

Information

from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

Annual Report 2024 (66th Report)

Table of contents

Page

Foreword	6
The year under review in brief	8
1. Alliance and operations	14
Troop commitments.....	14
Protecting NATO's eastern flank	15
Lithuania	15
Lithuania brigade.....	15
Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)	17
Latvia and Estonia.....	19
Slovakia.....	19
NATO Force Model and Allied Reaction Force	19
Navy.....	19
International crisis management	20
Red Sea.....	20
Lebanon.....	20
Iraq and Jordan.....	21
Kosovo.....	21
Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	22
Niger.....	22
Indo-Pacific.....	23
Posts abroad.....	23
Appreciation and recognition	24
Exercises abroad	25
Evaluation of deployments abroad	26
2. Ukraine	27
EU training mission.....	27
NATO support mission.....	28
Lessons for the Bundeswehr.....	28
3. Structural reform of the Bundeswehr	28
4. The Bundeswehr's financial resourcing	29
Defence budget and special fund.....	29
Flexible funding.....	30
5. Bureaucracy	30
6. Materiel	36
Full resourcing.....	36
Clothing and protective equipment.....	38
7. Infrastructure.....	42
Accommodation for servicewomen and men	42
Facility condition and project duration.....	43
Improvement measures by the federal and state governments.....	48
8. Personnel.....	50

Personnel situation.....	50
Personnel recruitment.....	52
<i>Applications.....</i>	52
<i>Onboarding process.....</i>	54
<i>Appointments and terminations.....</i>	55
<i>Re-employment and lateral entries.....</i>	57
<i>Appointment of 17-year-olds.....</i>	57
<i>Age limit.....</i>	58
Personnel retention.....	59
<i>Re-enlistment.....</i>	59
<i>Transfer to career soldier status.....</i>	60
<i>Bonuses.....</i>	60
<i>Higher education.....</i>	61
<i>Postponement of retirement.....</i>	62
<i>Making the Bundeswehr more attractive for existing personnel.....</i>	63
<i>Internal labour market.....</i>	64
Military performance evaluation system.....	65
Promotion.....	68
Civilian initial and follow-on occupational training.....	70
Security clearance.....	71
Activities for foreign powers.....	74
9. New military service model.....	74
10. Women in the armed forces.....	75
Women in command.....	76
Women-specific recruitment.....	78
Attractive framework conditions.....	79
Military equal opportunity officer and equal opportunity women's representatives.....	80
11. Leadership development and civic education.....	81
Violation of the free democratic basic order.....	83
Offences against sexual self-determination.....	88
Military personnel representation.....	93
Lifesaving acts and acts to help others.....	93
12. Culture of remembrance and fostering tradition.....	95
13. Administration of justice and legal offences.....	98
Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts and Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney.....	98
Interpersonal conflicts.....	99
Alcohol and drugs.....	101
Ammunition and weapons losses.....	102
Crimes against the Bundeswehr.....	104
14. Voluntary military service and home defence.....	104
15. Reserves.....	105
Strengthening the reserves.....	107
Assurance of livelihood and other benefits.....	108
Personnel issues.....	109

16.	Veterans	111
17.	Diversity	111
	External appearance.....	113
	Transidentity.....	114
	German Self-Determination Act.....	114
18.	Compatibility of family and duty	115
	Flexible working time models	115
	Family-friendly assignment planning.....	117
	Childcare.....	117
	Family support and support offices	119
	Financial benefits.....	120
19.	Health	121
	Medical Service personnel situation.....	121
	Medical service support.....	122
	Applied military psychology	126
	Disablement pension.....	127
	Mission-related injury.....	127
	Suicides and suicide attempts	129
20.	Welfare	130
	Financial	130
	<i>Military pay and incentive pay</i>	130
	<i>Separation allowance and relocation allowance</i>	131
	<i>Rail travel in uniform</i>	133
	<i>Funeral expenses</i>	134
	Working hours.....	134
	Catering and MWR food service	136
	Military chaplaincy.....	137
21.	Environment and climate	139
22.	Physical training	140
23.	Cases and petitions: Statistical overviews	142
24.	Visits, meetings and talks by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces	149
25.	Legal basis of the office, duties and tasks of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and servicewomen and servicemen's right of petition	155
26.	Organisational chart of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces	167

Foreword

The 2024 Annual Report is my fifth annual report. My five-year term as Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces finishes at the end of May 2025. They have been five intensive and moving years, for our society, for the Bundeswehr – and for myself.

These years will enter the history books as a “turning point”. Russia’s attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, in violation of international law, was a turning point for the security and threat level in Germany, Europe and the world, and it also changed everything for the Bundeswehr.

Following more than three decades during which deployments abroad were the main mission focus, national and alliance defence is once again the Bundeswehr’s core mission. A defence army became an expeditionary army – and is now becoming a defence army again.

Other important events have also played a key role in this development. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine therefore marked a turning point, as did the end of the deployments abroad in Afghanistan and Mali.

Afghanistan and Mali were the Bundeswehr’s longest, most extensive and most dangerous deployments outside Europe. 93,000 service personnel were deployed in Afghanistan. It was the Bundeswehr’s highest-casualty deployment abroad – 59 people lost their lives. More than 20,000 service personnel were deployed in Mali. Many of them returned from both missions wounded in body and mind.

The results of both deployments range from sobering to alarming. The goals of the international community connected with the deployments were not even remotely achieved – in either Afghanistan or Mali. It is therefore entirely understandable that many of the service personnel deployed there are asking themselves what the point of their commitment was. Whether there will be any comparable deployments in the coming years is more than questionable – not least of all in view of the refocussing on national and alliance defence.

Looking back over the past five years, it is no exaggeration to say that the Bundeswehr has without doubt experienced the most varied years in its almost 70-year history, with events, developments and decisions that have fundamentally changed it, and will have a lasting impact.

The troops were called upon and challenged in their entire range of tasks – from national and alliance defence to international crisis management and administrative assistance. Both the scope and the intensity were remarkable here, with the most comprehensive administrative assistance mission in the history of the Bundeswehr in the biggest global pandemic of the 21st century; the end of the 20-year Afghanistan deployment; the biggest and most dangerous military evacuation operation to date with 5,347 people rescued from Kabul; the end of the 10-year mission in Mali; the massive strengthening of NATO’s eastern flank; and the new situation of permanently stationing an entire brigade abroad.

What was demanded of our service personnel and what they achieved was an entirely new dimension in terms of quality and quantity and deserves the corresponding respect and recognition. We can be very proud of our soldiers!

So much has changed in and for the Bundeswehr in the past five years – and not just vis-à-vis the core mission. Much that was neglected for years and decades, and which my predecessors had already reminded us of in their annual reports, are now top priorities on the political agenda.

Be it the personnel requirements, material shortages or infrastructure modernisation – now at last there is movement everywhere: EUR 100 billion special fund, defence budget increases, record numbers of procurement proposals, recruitment initiatives, action plans to accelerate infrastructure projects, structural reforms to focus on the core mission.

These endeavours were immense, the results, however, are not yet visible, tangible or measurable everywhere,

which, to a certain extent, may well be understandable. Market-available protective vests are quickly purchased and delivered, but it takes so much more time to procure tanks, ships and aircraft or to modernise entire barracks. Even if the metaphor is perhaps somewhat overused – the Bundeswehr is a tanker, not a speedboat. And it takes time to fully refurbish a tanker and change its course.

Time, which we do not have. Since 2014 and its annexation of Crimea in violation of international law, Russia has no longer been a partner – it is now a threat to our security and peace. The Bundeswehr must therefore be fully and always ready for deployment, and its human, material and infrastructural resources

must also be swiftly improved. Impatience is the order of the day, and expectations are justified. We must defend our peace and our freedom and effectively deter potential attackers.

This requires continuity and reliability. Bundeswehr security and defence policy matters should be deliberated on for the long term and decided on with firm and consistent consensus. This was often the case over the past five years. Many decisions, from the special fund and procurement proposals through to the Lithuania brigade, were supported by a broad majority in the Bundestag and by members of the various political parties and factions. This was a strong sign of Parliament's backing for and confidence in the parliamentary army.

The Bundeswehr has also received support from other quarters, with society's awareness and appreciation of it increasing significantly – with the COVID-19 pandemic and the administrative assistance provided by the troops, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and with the cognizance that we need the Bundeswehr for our peace and our freedom. Right now, the armed forces are more firmly and visibly at the centre of our society than they have been for decades. The “friendly disinterest” of the past has become “interested friendliness” – with strong solidarity and support.

This is most clearly illustrated with the veterans' situation. The Bundestag has declared 15 June as National Veterans Day, and support and care for veterans has been improved significantly. The 2023 Invictus Games in Düsseldorf also enjoyed enormous interest. The lives of our service personnel and veterans are made so much better by this awareness and recognition.

The compulsory military service debate is a further sign of the closer ties between the Bundeswehr and society. At its core this is about society's relationship with the Bundeswehr, about the question of what each and every one of us can and should do for our society and our security. Dismissed as a summer slump topic at the beginning of my term of office in 2020, the debate is now in full swing, with new models and modern concepts on the table, even including initial draft laws. In the near future there will be a new military service in some form or other.

The office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces truly is a very special entity. For me it has been a pleasure and an honour – five years in which I got to know so many servicewomen and men personally. Five years in which I read some 12,000 petitions, made almost 400 troop visits at home and abroad, and visited all major bases and facilities, including some very small units, and many of them several times, such as SOFCOM (13 times) or the eFP Battlegroup and the brigade in Lithuania (seven times). Above all it is the meetings, chats and conversations with our outstanding service personnel that mean so very much to me.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported and accompanied me over these almost five years now, especially the first-class, dedicated and empathetic staff at the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

I would also like to thank the members of the German Bundestag for their trust, the Federal Ministry of Defence for the excellent cooperation and the general public for their interest.

And I would like to thank our servicewomen and men. They are the best in the business. Highly trained, highly professional, motivated and dedicated. I would like to thank them for their service, operational readiness and efficiency – from the bottom of my heart!

The year under review in brief

Once again, 2024 was also characterised by massive radical change in security and defence policy, as well as growing tensions in a transforming world order. Russia's war on Ukraine in violation of international law, the horrific war in the Middle East, the unclear security situation in Syria, growing tensions between China and Taiwan, instability in the Sahel region, new technological developments and, last but not least, the impact of the US elections and the consequential growing rivalry between the major political powers, put further pressure on the German security architecture and the rules-based international order. All of which had perceptible impacts on society, as well as the mission and the tasks of the Bundeswehr and its service personnel.

The celebrations to mark 23 May 2024 therefore became all the more important in the year under review. Our Basic Law, the foundation of cohabitation in a free and democratic constitutional state, turned 75 years old on this day. On 8 May 2025 we will soon commemorate the end of the Second World War in Europe 80 years ago, a date which also symbolises the responsibility of our service personnel in the Bundeswehr as a parliamentary army, defending our peace, freedom, security and the rule of law. These pillars of a pluralistic and democratic society must not be taken for granted, and their preservation requires that they be strived for consistently. In this respect the Bundeswehr is ready and prepared to deter potential aggressors with the required strength. The Ministry of Defence therefore continued to work intensively in the year under review to overcome current and future challenges, which are often a result of past failings.

One particular step towards further strengthening national and alliance defence was to transpose the approaches of the Federal Government's 2023 National Security Strategy into a new capability profile of the Bundeswehr and into a military strategy. A comprehensive structural reform was therefore implemented on the path to the "Bundeswehr at the turning point". On 1 October 2024, the Territorial Operations Command (Germany) and the Joint Forces Operations Command (abroad), among others, were transformed into the Bundeswehr's "German Joint Force Command". This is now the operations command for all Bundeswehr activities. The command also continues to develop the aptly-named Operation Plan Germany (OPLAN DEU) – the first new defence plan since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, the previous Cyber- and Information Domain Service (CIDS) military organisational unit, also joined the three traditional services, army, air force and navy, as a fourth service. The previously independent Joint Support and Enabling Service as a logistics service provider and the Central Medical Service were also merged into a newly created support unit.

NATO is and remains the foundation of our security. The alliance, vital for Germany and its partners, celebrated its 75th anniversary in summer 2024. NATO also responded to the growing threats in the year under review by transforming the NATO Response Force (NRF), which operated as a rapid reaction force since 2004, into the NATO Force Model (NFM), which is now re-establishing regional responsibilities. The alliance partners continuously provide resources for their region here. Germany's focus is on Central and North-Eastern Europe, which of course includes Poland and Lithuania in particular. The NFM is divided into three high-readiness forces, each with increasing response times – from 10 to 30 days, through to 180 days. In 2024 Germany had some 14,000 service personnel at the ready for the NRF and the NFM, including the national support forces required to carry out the mission. With the transfer of command responsibility for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) to the United Kingdom, the number of Bundeswehr service personnel participating in deployments, standby commitments, standing operational tasks and other commitments fell from 23,100 to 6,300 in the year under review.

Setting up the Lithuania brigade is a special signal of solidarity with NATO partners and for national and alliance defence. The formation of the 45 Armoured Brigade, which was already planned in 2023 and has been growing ever since, is the first time in the Bundeswehr's history that it has been deployed in this form. German service personnel have already been deployed alongside other NATO- partners in the NATO- enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) combat unit in Lithuania since 2017. The planned permanent stationing of 4,800 soldiers and 200 civilian employees in Lithuania further demonstrates the resolute action of the political and military leadership. A corresponding intergovernmental agreement between Germany and Lithuania was signed in autumn 2024 and ratified by the German Bundestag in January 2025. The regulations set out in the comprehensive administrative agreement go far further than what was previously regulated in the past in an agreement on the stationing of armed forces. The details range from the rent-free transfer of properties and the commitment to providing school buildings, through to aspects relating to residential law and tax law. Deployment in Lithuania is voluntary, as confirmed by the assurance provided by the Minister of Defence. Many soldiers from the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion in Oberviechtach and the 203 Tank Battalion in Augustdorf (both units will form the brigade alongside

the eFP in the future), signalled their readiness in the year under review to carry out their mission, even under temporary basic conditions. To date the transfer has been going as planned, so the brigade will hopefully be fully operational by 2027.

The *Zeitenwende* (turning point) article law, which the German Bundestag finally passed with a large majority in January 2025 following a public hearing in December 2024, is a crucial building block for the Lithuania brigade. It includes numerous important measures, which are primarily intended to make service in Lithuania more attractive, including an increase in payments for service personnel abroad, the expansion of the scope of application of enlistment bonuses and the possibility of remuneration for additional work or for special time burdens in addition to remuneration for an assignment abroad. To improve social security accordingly, the areas of application of the deployment allowance and one-off accident compensation were also extended and payments in the event of unfitness for service or death were improved.

Numerically the Bundeswehr's biggest mission in the year under review was the EU training mission for Ukrainian service personnel (EUMAM UA), with an average of 1,500 committed German troops. In addition to the physically demanding daily training routine, the psychological strain is probably the greatest challenge for the German instructors, as those they are training will return to the armed conflict and may lose their lives. The translators and interpreters in particular do an outstanding job here. In the year under review the Bundeswehr also participated in the newly established NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU).

The German Navy also faced particular challenges in the year under review with its increased presence in the North Sea/Baltic Sea region. It has assumed a leadership role within the NATO alliance in this sea area. It also participated in the Indo-Pacific Deployment for the second time since 2021, and since February 2024 in the European Union-led EUNAVFOR Aspidos operation. As part of the latter mission the crew of the frigate HESSEN took part in the first live use of weapons in the history of the German Navy since the Bundeswehr was founded. All crews performed excellently, in particular because the work required for the operation at times significantly exceeded the general operational workload.

The Bundeswehr's wide variety of new tasks require a sufficient financial basis. At approximately EUR 52 billion, the expenditure volume in the original defence budget (Section 14) was fortunately around EUR 1.8 billion higher in 2024 than in the previous year. Actual expenditure in 2024 totalled around EUR 50.3 billion. Approximately EUR 19.8 billion were also provided from the Bundeswehr's special fund, of which the Bundeswehr spent around EUR 17.2 billion. Therefore, with future budgets the Ministry should ensure that available funds are also spent. On the whole approximately 82 percent of the special fund's EUR 100 billion credit authorisation had already been debited by the end of 2024. The Budget Committee also approved 97 major procurement and development projects in the year under review with the aptly-named, "EUR 25- million-- proposals", which is a record – in the previous year it was only 55.

As part of the advanced full resourcing, much of the personal equipment that service personnel absolutely need to complete their mission arrived with the troops. Protective vests and helmets in particular, as well as cold-weather and waterproof protection gear (now provided in sufficient numbers), were no longer the subject matter of countless petitions in the year under review. There is, however, still a shortage of functioning major end items and spare parts in particular, which is partly due to the crucial delivery of materials to Ukraine. In this respect, a sufficient defence budget, separate from a special fund, will continue to be essential for the Bundeswehr's operational readiness and defence capability. Nevertheless, according to the Federal Government, Germany achieved NATO's two- percent- target in the year under review.

Sufficient and fully operational personnel are the key to defence capability. In the year under review, the Bundeswehr once again did not come near to achieving its target of 203,000 service personnel originally set for 2025, but later changed to 2031. Whether or not this number is sufficient to meet future challenges is already in question. At the end of 2024 there were 181,174 active military personnel. At the same time the Bundeswehr is increasingly ageing. While the average age at the end of 2019 was 32.4, by the end of 2024 it had risen to 34.

The summary report on personnel recruitment presented by the Personnel Task Force in December 2023 included numerous measures, which the Bundeswehr implemented immediately in the year under review. The decisive action to counter the falling number of applications and new recruits in the Bundeswehr in particular was very welcome. Although this number did in fact increase in the year under review, the personnel strength fell by a total of 340 servicemen and women. The downside of this diligent work is that many more senior service personnel felt forgotten or poorly advised by the Bundeswehr and in particular the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel

Management when new recruits, for example, were given preferential treatment or financial benefits when filling posts.

A total of 20,290 service personnel joined the Bundeswehr in the year under review, an increase of eight percent on the previous year. As pleasing as the increase in the number of applications and appointments is, the high level of those leaving the service during their probationary period remains extremely problematic. In 2023, of the 18,810 service personnel who joined, 5,100 (27 percent) left the Bundeswehr again: 4,900 at their own request by revoking the declaration of commitment within the six-month probationary period and 200 through dismissal. On the whole one in four people leave the Bundeswehr again within six months. Measures to significantly reduce the high drop-out rate must be increased and intensified, otherwise even the most successful recruitment drive cannot compensate for the loss. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence believes the notice period of one month to the middle or end of the next month in the first five months of the six-month probationary period introduced in 2023 for those doing voluntary military service to avoid heat of the moment resignations, is a promising measure to reduce this high drop-out rate. In the year under review, it resulted in a slight decrease in the number of dropouts in the first three months of service.

It is also important and appropriate that the Bundeswehr is already increasingly aiming to intensify its presence and commitment in the various districts and regions. Finally, a regional anchoring in society is important for the Bundeswehr to also attract and retain young people for the armed forces. That its various sites received more freedom in the year under review to implement locational advertising measures on their own responsibility and independently of nationwide campaigns is also a positive development here. The Bundeswehr thus addresses applicants where they want to live and work. The different service sites, units and facilities specifically emphasise the respective distinctive features and benefits of their locations. The commitment of the armed forces is very impressive and includes a wide range of creative ideas.

Unacceptable and not an advertising factor, however, is the poor situation with promotions in the forces, ongoing for some years now. Service personnel in certain rank categories are regularly only promoted after years of waiting, despite meeting the respective legal career path requirements, because the Bundeswehr's budget does not include the necessary established posts. Altogether 4,006 service personnel were awaiting promotion in the period from August 2023 to August 2024. Internal reallocations of unfilled posts meant that at least the promotion of senior ensigns to acting sub-lieutenant, which had previously been uncertain for many months, was now possible.

Unfortunately, the very high number of unfilled posts has continued to deteriorate. While approximately 18 percent of military personnel in the careers above enlisted personnel were unfilled in 2020 (when the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces term of office began), this figure had even risen to just under 20 percent by the end of 2024. In the year under review approximately 28 percent of all posts with enlisted personnel were unfilled. Along with the general shortage of personnel, this is also due to vacancies with, for example, training, parental leave, illness or leave of absence due to membership in an interest group. The armed forces therefore run the risk that personnel readiness and mission accomplishment will suffer considerably, if almost one in five NCOs and officers and more than one in four among the enlisted personnel are missing.

In view of the massive shortage of personnel and the tasks ahead, the debate on the reintroduction of compulsory military service, which was set aside in 2011, reappeared in summer 2024. In this context the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces considered the military service model presented by the Minister of Defence, which was not adopted because of the early German Bundestag elections, to be an appropriate and correct proposal. On the basis of a mandatory questionnaire for men of legal age and a voluntary questionnaire for women of legal age, the most suitable and most motivated candidates would have been invited to a physical examination, with subsequent selection. Since the beginning of her term of office the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has supported an aptly-named "society year" – a compulsory year for young men and women, in, for example, environmental protection, the social sector or the armed forces.

For some time now, each year 16,000 to 19,000 reservists have guaranteed a certain, albeit by no means sufficient, compensation for the shortage of personnel. In numerous units they ensure the Bundeswehr's operational readiness and force sustainability. According to its capability profile, however, some 90,000 such volunteers are essentially required, irrespective of the shortage of personnel. The Bundeswehr therefore introduced the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel, whereby all service personnel are automatically planned into or ordered into the reinforcement reserve for six years after leaving the military. Following a slow start the process developed favourably in the year under review.

There are still considerable problems with the infrastructure. The Bundeswehr has already implemented infrastructure measures costing several EUR billion. In the year under review, for example, it was therefore able to increase investments to approximately EUR 1.6 billion, which was a substantial improvement compared to the previous year (2023: EUR 1.25 billion). The total investment requirement in the infrastructure area, however, still ran to approximately EUR 67 billion at the end of 2024. In places some barracks and facilities are therefore still in a disastrous state. Following long years of savings, the renovation backlog remains high. The problem and the associated tasks have at least been recognised by those responsible. In the year under review two specialist conferences were held at the initiative of the Minister of Defence, at which, at ministerial and state secretary level, representatives of the federal and state governments discussed options for action in the infrastructure area. The basis here was provided by the “Action plan for the accelerated provision of the necessary infrastructure for the Bundeswehr at the turning point”, developed beforehand by the Ministry of Defence.

Although there was a considerable delay, there were nevertheless some rays of hope in the year under review. After 13 years of construction, the combat swimmers in Eckernförde were finally able to put the diving training hall urgently required for their training into operation. Other facilities have also been completed and superbly equipped after very long construction periods in most cases. Nevertheless, there is still immense requirement for restructuring at many locations, which unfortunately cannot be met in the short term due to the long construction planning times and the excessive demand on the state building authorities.

Just a few federal states, in particular Bavaria, have already taken measures to support the armed forces within the scope of their respective powers. The Law on the Promotion of the Bundeswehr in Bavaria, for example, thus amends existing state law regulations. In addition to substantial simplifications in favour of the Bundeswehr in the building sector, it also stipulates that schools must cooperate with youth officers in the context of civic education. Bundeswehr career counsellors as well as authorities and organisations with security tasks, may also provide information about career and employment opportunities in their fields as part of school career orientation events. All state governments should compile comparable regulations.

Excessive bureaucracy often inhibits the armed forces’ operational capability. During the year under review not a single troop visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces went by without service personnel complaining about the increase in administrative tasks. On the whole the Bundeswehr tends to complicate matters with its predetermined or internally-created regulations and their fragmented (sometimes also misinterpreted) implementation. Unnecessarily complex procurement processes also strain the patience and nerves of all involved. The Ministry of Defence has been working flat out for years now to achieve improvements and ensure sustainable workload reductions by cutting red tape – it has, however, only made partial progress. One reason here is that the necessary digitalisation is not making the required advances in many areas within the Bundeswehr. Included here, for example, are the introduction of electronic health records and electronic time and attendance recording. Furthermore, an overly pronounced security mindset on the part of some of those in positions of responsibility is also preventing the change in mentality required to dismantle bureaucracy. Finally, time-consuming and resource-intensive groundwork from and cooperation with other federal ministries is often required to reduce the mass of laws and ordinances, which do not fall exclusively within the remit of the Ministry of Defence.

Service personnel are also understandably unhappy whenever procedures take too long – be it in human resources, in the course of security clearance or with Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court proceedings. The Armed Forces’ Disciplinary Attorney in particular, as well as the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts and the Military Counterintelligence Service, were often unable to provide sufficient information on when progress could be expected in the respective case due to work overload. The vigorously driven increases in personnel in these areas resulted in a fundamental improvement, but this is still insufficient in some areas. In this respect, it is welcome that the new version of the military disciplinary code passed by the German Bundestag in October of the year under review takes this factor into account. It will create the conditions to significantly speed up proceedings to punish disciplinary offences. The Ministry of Defence, on the other hand, has been working for far too long on the new version of the aptly-named, “Hair and Beard Decree”. Six years after the Federal Administrative Court called for a corresponding legal regulation, service personnel have little understanding for the fact that they must still comply with obviously outdated rules and regulations.

In 2024 a total of 24,675 servicewomen were serving in the armed forces. This means that, outside of the Medical Service with 9.89 percent, and 13.62 percent overall when including the Medical Service, despite all the positive developments in recent years, women are still severely under-represented. The changes compared to previous years are so minimal that the figures are still only very slowly approaching the required share of 20 percent women in the Bundeswehr, which is included as a goal in the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military

Personnel redrafted in 2023. On the whole there are still far too few women in the Bundeswehr – especially in leadership positions.

Full gender equality in the Bundeswehr is still far from being achieved. Female military personnel are still often exposed to prejudice, discrimination and unfortunately sometimes sexual harassment. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces received a total of 48 reports of sexual misconduct in the year under review. She also monitored the investigations into 376 reportable events because of suspicion of criminal offences against sexual self-determination. The Minister of Defence's decision to commission the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences to conduct a scientific unreported cases investigation into the causes, extent and consequences of sexual misconduct in the Bundeswehr is therefore very welcome.

Even in basic operations, it is a major challenge for service personnel in the Bundeswehr to harmonise their family obligations and their career. Further impediments also emerge in the context of national and alliance defence. The compatibility of family and duty with operational readiness, however, is not a contradiction – on the contrary, they can go hand in hand, as the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence correctly emphasised at the conference of military equal opportunities commissioners in the year under review. Flexible working time models, well-equipped childcare facilities with flexible opening hours and unbureaucratic help with cases of crisis and hardship are prerequisites to ensure that service personnel have their heads clear to perform their duties well. The task for the coming years will therefore be to further develop the existing structures with regard to national and alliance defence. One particular building block here is the aptly-named “cold start file” published in the summer. Service personnel can use the file to compile a checklist of all topics and documents relevant in private life. It is therefore a good basis for making early arrangements for emergencies.

Fortunately, the annual review once again shows that extremism only affects a small minority of service personnel in the Bundeswehr. One thing is certain – with just a few exceptions, they represent and defend the common values and principles of our Basic Law and act accordingly, both at home and on deployments abroad and missions. Important legislative measures were also the right solution for combating extremism, such as the amendment to the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, which came into force in 2023, to accelerate the discharge of armed forces' members with extremist tendencies. Since the beginning of the year under review the new dismissal offence under § 46 (2a) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act has provided a further sharp and effective tool against recognised enemies of the constitution in the Bundeswehr.

Dealing with physical and/or psychological injuries suffered by numerous servicewomen and men on deployments abroad, particularly in Afghanistan, is still a major and relevant topic. Especially important here is the Act on the Continued Employment of Personnel Injured on Operations, which aims to enable medical and vocational rehabilitation for service personnel who have been injured on operations. The act guarantees them the certainty that their employer will not abandon them during this difficult time. The process-simplified Military Compensation Act, which was passed in August 2021 and finally came into force in January 2025, as well as, independent of this, the wide range of support services offered by the Bundeswehr Assistance Network, provide relief and assistance for the affected service personnel and their families. Also, correct and appropriate is the fact that the First Committee of Inquiry of the 20th electoral term and the Study Commission on “Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany's future networked commitment” carried out parliamentary inquiries and drew honest conclusions about the Afghanistan mission.

As in previous deployments abroad, the military chaplains also provide valuable support to service personnel with regard to national and alliance defence. The Protestant Military Bishop's religious operational plan, with which the chaplaincy collaboratively prepares for emergencies, is therefore to be welcomed. More specifically, this includes accompanying people to NATO's- eastern flank, assisting the injured and dying, accompanying those wounded to Germany, delivering death notices, conducting funeral services and providing pastoral care, among other duties. While there has been significant progress with the Jewish military chaplaincy in the year under review, the still insufficient support services for the approximately 3,000 Muslim service personnel in the Bundeswehr, on the other hand, remains unsatisfactory. The Ministry of Defence does, however, plan to introduce the Muslim military chaplaincy in 2025.

The increase in attacks or crimes against the Bundeswehr in the year under review is cause for concern. Of a total of 185 cases, 13 related to members of the Bundeswehr, when wearing the uniform in public, for example. In 172 cases the offences were directed against Bundeswehr property and included three arson attacks and four acts of sabotage. In this context it was determined that barracks security is not always guaranteed by sufficiently high fences. In light of the worsening security situation in Germany and Europe, there is a clear need for improvement here.

One international focus of the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in the year under review was the cooperation with other military ombuds institutions. At her invitation, the 16th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) was held in Berlin in autumn 2024. The conference was initiated for the first time in 2009 by the then Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. More than 100 guests from all over the world accepted the invitation and exchanged views on the topic of “The Armed Forces under Pressure – Ombuds Institutions and the Duty of Care to Service Members” and the current challenges and pressures facing their national military.

Such exchanges in recent years have contributed, among other things, to Kosovo now also having a military ombudsperson. In spring 2024 the Kosovan Parliament elected a woman to this office, which, in terms of its legal structure, remit and functioning, is closely modelled on the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of the German Bundestag. A close exchange similar to that with Kosovo during the establishment of the office also took place with the UK in the year under review, and the Government of the United Kingdom is also in the process of setting up an independent ombudsperson for the armed forces – as a strong voice for service personnel and their families. This is especially important in times in which all armed forces find themselves under immense pressure.

The Bundeswehr once again shone in the area of top-level sports promotion at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. The athletes it sponsors once again made a significant contribution to Team Germany’s success. Following on from the Invictus Games in Düsseldorf in 2023, the Invictus Germany Games were held for the first time in the year under review. Fully in line with the games’ motto, “A Home for Respect”, the participating service personnel injured on operations, their families and relatives, also received the necessary recognition and appreciation in a smaller format here.

The decision by the German Bundestag to hold an annual Veterans Day on 15 June was also important and the right thing to do in this context. The units committed to the work for veterans in this respect had been campaigning for this day for over a decade. It was a long overdue step towards increasing the visibility, recognition and appreciation of our veterans, and thus of all Bundeswehr servicewomen and men.

1. Alliance and operations

National and alliance defence has become increasingly more important for German foreign and security policy since the 2014 annexation of Crimea in violation of international law. This prioritisation has been clearly perceptible for the Bundeswehr's service personnel since 24 February 2022 at the latest, when Russia's full-scale and brutal war of aggression on Ukraine began. While the 2016 White Paper for the Bundeswehr postulated that national and alliance defence and international crisis management are equally important, the 2023 National Security Strategy stipulates that all other Bundeswehr tasks must be subordinate to the core mission of national and alliance defence. This is demonstrated in the intensive and deterrence-oriented strengthening of NATO's eastern flank. In particular, the establishment of a heavy combat brigade in Lithuania with 4,800 service personnel and 200 civilian employees by the end of 2027 must be emphasised here.

At the same time the number of international conflicts is not decreasing. The end of the large-scale deployments abroad, such as those in Afghanistan and Mali, does not mean the Bundeswehr will not continue to be called upon to assist with international crisis management in the future. Prioritisation will however be necessary, given that human and material resources are limited, as also concluded by the Federal Government in its, "evaluation of all current foreign missions of the Federal Armed Forces", which it presented to the German Bundestag in the year under review. According to the evaluation, deployments abroad with a direct stabilising effect in Europe and among its neighbours, and those set up to secure critical trade routes, should in future be prioritised more clearly in line with Germany's security policy interests, without neglecting existing alliance obligations here.

The example of the crew of the frigate HESSEN, which, as part of the EUNAVFOR Aspides mission in 2024 in the Red Sea, participated in the first live use of weapons in the German Navy since the Bundeswehr was founded, shows that Bundeswehr service personnel are still exposed to specific dangers to life and limb on their deployments abroad.

Troop commitments

At the end of the year under review a total of 876 service personnel were active on nine different deployments abroad. The Bundeswehr's longest (still ongoing) deployment in Kosovo was also one of the two largest contingents here: 285 soldiers made up the German contribution to NATO's KFOR mission. A further 37 personnel were deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the EUFOR Althea mission. In the COUNTER-DAESH/CAPACITY BUILDING IRAQ mission, 288 soldiers were stationed in Jordan and Iraq. In the Mediterranean missions, 33 personnel were active with the SEA GUARDIAN mission, while 176 were deployed with UNIFIL and 12 with EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. The EUNAVFOR Aspides EU operation to protect shipping routes in the Red Sea was added at the beginning of the year under review as a new naval mission. There were 28 service personnel still deployed here at the end of the year. By the time the frigate HESSEN returned to Germany at the beginning of May 2024 the figure was still approximately 240 personnel. Following the end of the MINUSMA mission in Mali at the end of 2023, the soldiers who were last stationed at the Niamey base in Niger returned to Germany in August of the year under review and the infrastructure was transferred to the state of Niger. The UNMISS contingent in Sudan with 14 soldiers and the MINURSO contingent in Western Sahara with 4 soldiers were therefore still active on the African continent at the end of the year under review.

In addition to the more conventional deployments mandated by the German Bundestag, Bundeswehr service personnel were also bound by numerous standby commitments, standing operational tasks and various other obligations. At the end of the year under review 921 Bundeswehr service personnel were stationed on NATO's eastern flank in the Baltic states. The Bundeswehr's commitment as part of a multinational battlegroup in Slovakia ended in May of the year under review. Its standing operational tasks also included naval and air force activities in the North Sea/Baltic Sea region, and in the Indo-Pacific region (Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024). In Germany approximately 1,500 personnel on average were involved in training Ukrainian servicewomen and men as part of EUMAM UA.

In 2024 the Bundeswehr also had 14,000 service personnel in Germany for the rapidly deployable NATO Response Force (NRF). With the transfer of command responsibility for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) to the UK, the number of Bundeswehr service personnel participating in deployments, standby commitments, standing operational tasks and other obligations fell from 23,100 in 2023 to 6,300 at the moment. It must be noted here that these figures only represent the status as of the reporting date. In relation to the entire year under review the total number is significantly higher due to regular personnel rotation.

Protecting NATO's eastern flank

Germany's security policy refocusing on national and alliance defence is most visible on NATO's eastern flank. While the White Paper in 2006 still referred to Russia as an alliance partner, the 2016 White Paper already stipulated that a dual approach of credible deterrence and defence capability as well as a willingness to engage in dialogue and cooperative security approaches were necessary. The 2023 National Security Strategy describes Russia as the greatest threat to peace and security in Europe, which is why Germany is particularly committed to its allies in the Baltic region. Lithuania is one of the more important focus points here.

Lithuania

Lithuania brigade

The Bundeswehr plans to station a fully operational heavy combat brigade, the 45 Armoured Brigade, with 4,800 service personnel and 200 civilian employees in Lithuania by the end of 2027. After the Minister of Defence had already made the fundamental decision in summer 2023, an **intergovernmental agreement** between Germany and Lithuania on the legal framework conditions was signed in the autumn of the year under review and ratified by the German Bundestag in January 2025. This is necessary because recourse to existing agreements and experiences for the permanent stationing of a large force outside the Federal Republic of Germany is not possible. The regulations set out in the comprehensive administrative agreement go far further than what was previously regulated in the past in an agreement on the stationing of armed forces. The details range from the rent-free transfer of properties and the commitment to providing school buildings, through to aspects relating to residential and tax law issues for service personnel and their families.

The 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion in Oberviechtach is one of the three units that will make up the Lithuania brigade in the future, along with the 203 Tank Battalion from Augustdorf and the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) combat unit. During the Parliamentary Commissioner's visit to the troops in autumn 2024, the units' members raised many questions and concerns, which made it clear that, along with the planned appropriate **framework conditions**, open communication with the troops is also imperative:

- *Several service personnel criticised the persistent uncertainties and insufficient planning capability. The main questions to be answered were, when exactly the deployment in Lithuania would begin, how long it would last, and where would they subsequently be transferred to. Answering these questions is important for those affected to make fundamental decisions – whether and when they should give notice on their apartment or sell their house, for example.*

To successfully set up the Lithuania brigade as a “flagship project of the turning point”, the Bundeswehr must integrate its service personnel into the decision-making processes. Transparent communication and comprehensive information are essential here.

The Ministry of Defence announced that a force deployment to Lithuania was already planned for the beginning of 2025 to set up a training and command-capable brigade headquarters, in addition to the parent headquarters already on site. This consists of a reduced signal, headquarters and support company and the first sections of the medical service and the military police. According to the Ministry, the first logistics personnel will follow at the beginning of 2026 at the latest. The further deployment of forces will depend on the corresponding provision of the military and civilian infrastructure by Lithuania. To date the deployment has been going as planned, so the brigade will hopefully be fully operational by 2027.

Some of the servicewomen and men of the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion critically asked whether the Minister of Defence's promised **voluntary** deployment in Lithuania would apply permanently:

- *They based this on the understanding that requests for transfers from the battalion would be rejected, with the exception of special hardship cases.*

Within the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion there have, however, recently also been soldiers who have submitted requests for a service extension with regard to their unit's deployment in Lithuania. During a troop visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in Lithuania at the end of the year under review, the commander of the parent headquarters announced that all posts had so far been filled with volunteers. This is good

news of course, but it remains to be seen whether the Bundeswehr will be able to maintain the voluntary arrangement of deployments to Lithuania. At the end of the year under review, the Ministry of Defence continued to focus on just the two battalions to be deployed. If sufficient numbers of service personnel do not volunteer for deployment in Lithuania, the command posts or transfers would have to be ordered, which would contradict the Minister's announcements.

The deployment should in any case be made without further delays:

- *During the Parliamentary Commissioner's visit to the troops, the armoured infantry signalled that they were also prepared to complete their mission under temporary basic conditions. It is crucial here to capitalise on the current momentum. The majority of service personnel are now ready to be deployed, and any delay would have a negative impact on their readiness. The longer it drags on, the more the mission is called into question.*

The Lithuania brigade must not be an empty shell devoid of personnel. Credible deterrence requires one hundred percent operational readiness, which also includes complete equipment with ready-to-use materials. It is therefore unsatisfactory that the supply of weapons systems, such as the PUMA S1 in particular, to the battalions in question has been slow to date, despite the massive delivery of the PUMA S0 to the industry. The "train as you fight" principle was out of question here in the year under review.

With an order of the day in September 2024 the Minister reaffirmed that he was particularly concerned about **families** joining the long-term presence of a German brigade in Lithuania. Places in childcare facilities and at international schools with German-language support; long-term perspective German schools abroad run by the Bundeswehr in Vilnius and Kaunas; two German-language day care centres for children; and modern residential facilities near the military bases in Rūdninkai and Rukla – all are items scheduled on the plans. Various language tuition activities for family members are also possible. Community services and assistance with housing have been active on site since April 2024. Work is also ongoing on a mobile workstation for accompanying family members. Since September 2024, twelve places have been available in a local daycare centre in Vilnius with German-language childcare for brigade members' children. The prospect of operating a primary school in Vilnius for the 2025/2026 school year is also a good start for more reliable planning.

After something of a delay, personnel management was able to help a services married couple:

- *The soldier had initially applied unsuccessfully for the Lithuania brigade's parent headquarters. In his petition, he complained that his wife would be serving in Lithuania from October 2024 until the end of her service in 2027, while he could not be deployed there until the end of 2026 at the earliest, as only then would suitable posts be available for him. Fortunately, personnel management found a way to offer the soldier a non-career-related post in regional proximity to his partner from October 2025, despite the conflicting requirement. It therefore accommodated the soldier so that he could be deployed in Lithuania, at least partially at the same time as his wife.*

Building up the Lithuania brigade must also be accompanied by a **change in mentality** on the part of the soldiers' relatives and families. By taking a serious look at the difficult issues of war and existing dangers, it is possible to address fears, to better recognise the necessity of the military profession and to appreciate and categorise the opportunities and skills acquired during a stay abroad. It is also important for family members to be able to interact, so they are not left alone.

- *On a positive note, a district in the Upper Palatinate plans to offer support to the family members of service personnel of the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion who will stay behind after the deployment to Lithuania.*

In the summer of the year under review, the Bundeswehr also released the **cold start file**. Service personnel can use the file to compile a checklist of all topics and documents relevant in private life. This applies, for example, to insurance policies, custody orders for one's own children and living wills or testaments. Arrangements for the support of relatives in need of care and powers of attorney for accounts are also included here, and access to social media profiles can be stored or made available to a trusted person. The personal care folder is therefore a good basis for service personnel to make arrangements in good time for an emergency and, if necessary, to talk to their superiors, unit physicians or the community services. All service personnel should therefore have a good look at the checklists and specific assistance options as soon as possible. As the documentation is extensive, it is important that the employer, the community services and the military chaplaincy offer training for this and provide opportunities for dialogue, so inhibitions can be reduced. The planned individual counselling and classes by the

community services, as well as the Ministry's consideration to provide instruction on obligatory training, are very welcome in this context.

The *Zeitenwende* (turning point) article law, which the German Bundestag finally passed with a large majority in January 2025 following a public hearing in December 2024, is an extremely important building block for the Lithuania brigade. It includes numerous important measures designed to make service in Lithuania more attractive.

Additional time worked will also be paid for in the future. The law stipulates the possibility of paying for overtime instead of time in lieu of overtime. This is of course preferred, as the time in lieu method regularly resulted in extended leaves of absence, especially with longer exercises:

- *Within seven months, the Lithuania brigade's advance party, consisting of 21 soldiers, had amassed a total of some 77 weeks in overtime hours. By December 2024 they would have reduced about 23 weeks of this, which could have been used more appropriately for the necessary work on site.*

Furthermore, the ability to deter and defend is only possible if the brigade is fully staffed at the site and is not understaffed by constantly reducing overtime.

In future it will also be possible to grant a separation allowance for a period of eight years under certain conditions with a reassignment from abroad to Germany, with the commitment to a relocation allowance if the servicewoman or man does not relocate to the duty station or to its service area (for family reasons, for example). In many cases the domestic separation allowance can then continue to be paid in addition to the relocation allowance. Another signal in this direction is the Ministry's announcement that those entitled to a foreign separation allowance can receive travel allowances for journeys home six times a year. Also not to be underestimated, especially for younger members of the Bundeswehr, are the travel allowances for single people without their own home, provided for in an accompanying regulation.

The new regulation on the payment of standby times of up to EUR 500 per month and other promotion and pay regulation adjustments are designed to make service in Lithuania more attractive. The application areas of the special foreign assignments benefits and pensions and one-off accident compensation were extended to improve social security. This makes perfect sense, as the increase in training and exercise operations in Lithuania is also accompanied by an increase in the risk of accident. Financial payments with unfitness for service or death have also been improved.

The law also takes into account the special situation of spouses who accompany a servicewoman or man years to Lithuania for several, and as a result must restrict or entirely abandon their own career plans. In many cases the legislative amendment means their private pension scheme can be financed for this period, similar to that with members of the Federal Foreign Office.

All these measures of the *Zeitenwende* article law are a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, a considerable effort lies ahead of the armed forces to create conditions under which the service personnel of the Bundeswehr will be motivated to serve in Lithuania for long periods.

The **protection of the Lithuania brigade** in particular must be ensured at all costs in view of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the hybrid threat to NATO's eastern flank, which has been steadily increasing for years now. The Military Counterintelligence Service also requires the necessary powers for this, which it does not yet have, because it has to date lacked a sufficient legal basis to be able to operate outside of Bundeswehr facilities during deployments abroad. Unfortunately, the intended reform of the Military Counterintelligence Service Act based on a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court in 2022 could not be implemented as originally planned. The President of the Federal Office of Military Counterintelligence also emphasised the particular urgency of reforming the law at a hearing before the parliamentary control committee. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces supports this requirement and also calls for rapid implementation of the reform project.

Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP)

German service personnel have already been deployed alongside other alliance partners in the NATO-enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) combat unit in Lithuania since 2017. The force is stationed in Rukla and will be integrated into the Lithuania brigade in the future. There were 756 German personnel deployed here at the end of the year under review. They are part of an increased international presence to protect Lithuania and the

strategically important Suwałki Gap, a narrow stretch of land between the Baltic states and the NATO partner, Poland, in the immediate vicinity of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

As in previous years, the **catering** in Rukla was again the subject of various petitions in the year under review:

- *Service personnel criticised the quality of the food and possible hygiene regulation violations. They found, for example, glass splinters and plastic in the food, maggots in minced meat and repeatedly found spoiled food in the food counter. In a statement, the Ministry of Defence said that these were regrettable individual cases that must not happen again in the future. It immediately informed Lithuania, which as the framework nation is responsible for operating the mess hall in Rukla. The responsible authorities in both countries are in close dialogue to quickly rectify the deficiencies. During an inspection, however, the contingent's senior veterinarian and the senior pharmacist did not find any further food hygiene regulation violations.*

The deficiencies identified are beyond unacceptable. In individual cases they endanger the health of service personnel and the morale of the troops in general. Even if the hygiene violations are really only isolated cases, numerous petitions and discussions during visits to the troops proved that there was a structural problem.

- *At the end of the year under review the situation finally seems to be improving, as related by service personnel to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces during the troop visit in Rukla in December. Setting up a contact point of the Bundeswehr Subsistence Office in particular seems to have had a positive effect here.*

With regard to the plans to build up the Lithuania brigade and the various measures to enhance attractiveness, the Ministry of Defence must ensure good mess halls by 2026 at the latest with the integration of the eFP into the Lithuania brigade. The autumn 2024 German-Lithuanian intergovernmental agreement will enable the Bundeswehr to operate its own kitchens in the future. It should utilise it accordingly and focus here on high-quality catering at all Lithuanian sites.

The need for improvement with regard to the further **infrastructure** in Rukla remains unchanged:

- *The problem of inadequate air conditioning in the container buildings with thermal fans, which has already been highlighted since 2021, persists and is not expected to be resolved before the end of 2025. The authorisation to install air conditioning systems was already provided over three years ago.*

The belief is growing that the installation of the air conditioning systems will be delayed until the completion of the German-Lithuanian barracks. This approach is incompatible with the planned increased attractiveness of a foreign assignment in Lithuania and is unacceptable for the service personnel concerned.

There was also annoyance in the year under review with regard to the existing regulations on the reimbursement of **travel expenses** when taking home leave:

- *A serviceman living in Lithuania criticised the fact that such costs are only reimbursed if the trip to Germany lasts at least two weeks. A move to Lithuania is therefore essentially unattractive. The Ministry of Defence commented that the function of trips home was to maintain private contacts in Germany or to attend medical appointments, for example. It went on to say that a stay of at least two weeks in Germany is required for such purposes.*

The Ministry's statement is understandable, given that two trips home by service personnel and their family members are already covered by their remuneration for an assignment abroad if they have moved abroad.

This also applies to salary advances for **rent deposits** with a separation allowance:

- *A soldier deployed in the advance party of the Lithuania brigade complained that only service personnel moving to Lithuania can claim interest-free salary advances for rent deposits when renting an apartment. Separation allowance recipients, who also depend on an apartment at the service point abroad, are not entitled to this option under the current regulations.*

The Ministry of Defence is working with the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community to ensure salary advances will also be possible in future when receiving a separation allowance. This is an important signal to those service personnel who are unable to move to Lithuania with their families, particularly during the Lithuania brigade's deployment phase, due to infrastructural deficiencies.

Latvia and Estonia

From March to November 2024 the German Air Force once again provided protection for nine months as part of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission, which monitors and protects the airspace over the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Bundeswehr therefore transferred five Eurofighters and their crews to Lielvārde in Latvia. A deployable air operations centre, which was stationed in Ämari (Estonia) despite the ongoing runway renovation, supplemented the German contribution from April to July 2024.

Unfortunately, the problems with the payment of **medical bills**, which were raised during a troop visit to the Baltic Air Policing mission in Estonia in December 2022, still exist two years later:

- *At the time, a servicewoman complained that she had to make advance payments to civilian specialists and outpatient clinics in Estonia as a self-payer.*

The Ministry is also examining the introduction of a procedure with which the medical services provided by the local civilian healthcare system in the country of deployment can be invoiced to the Bundeswehr, and paid for directly by the Field Offices of Defence Administration. An initial proposal has since been submitted, however practical application and data protection issues must still be resolved. A timely conclusion of the process would of course be very welcome.

Slovakia

The Bundeswehr's two-year commitment to NATO's- **enhanced Vigilance Activities** (eVA) battlegroup, led by the Czech Republic in Lešt, Slovakia, came to an end in the year under review. At the final parade at the end of May 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces spoke with numerous service personnel of the final contingent and discussed many of the mission's successes. The frequently criticised PUMA S0 infantry fighting vehicle, it was established, had proved its suitability for use abroad for the first time, and its operational readiness during the contingent period was over 90 percent. This was in particular due to the close-knit cooperation between the combat troops and the maintenance and logistics personnel. The spare parts supply and the supportive work of the special engineers were also crucial and exemplary here.

NATO Force Model and Allied Reaction Force

The NATO Response Force (NRF), which has operated as a rapid reaction unit since 2004, has enabled the alliance to respond quickly and effectively to crises and conflicts worldwide. However, as a result of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine in violation of international law, NATO decided that this was no longer sufficient. Although the NRF could in principle be deployed anywhere in the world, it had to cover long distances to deploy its troops. All things considered it was also too small and not flexible enough. To counter the constantly growing threats, particularly from Russia, NATO therefore reorganised itself on 1 July 2024 and transformed the NRF into the **NATO Force Model** (NFM).

The NFM re-establishes regional responsibilities. The alliance partners continuously provide resources for their region here. Germany's focus is on Central and North-Eastern Europe, which of course includes Poland and Lithuania in particular. The NFM is divided into three high-readiness forces, each with increasing response times – from 10 to 30 days, through to 180 days. The Allied Reaction Force (ARF) replaces the NRF's spearhead here, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) as the new rapid reaction unit. The ARF is permanently under NATO's operational command.

In 2024 Germany had some 14,000 service personnel at the ready for the NRF and the NFM, including the national support personnel required to carry out the mission. The NFM plans to incorporate 35,000 German service personnel from 2025.

Navy

The Federal Government's focus on national and alliance defence is demonstrated for the German Navy with a stronger presence in the North Sea/Baltic Sea region. It has assumed a leadership role within NATO in this sea area. The Commander Task Force Baltic headquarters were set up in Rostock on 1 October 2024 for this purpose. Multinational exercises will be planned and operations conducted from here.

This correct prioritisation of alliance defence in the Baltic Sea means the workload must be reduced elsewhere, in view of the low personnel levels and the Navy's enormously high mission situation. Considering ending participation in individual missions, such as the NATO- support mission in the Aegean, for example, should therefore not be ruled out.

International crisis management

Red Sea

Germany has participated since February 2024 in the European Union-led EUNAVFOR Aspides operation, which is a response to Houthi militia attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. The German contribution was initially limited to one year and provided for a personnel limit of 700 servicewomen and men. In addition to the deployment of the frigate HESSEN until the end of April 2024, in the year under review a number of service personnel were deployed to the headquarters in Larissa (Greece) and to the headquarters of the forces on board an Italian naval vessel.

The crew of the frigate HESSEN delivered an outstanding performance. They and the military leadership should be highly praised, in particular as the work required for the operation significantly exceeded the general operational workload. Due to the short notice before the mission start, the regeneration phase for the crew, originally planned until April 2024, had already ended in February 2024. And nor did the tight operational schedule allow for longer port calls. The constant threat and danger posed by drones and anti-ship missiles also contributed to the enormously high **operational workload**. After successfully fending off a drone attack, the entire crew was deservedly awarded the Combat Medal as the Bundeswehr's first closed contingent. Not all crew members, however, had actually received the medal by the end of the year under review:

- *According to the Ministry, all medals awarded were applied for, signed by the Minister of Defence and also sent to the respective units of the service personnel in question by the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management. In some cases, however, the medals have not yet been awarded by the units, or the handover of the respective medal has not yet been entered into the personnel management system.*

The units affected should now ensure as quickly as possible that the medals are finally awarded in a dignified setting, to illustrate the Bundeswehr's appropriate recognition and appreciation for the service personnel who participated in the mission.

The Bundeswehr's further participation in the mission was planned for the second half of the year with the deployment of the frigate HAMBURG, which initially set sail for the Mediterranean at the beginning of July. Due to the developing situation in the Middle East, however, the Bundeswehr took the responsible and logical decision not to deploy the frigate to the Red Sea for the time being. It at first remained under national command in the eastern Mediterranean, which meant the mission developed differently than planned:

- *The frigate's commander informed the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces that, because of the crew's specific preparation for a combat mission in the Red Sea, the crew was initially somewhat disappointed by the decision. The background and the need to remain in the Eastern Mediterranean were explained in great detail and attentively.*

This well-delivered communication is exemplary, especially as the course of this mission is not comparable with the German Navy's previous missions in the Mediterranean.

Lebanon

In June of the year under review the German Bundestag approved the one-year extension of the UNIFIL mandate in Lebanon, which has been in place since September 2006. Bundeswehr service personnel participate here in training the Lebanese Navy, to enable it to begin surveillance of the sea and airspace itself. The Bundeswehr is also active in helping ensure the civilian population has access to humanitarian aid. There were 176 service personnel deployed on this mission at the end of the year under review. Their protection and security must be a top priority with the fragile situation in the Middle East. This means the **security situation** on the ground must be analysed and evaluated each and every day.

The security and threat situation in Lebanon changed with the attack by the Islamist terror organisation Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2023. This also had an impact on the foreign assignment allowance, and the mission contingent requested it be reviewed and adjusted in November 2023:

- *Several service personnel deployed in Lebanon complained about the processing time and in particular about the Ministry's communication behaviour. The Ministry only decided to adjust the foreign assignment allowance on 8 October 2024, in other words one year after the security and threat situation changed, with retroactive effect to 8 October 2023.*

Even if the personnel in question have not suffered any disadvantage with the subsequent payment of the differential amounts, explanatory information on the procedure for determining the amounts and the respective status would have been desirable. The Bundeswehr should also regularly review the deployment conditions in Lebanon, due to the current deterioration in the security and threat situation. The rocket fire on the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, in which eight Austrian UN peacekeepers were injured in the year under review, illustrates the immense operational strains and dangers Bundeswehr service personnel are exposed to here as the Middle East conflict intensifies. Whether or not the mission can be accomplished at all is also uncertain. The deployment should be evaluated honestly and carefully, and its impact, success and dangers should be assessed.

Iraq and Jordan

The German Armed Forces' COUNTER-DAESH/CAPACITY BUILDING IRAQ mission aims to enable the Iraqi armed and security forces to ensure security and stability in the country, and to prevent a resurgence of the so-called Islamic State (IS). The Bundeswehr has been cooperating with the Operation Inherent Resolve international anti-IS and stabilisation mission since 2015. German service personnel have also been supporting the NATO mission, which advises the security institutions in Iraq on a strategic level, since 2020. A total of 288 Bundeswehr personnel were deployed at several locations in Jordan and Iraq in the year under review.

This mission is of course also affected by the increasing tensions in the Middle East, as illustrated by the rocket attacks on the German-American base in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil at the end of 2023, and missile strikes near the central Iraqi Al-Asad airbase in the summer of the year under review. As the base in Al-Azraq (Jordan) was not affected by these attacks and sufficient protective measures against drone and missile attacks are essentially in place at the base, the Federal Ministry of Defence did not recognise any increase in the specific risk situation for German service personnel in Jordan in the year under review, and therefore comprehensibly refrained from increasing the foreign assignment allowance.

Another problem arose for many service personnel on deployment abroad:

- *One serviceman stationed with the NATO Mission Iraq in Baghdad complained that, due to the delivery times of the military postal service, it could not be ensured that service personnel deployed in Iraq would be able to vote by post in the early Bundestag elections in February 2025.*

As there would be little time with the early Bundestag elections, the Ministry of Defence decided to send couriers to all Bundeswehr deployment areas to ensure postal voting documents would be delivered on time. This procedure is warranted and necessary, so that service personnel, as citizens in uniform, can also exercise their **right to vote** while on their mission.

Kosovo

Germany has participated in NATO's KFOR stabilisation mission in Kosovo for 25 years, making it the Bundeswehr's longest mission. The intensity of the deployment has not diminished in recent years. It remains dangerous in particular due to the ongoing tensions in the Kosovo-Serbia border region. In the year under review a significant **increase in personnel** was therefore made from 72 to currently 285 contingent members with the creation of a new task force company. Its tasks include responding to violent demonstrations and complementing the national security structures. Challenges posed here became apparent during the troop visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in spring 2024:

- *One soldier criticised the fact that his unit did not have sufficient protected vehicles to be able to deploy a full complement of personnel in an emergency.*

- *Another complained that the company is going to be prohibited from using irritant gas for self-defence.*

After reviewing the facts, the Ministry of Defence announced that, following training in the use of irritant gas, the task force company's service personnel will now be permitted to carry it on patrols. This is to be welcomed. In the event of sudden risk situations, non-lethal weapons must be available in addition to firearms, to be able to respond proportionately to specific threats.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

NATO troops have been stationed in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the Bosnian War in 1995. In 2004 the European Union took charge of the stabilisation and peacekeeping mission as part of the EUFOR Althea operation. After the German participation ended in 2012, the German Bundestag decided to resume the mission in 2022 due to ongoing tensions in the country and to protect against destabilisation. In the year under review, 37 German service personnel served in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the most part they were attached to the EUFOR- headquarters staff in Sarajevo.

Other contingent members were deployed in **liaison and observation teams** in the border areas with Serbia and Croatia. The teams' task is to recognise the resurgence of conflicts between the different ethnic groups early on, for example through regular patrols. They also provide instructional classes in local schools on the still omnipresent danger of mines. They also establish contacts with regional decision-makers and are visible and reliable contact partners in the region. Their mission is to enter into dialogue with the local population, which, in individual cases, can be extremely emotionally demanding. Many of their dialogue partners -have experienced war and displacement or were caught up in the war themselves. The teams, usually six soldiers, live in rented houses and have little personal contact with the rest of the contingent during their six-month deployment.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces formed her own impression of this important mission on a troop visit in the border region with Serbia in the early summer of the year under review. The good bond in the teams in particular was discussed here, but there were also suggestions on how to improve **preparation for missions**:

- *The soldiers deployed in the liaison and observation teams wanted more language courses and better preparation for the complex dialogue with the members of the different ethnic groups, for whom reconciliation is still a long way off. They also said it would be good to get to know each other in the teams for longer in the run-up to the mission, which would make the cooperation in close quarters over many months easier.*

The soldiers' request for training in the respective national language is of course understandable. However, due to the use of translators and interpreters, the considerable expense of such training cannot be justified. With the *Taktische Gesprächsführung im Einsatz* (tactical conversational skills in the field) training course and the planned further training beginning with the EUFOR Althea 7th German mission contingent, the soldiers are well prepared for their deployment.

On the whole the service personnel of the small mission contingent operating away from the spotlight were deeply grateful for the special appreciation and recognition of their service shown during the visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Many of the problems highlighted were already remedied in the follow-up to the troop visit, meaning the basic conditions of the mission on the ground have improved noticeably. The Bundeswehr has provided mobile air conditioning units and set up additional computer workstations for the liaison and observation team's house in Vlasenica. The relocation of the National Support Element to Camp Butmir was also expedited.

Niger

The Bundeswehr's mission in Niger ended in late summer 2024. The Bundeswehr has been committed in the Nigerien capital, Niamey, since 2016 with the provision of emergency medical flights via the local air transport base. From 2018 it also trained Nigerien special forces as part of the GAZELLE mission, which was transferred to the EUTM Mali mandate in August 2021 and terminated at the end of 2022. In April 2023 the German Bundestag approved the Bundeswehr's participation in the new EU Military Partnership Mission in Niger, which was set up to contain the instability and violence in the country and prevent a further escalation of the crises in the Sahel. The initial aim was to continue training Niger's special forces, which to date was provided with the

GAZELLE Mission, as part of the TORIMA Mission. Following the military coup in Niger in July 2023, however, all EU Military Partnership Mission and TORIMA Mission activities were suspended, followed by the complete withdrawal at the end of May 2024. The Bundeswehr also completed the redeployment of equipment for the MINUSMA Mission, executed via the Niamey air transport base with a greatly reduced number of personnel, at the end of May of the year under review. The last remaining service personnel returned to Germany in late summer 2024.

Indo-Pacific

The Bundeswehr's Indo-Pacific Deployment is its contribution to strengthening and maintaining the rules-based international order, to preventing the formation of political blocs and to consolidating security policy cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. In the summer of the year under review the German Bundestag passed a motion to intensify cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners to provide solutions to global challenges.

The German Navy and the German Air Force were committed with the Indo-Pacific Deployment between May and November of the year under review for the second time since 2021. The maritime task force consisted of two ships – the frigate BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG and the Combat Support Ship FRANKFURT AM MAIN. In addition to port calls with friendly nations, it also participated in several multinational exercises. As an expression of the validity of the international rules-based order, the Bundeswehr passed through the Taiwan Strait for the first time in over 20 years.

Service personnel want to stay in touch with their families, relatives and friends back home, especially on such long sea journeys. The fleet therefore provides **MWR (multi-way relay) communication** on its ships. This is a local network that provides the crew access to the Internet via satellite link for purely private purposes:

- *For the first time, communication satellites in low earth orbit made it possible for the contingents to access the Internet faster than with the satellites previously used in higher orbits. The Navy has thus taken a decisive step forward with the provision of support media on its ships.*

Finally there is good, well-functioning MWR communication, which is highly praised by the service personnel on site. It would of course be ideal if all Navy units received the required satellite antennae as promptly as possible.

During a port call of the seagoing units in Goa/India, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces formed her own impression of the basic conditions, the excellent leadership and the outstanding performance of the crews of both units. Despite the particular stresses and challenges during the multi-month voyage, the crew members were highly motivated and committed.

This was not simply a matter of course given the combat support ship's long absence of seven months and four months for the frigate BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG. The combat support ship's crew was deployed for the entire Indo-Pacific Deployment. The frigate BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG's crew, which had embarked in Singapore, immediately went on to its successor operation as part of the UNIFIL mission in the Mediterranean. Even if some of the mission's hardships could be mitigated and the basic conditions such as the MWR communication were exemplary, such long deployment times are too long for the deployed service personnel and their families.

Posts abroad

The Bundeswehr's commitment to the alliance and its international integration are also reflected in its numerous posts abroad. These include training facilities, military attaché staff at German embassies and permanent representations or German contributions to NATO- facilities and large NATO units as well as the Bundeswehr administrative offices abroad. The immense commitment of German service personnel stationed abroad for these purposes has long promoted excellent bilateral and multilateral cooperation with allied armed forces. The planned permanent stationing of the 45 Armoured Brigade in Lithuania by 2027 with 4,800 servicewomen and men and 200 civilian employees will significantly increase the number of personnel attached to posts abroad.

Taking up such assignments often confronts service personnel with numerous challenges. In addition to the search for affordable housing and suitable nursery or school places for the children travelling with them, the advance payment of the first rent can be an enormous burden, especially for junior-ranking service personnel. The Bundeswehr administrative offices abroad and the Bundeswehr Social Services are available to provide advice for those affected to make their start abroad easier.

During troop visits abroad by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, service personnel often complain that some insurance companies and banks do not recognise the Bundeswehr's certificate of residence in Germany, resulting in loan applications being rejected, insurance policies being cancelled and premiums being increased.

- *In line with the approach of the Federal Foreign Office, since October 2022 there have been “domestic addresses” with the responsible command authorities for service personnel deployed abroad, as well as for the civilian personnel.*

Such **domestic addresses** must be implemented promptly in all organisational areas of the Bundeswehr, so service personnel from posts that are not within the remit of the Office of the Armed Forces can also benefit from them.

There are also obstacles when returning to Germany from a foreign assignment, with the **school registration** of children that also travel with the deployment, for example:

- *The school authorities require the family's registration address to determine the school, to be able assess the feasibility of the route to the school. Service personnel who have deregistered before starting their foreign assignment cannot, however, provide a domestic registration address.*

At the suggestion of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the President of the Standing Conference of Education Ministers has taken this problem as an opportunity to once again explicitly raise awareness among the education ministries of the states.

During a deployment abroad the **provision of medical services** to service personnel is an important criterion for the attractiveness of the respective Bundeswehr base abroad:

- *A soldier stationed in Szczecin criticised the fact that, due to the lack of military medical care at the base, any treatment by the Polish healthcare system subsequently had to be confirmed by the medical centre in Torgelow by appearing in person, about an hour's drive away. A video consultation set up with Torgelow is not available for technical reasons.*

The Bundeswehr is working to ensure video consultations are offered in Szczecin again in future. In the meantime, the responsible disciplinary superiors have already dispensed with the presentation of the respective sick note, which once again presents a pragmatic solution for the troops.

Appreciation and recognition

With participation in deployments abroad and recognised missions abroad, Bundeswehr service personnel are awarded the **Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medal** in bronze, silver and gold, according to the deployment time. Those who have participated in active combat at least once or have suffered terrorist or military violence at great personal risk are also awarded the **Combat Medal**. With the new version of the corresponding foundation decree from 2022, the Ministry of Defence changed the date for awarding Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medals to 1 November 1991, meaning that missions further in the past are now also eligible for the medal. This resulted in a higher number of applications:

- *Several service personnel complained about the long processing time of twelve months on average for their applications for the Combat Medal to be awarded.*

The higher number of applications must not result in the examination of the award criteria taking a year or longer. At the recommendation of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the personnel of the unit responsible for reviewing individual cases in the German Joint Force Command of the Bundeswehr (formerly the Joint Forces Operations Command) was temporarily increased to reduce the existing backlog in processing applications as quickly as possible.

Due to criticism from the troops that not all missions are still included, the Ministry of Defence is considering also taking **domestic missions** into account and, if necessary, changing the date for awarding the Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medal again and setting it to 3 October 1990.

Also welcome is the fact that the new version of the foundation decree, currently under review, is expected to further extend the group of people to be honoured. This project is based on findings from the **Sudan evacuation mission** in April 2023, with which not all of the service personnel involved received a Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medal. According to the Ministry, the applicable regulations do not provide for the awarding of the Bundeswehr

Foreign Duty Medal to those service personnel of the mission who had remained alone on standby in the respective parent units in Germany, to be alerted when required. The planned amendment to the foundation decree will cover the Sudan evacuation mission in its entirety. Those Bundeswehr service personnel who are deployed in Germany as part of the training support for the Ukrainian armed forces would then also be eligible to receive a medal presented by Germany. At the moment they only receive an EU medal.

With the new version of the foundation decree, the Ministry should also change the procedure for awarding the Combat Medal to members of **foreign armed forces**. According to the current legal situation, a Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medal can only be awarded to members of foreign armed forces in exceptional cases if they have rendered special services to the Bundeswehr during their deployment. Passive witnessing of terrorist violence alone is not sufficient to meet the criteria of the foundation decree – active participation in combat action is required. For reasons of equal treatment and international solidarity, it would make more sense in future to apply the same criteria that apply to members of the Bundeswehr to awarding the Combat Medal to foreign service personnel.

Exercises abroad

To ensure national and alliance defence, large-scale NATO exercises are held regularly in the alliance area, with which service personnel train for multinational interaction between the combatant forces. When preparing and conducting the exercises, the participating nations can face challenges with regard to the **infrastructure**, as was the case with the Ramstein Legacy exercise in 2024:

- *One participating soldier criticised the hygiene conditions of the accommodation and sanitary facilities in Burgas (Bulgaria). There was a strong odour in the accommodation. Due to leaking urinals he at times had to stand in urine. The tap and shower water was milky and cloudy. Many soldiers therefore could not wash properly, despite the high temperatures, and he consequently contracted the skin disease scabies because of these conditions.*

There are no generally applicable standards for accommodation in other nations. Nevertheless, minimum standards for hygienic conditions are of course essential. In future the Bundeswehr should therefore specify the requirements for accommodation and sanitary facilities in advance and ensure that existing deficiencies are rectified as quickly as possible with a preliminary inspection on site.

During further exercises abroad, service personnel also complained about the working time regulations:

- *Compensation for overtime worked here is only possible as time in lieu and not paid out. In some cases, 200 hours of overtime were accrued, which, however, could not have been reduced.*

To date, in addition to remuneration for an assignment abroad, the Federal Remuneration Act has excluded financial payment for **overtime**. The *Zeitenwende* article law has provided a remedy in this respect. The creation of a payment option for special time-recorded duties in addition to remuneration for an assignment abroad was a core demand of the armed forces as part of the further development of military working time legislation. The fact that this is finally being implemented is a welcome development, as one thing is clear – exercises are the new deployments. The associated stresses and absences certainly are not part of everyday service.

The difference in **financial compensation** was criticised by service personnel participating in parallel exercises and standby commitments in the same country:

- *A serviceman deployed in Lithuania as part of the *Quadriga* exercise in 2024 complained that he was subject to different regulations than members of the eFP standby commitment in Lithuania.*

The difference in the level of financial compensation for exercises compared to standby commitments is understandable. While on exercises, service personnel are compensated in particular for the additional time they spend abroad, while the foreign assignment allowance granted with standby commitments, on the other hand, covers all additional material expenses and other hardships experienced while abroad, such as the mostly lengthier absence from family members in Germany. To avoid discrepancies, units should communicate the legal framework conditions clearly and comprehensibly before deploying abroad, especially with parallel exercises and deployments at the same location.

Evaluation of deployments abroad

At the end of the 2024 year under review, with the Study Commission on “Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany’s future networked commitment” and the First Committee of Inquiry (Afghanistan), the two committees set up by the German Bundestag in 2022 to evaluate the Bundeswehr’s mission in Afghanistan completed their review of its content work here. The Study Commission’s work finished as planned following a previous decision by the German Bundestag to extend its term, while the First Committee of Inquiry terminated its work prematurely due to the shortened electoral term.

Germany was the second largest contributor of troops in Afghanistan after the United States. Approximately 93,000 women and men from the Bundeswehr served in the Hindu Kush from 2001 to 2021. Of these, 59 lost their lives – more than in any other Bundeswehr deployment abroad.

The **Study Commission** on “Lessons from Afghanistan for Germany’s future networked commitment” took a broad approach with its analysis and focused on the almost 20-year mission in Afghanistan with the inclusion of external experts from various disciplines and institutions. In its interim report published and debated in the Bundestag in February 2024, the commission members repeatedly praised the personal commitment, reliability in mission completion and high commitment level of the Bundeswehr’s participating service personnel, which had enabled progress in Afghanistan and provided hope for its people. This assessment is very welcome, as the mission in Afghanistan had a significant impact on the troops. Nevertheless, the Study Commission rightly concluded in its interim report that the mission had failed strategically with the troop withdrawal and the Taliban’s renewed seizure of power. Beginning with the lack of a concrete objective for the mission, the lack of knowledge of the country of deployment and its society, the lack of a realistic view of the general situation and a non-existent exit strategy, deficiencies were found in both the communication and the coordination of work between the various entities involved. With regard to the Bundeswehr, the commission identified considerable progress with increasing deployment duration, likewise with regard to the rules for the use of military force (Rules of Engagement). On the whole the Bundeswehr developed structurally and culturally into an expeditionary army over the course of the deployment, which also, and in particular, resulted in an improvement in the special foreign assignments benefits and pensions for the German service personnel.

The Study Commission presented its final report in January 2025. With regard to the points critically appraised in its review of Germany’s commitment in Afghanistan, the commission made 72 specific recommendations for action, which should be considered in the future with international crisis management missions. With regard to the Bundeswehr, it recommended, among other things, that, despite the return to national and alliance defence, mission-relevant capabilities for international crisis management be maintained, and that appropriate funding for training, equipment and preparation be secured. The Commission advised the Federal Government and the German Bundestag to continue to publicly show widespread appreciation and support for the operational forces in international crisis management for their shared responsibility for the care and support of those with mission-related injuries.

The **First Committee of Inquiry** concentrated on the German Government’s actions during the Bundeswehr’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, focusing in particular on the evacuation operation executed in August 2021. The Committee concluded its taking of evidence in the year under review by questioning the respective management levels of the various entities involved and the policy makers responsible at the time, including the former Federal Chancellor. The final report presented in February 2025 reached similar conclusions to those of the Study Commission.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has followed the work of the two parliamentary committees with great interest. The task of the German Bundestag, the Federal Government and the military leadership of the Bundeswehr is to discuss the lessons learnt and the resulting recommendations in order to derive specific measures for Germany’s future foreign and security policy and for the deployment of the Bundeswehr.

The parliamentary groups supporting the Government also agreed in their coalition agreement to **regularly evaluate** ongoing deployments abroad. The Ministry of Defence and the Federal Foreign Office subsequently carried out such an evaluation in 2024 and submitted a corresponding report. The conclusions drawn here include, for example, that the Bundeswehr’s participation in deployments abroad should be clearly aligned with Germany’s security policy interests, and that expectations on Germany’s military contributions should be formulated realistically. Furthermore, the Bundeswehr must be equipped so it can complete its main task, namely, national and alliance defence. This is the basis for also making a substantial contribution to international crisis management with military capabilities.

2. Ukraine

EU training mission

Since the end of 2022 the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM UA) has been supporting Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invasion. In the year under review, Bundeswehr service personnel made an important contribution to Ukraine's defence capabilities by training the Ukrainian armed forces. On average approximately 1,500 members of the Bundeswehr participated in the mission – as instructors, in supply systems and as translators and interpreters. Numerically, **EUMAM UA** was therefore the Bundeswehr's biggest mission in 2024. Unannounced in the year under review, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited a training course of this mission for the second time in her term of office. She gained a first-hand impression here of the commitment, wholeheartedness and high level of professionalism that the troops perform their important mission with.

- *Service personnel deployed here reported that the cooperation between the German and Ukrainian forces was characterised by trust and “working as equals”. They all saw the mission as a meaningful task and thankfully unbureaucratic.*

In addition to the physically demanding daily training routine, the **psychological strain** is probably the greatest challenge for the German instructors, as those they are training will return to the armed conflict and may lose their lives. The close personal contact gives the Bundeswehr service personnel an in-depth insight into the results of the war and the prevailing problems, difficulties and suffering. The Bundeswehr therefore offers instructors continuous psychological support as part of its care and welfare programme. As part of regular multi-day visits to the various training centres, military psychologists provide both individual and group discussions with the instructors, the service personnel with the required language skills, and the military organisation and command personnel. Short-notice applied military psychology support is also ensured with availability by phone. According to the Federal Ministry of Defence, there are no known cases of stress disorders among members of the Bundeswehr, which could be traced back to their deployment as instructors.

It proved difficult to create the necessary formal basis for adequate **family support**, as the head of a family support centre explained:

- *This requires the participating service personnel to be recorded in the mission tool in the Bundeswehr's personnel management system. This has not yet happened, however, for EUMAM UA trainers, whose deployment regularly comprises three training sessions of 35 days each, the reason being their high fluctuation and the considerable administrative work involved. According to German Army Headquarters, registration here also results in an automatic change in the disciplinary subordination of the training personnel from their parent unit to the Multinational Special Training Command, which is neither planned nor structurally feasible. However, as this approach contradicts the clear ministerial orders, the command is examining options to solve this problem.*

Even though the military chaplaincy and applied military psychology offer services for the training personnel, support for their families must not be hindered by such bureaucratic obstacles.

The EU countries participating in the mission trained more than 60,000 Ukrainian service personnel by the end of 2024. The EU defence ministers agreed to increase this number to approximately 75,000 Ukrainian personnel by the end of winter 2024/2025. The training in Germany focuses here on **Ukraine's requirements**. The Bundeswehr once again trained almost 10,000 Ukrainian personnel in the year under review. To maintain these figures the current level of personnel and material deployment will also have to be maintained as it is.

The training of Ukrainian servicewomen and men would not be possible without the invaluable support of **translators and interpreters**. The Bundeswehr therefore deployed several hundred in the year under review. The Ministry of Defence is only too well aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by the service personnel deployed with EUMAM UA for language mediation. In May 2023 it therefore specified a distribution key for the various organisational areas, to spread the current workload of the service personnel with the required language skills and the units providing them more evenly. In cooperation with a civilian service provider, it also recruited women and men from Ukraine to work as translators and interpreters. According to the Ministry, the experiences gained here have been thoroughly positive. The civilian translators and interpreters are proving their skills and providing valuable relief for the active troops. Where required they can also call on the support of the military

psychologists. While the Bundeswehr offers a post-deployment seminar for military and civilian personnel and participation is mandatory, there is no comparable programme for external civilian translators and interpreters. It is therefore the civilian transfer company's responsibility to provide appropriate follow-up support for these personnel. In view of the expertise available with the applied military psychology, the Bundeswehr should agree with the civilian contractual partner that they can also offer the external civilian translators and interpreters an internal Bundeswehr follow-up seminar. Alternatively, the Bundeswehr could contractually oblige the civilian service provider to independently submit a similar offer for them.

NATO support mission

Independently of the EUMAM UA EU training mission, at their summit in Washington in July 2024 the NATO member states decided to set up the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine mission (NSATU) as a coordinating element. The mission bundles the military assistance and support of NATO- countries for Ukraine to make it even more effective and efficient. The Bundeswehr participates in and is committed to this important mission on multiple levels. In particular, it provides personnel for numerous positions at the headquarters of the relevant NATO command in Wiesbaden. German service personnel, together with the partner nations, are also protecting the logistics chain to support Ukraine.

Lessons for the Bundeswehr

The Bundeswehr has learnt its own lessons for military action from Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine in violation of international law. Since summer 2022 this has been based on the analysis of warfare by the German Army Headquarters for the Bundeswehr's land forces. The other services and organisational areas of the Bundeswehr are also reviewing their existing structures and plans. The lessons learnt here apply to the Bundeswehr's entire spectrum of capabilities. Among other factors, this involves equipping with specific weapons systems, the requisite equipment, and the future organisation of tactics and training.

The need for fully equipped armed forces that are permanently operational and combat-ready at all times also means that the materials and major end items delivered to support Ukraine must **be replaced** as quickly as possible and ammunition stocks must be replenished as required. According to the Federal Government's figures, which it publishes transparently online, Germany has supported Ukraine since February 2022 with material from Bundeswehr stocks with an estimated replacement value of approximately EUR 5.2 billion. In addition to armoured combat vehicles, Germany has also supplied the Ukrainian armed forces with artillery and air defence weapons and equipment, as well as protective and basic special equipment. To cover the Bundeswehr's requirements and to compensate for the material deliveries to Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence has already launched various procurement initiatives and, where necessary, submitted them to the parliamentary participatory process as part of the "EUR 25-million proposals".

3. Structural reform of the Bundeswehr

The Ministry of Defence aims to adapt the national and alliance defence to the current threat situation with more flexible, more agile and more efficient structures. By taking the security policy situation in Germany, Europe and the world into account, the 2023 Defence Policy Guidelines formulate the Bundeswehr's mission for the near future. To translate their specifications into a capability profile and a military strategy, the Ministry of Defence worked on a structural reform of the armed forces, which it presented in the spring of the year under review and has since implemented in large part. In addition, the Minister of Defence also reorganised the Federal Ministry of Defence with the Osnabrück Decree in May 2024, with the goal of improving its ability to lead and act in each and every situation, and strengthening its technical, content-related and organisational decision-making power and its own responsibility on all levels. The entire restructuring is scheduled for completion in 2025.

Setting up the German Joint Force Command was a key element of the reform. Two existing military operations commands were merged here – the Bundeswehr Territorial Command, which was previously responsible for all domestic Bundeswehr missions and for national territorial defence, and the Joint Forces Operations Command, which commanded the Bundeswehr's international crisis management deployments abroad. The new **German Joint Force Command** will now guarantee uniform command and control across all Bundeswehr missions and ensure uniform, consistent Ministry of Defence advice. The command will also be a central contact point for

national and international partners to coordinate joint deployments and missions. According to the Ministry, the state command headquarters of the federal states serve as a link to this command level. The command also continues to develop the aptly-named Operation Plan Germany (OPLAN DEU), the first new defence plan since the Cold War ended. Some 200 members of the Bundeswehr, including representatives from various federal and state authorities, tested it in a stress test in November 2024.

Furthermore, the former military organisational unit, the Cyber and Information Domain Service (CyberInfoDS), also joined the three traditional services, army, air force and navy, as a fourth service, because conflicts, threats and wars now also encompass the cyber and information domain. The relevance of hybrid threats, for example, is growing all the time. Additionally, the Bundeswehr will also set up a new home defence division as the Army's fourth brigade-size or higher unit in April 2025.

The previously independent Joint Support and Enabling Service as a logistics service provider and the Central Medical Service were also merged into a newly created **support unit**. By bundling these capabilities, the Ministry of Defence will ensure that all services have access to all capabilities at all times, when and where required. The support command will also create an efficient military administrative structure that bundles administrative tasks.

As with all previous reorganisations, this one also demands much from the respective service personnel, especially when a realignment happens as in the following case:

- *During a troop visit to the NBC defence regiment 1 in Strausberg in April 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learned that the operational readiness of the unit, which had already been set up in April 2022, was significantly restricted because the basic organisational directive had not yet been signed. This had considerable consequences – more than 200 posts had not been released, existing material was outdated and inadequate, and a number of buildings on the site had been demolished or were earmarked for demolition. On the whole, therefore, there is no NBC defence-specific infrastructure.*

Such situations are unacceptable. When the Bundeswehr sets up new units or battalions, it must ensure they are adequately equipped with personnel and equipment, and that the necessary infrastructure is provided. It must be guaranteed that the mission can be completed from the outset. Otherwise, the high motivation of the service personnel in such units and formations is quickly lost again due to inadequate framework conditions.

4. The Bundeswehr's financial resourcing

Defence budget and special fund

At approximately EUR 52 billion, the expenditure volume in the original defence budget (Section 14) was fortunately around EUR 1.8 billion higher in 2024 than in the previous year. Actual expenditure in 2024 totalled approximately EUR 50.3 billion.

Approximately EUR 19.8 billion were also provided in the year under review from the Bundeswehr's **special fund**, of which the Bundeswehr actually spent around EUR 17.2 billion. Therefore, with future budgets the Ministry should ensure that available funds are also spent. On the whole, approximately 82 percent of the special fund's EUR 100 billion credit authorisation had already been debited by the end of 2024. The Bundeswehr drew on the special fund in 2024 for numerous defence-related investments in the areas of research, development and testing, as well as military procurements.

Shortly before the parliamentary Christmas break in December 2024, the Budget Committee of the German Bundestag approved a further 38 defence investments totalling more than EUR 25 million. On the whole, it approved 97 major procurement and development projects in the year under review with these "EUR 25-million proposals" with a total investment volume of approximately EUR 58.5 billion, which is a record – the year before, it was only 55. The transfer from the regular defence budget to the special fund was necessary to take account of the constantly increasing operating expenses and multinational commitments. With these investments, Germany is thus responding to the global political situation and in particular to external threats, because a well-equipped Bundeswehr provides both deterrence and defence capability. The war in Ukraine highlights the areas in which the Bundeswehr must rearm. Procurements that have already been made with the help of the special fund could now be used, for example, to better defend against drone attacks.

According to the Federal Government, the **NATO target** of each member state of investing at least two percent of its gross domestic product in defence was achieved in the 2024 budget year, taking into account the

appropriations in Section 14, the special assets of the Bundeswehr and the relevant expenditure in other sections of the budget.

As in previous years, actual expenditure on personnel and supplies is the largest item in Section 14. In 2024 it was approximately EUR 22.46 billion, or 44.8 percent of total expenditure. Spending in this area is expected to increase significantly in the coming years, to deploy and station the brigade in Lithuania in particular. In Section 14 with a total of EUR 9.831 billion, the costs for military procurements and maintenance accounted for approximately 19.6 percent of total expenditure in the year under review. Some EUR 15 billion were also spent on military procurements from the special fund in 2024, which was 87.8 percent of the special fund's total expenditure that year. Due to the higher energy and raw material prices, spending in these areas will increase further in the future.

During visits to the troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learned that the investments were well received by the troops, for personal equipment, modern combat clothing and new big and small equipment, for example. In conversations with service personnel, however, she also heard where the funds are still lacking and how long procurement is still taking. The financial volume in Section 14 must be significantly increased further to ensure the necessary maintenance and development of the armed forces' capabilities on the one hand and the Bundeswehr as an attractive employer on the other. Both the Bundeswehr and the defence industry must have planning security. A corresponding increase in the regular defence budget is absolutely essential to complete or continue the important projects begun with the special fund. This also applies in particular with regard to the far from sufficient personnel strength and the disastrous infrastructure in some areas.

Flexible funding

The "Flexible funding" package of measures for commanders and civilian heads of services will enable them to act quickly. They can use the total of EUR 60,000 immediately available to them to purchase and use products available on the market locally and at short notice. The budgetary guidelines must be observed here, which is why the frequently used term, "hand money", can be misleading.

Expenditure from the flexible budgetary funds totalled approximately EUR 13.3 million in the year under review. Altogether 3,571 procurement processes were initiated. The average outflow of funds for a post was approximately EUR 35,000. During visits to the troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces once again learned that the range of products purchased is expansive and varied, ranging from the purchase of commercial drones and tools, through to use for conferences and other events.

As in previous years, service personnel nevertheless criticised the lack of flexibility with regard to the use of funds. They wanted even more scope of action:

- *Officers from the 393 Tank Battalion in Bad Frankenhausen suggested using these funds for regional recruitment or financing shuttle buses for those not entitled to accommodation.*
- *The preference to use the flexible funding for IT purchases was also expressed several times. For budgetary reasons it has not yet been possible to use the funds for both IT and personnel recruitment.*

An evaluation of the flexible funding in 2022 focused on the removal of remaining obstacles and its further development. One important result was the proposed creation of a new budget item for purchasing devices, equipment supplies and items of equipment for administrative purposes from 2025. In future, these funds will be used to finance commercial and market-available material requirements of military facilities, but not military equipment or IT.

5. Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy, often synonymous with the administrative apparatus, is in itself not negative, but rather necessary to ensure the proper functioning of democratically legitimised institutions to safeguard the common good. This also applies to the Federal Republic of Germany in general, and to the Bundeswehr in particular. Bureaucracy, however, usually has a negative connotation, and rightly so. What we really mean is **excessive bureaucracy**, which, in the case of the armed forces burdens the respective units and service personnel beyond what is necessary, leaving them justifiably irritated and frustrated. This excess must be reduced and prevented in the future, as it causes countless problems. Complex administrative processes slow down the troops' decision-making.

Bureaucratic obstacles also hinder necessary decisions, often impairing the armed forces' operational readiness and response capability. Rigid bureaucracy also makes it difficult for the units to react quickly to changing situations or requirements. An overly complex administrative structure also reduces the motivation and satisfaction of the service personnel, as they often have to deal with lengthy processes and unnecessary formalities. There is therefore never a troop visit where they do not raise the problem of excessive bureaucracy with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

- *In their criticism, service personnel often make comparisons with the condition of the Bundeswehr some decades ago. Many believe everything is now more complex and complicated.*
- *One officer, for example, pointed out that 30 percent of his work was the result of bureaucratic processes.*

With regard to the Bundeswehr's core mission, national and alliance defence, sufficient time to achieve it without being hampered by unnecessary bureaucratic processes is essential.

This was also recognised by the Federal Ministry of Defence, which has focused on reducing bureaucracy since 2013 at the latest. The **Programme for Bureaucracy Reduction** published in March of the year under review, which builds directly on the 2016 deregulation agenda, is especially important here. Designed as a strategy paper, it identifies various problem areas that hinder bureaucracy reduction within the Ministry of Defence's area of competence. It also identifies specific goals to be achieved.

In addition to the traditional areas of regulation management, bureaucracy reduction and bureaucracy prevention, the programme in particular focuses on a **change in mentality** within the armed forces. This is an excellent and welcome approach, as there is often a clear need for improvement here:

- *"Everything to everyone" e-mail commands are a widespread management practice. The files processed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces also frequently include pages of orders from military superiors, some of which have been revised several times and seem absurd in their depth of detail and regulate every conceivable arrangement of a simple official event in minute detail.*

The Bundeswehr's leadership philosophy, **Führen mit Auftrag (mission command)**, must be emphasised again here. The Ministry of Defence therefore rightly identifies key factors in the programme that are good examples for a necessary change in mentality – an overly pronounced safety net mentality when making decisions, excessive control by superiors that does not allow any room for manoeuvre, a lack of unbureaucratic thinking and action on the part of all those involved, and an insufficiently pronounced and tolerant error culture. The Ministry therefore focuses in particular on the actions of leaders, while at the same time calling for the cooperation of all Bundeswehr members, because the occasional request by some service personnel for detailed instructions from their superiors and a lack of willingness or courage to accept responsibility themselves also hinder the reduction of bureaucracy.

Understandably, this change in mentality, which was requested with good reason, has yet to take full effect in the armed forces. This cannot happen overnight; however, moving away from the, "we've always done it like that" way of thinking in the units as quickly as possible, is absolutely imperative. It is a good thing, therefore, that a department within the Ministry, specifically responsible for bureaucracy reduction, also heads up the regulation management and bureaucracy reduction group, created in August 2023 for this topic as part of operational oversight. The group's core element is the central **contact point** for bureaucracy reduction. For the first time in the Bundeswehr's history, the Ministry of Defence has established a structure that is tasked with reducing bureaucratic obstacles and that performs this task centrally for the entire area of competence. With the group, all Bundeswehr members can report bureaucratic hurdles quickly and easily by e-mail, intranet or telephone, however not all of them are aware of this:

- *Some service personnel who were asked about the regulation management and bureaucracy reduction group said they did not know about it. Some were also somewhat negative about the group, as they felt it was just another office that would not reduce bureaucracy but rather would increase it.*

This criticism is unwarranted. The group has already achieved a good deal since it was set up, however it is crucial that service personnel inform the contact point immediately if they encounter bureaucratic obstacles. Via an information portal, accessible to all Bundeswehr members on the intranet, the contact point posts daily updates on the bureaucratic barriers and solutions submitted to it. There were over 600 issues at the end of the year under review.

After receiving a report, it researches extensively (often together with the sender) to determine whether the bureaucratic obstacle originates in the Ministry of Defence's scope of responsibility. If it does, the group must work out a solution without ministerial involvement. Many bureaucratic problems can thus be solved on site in the facilities, because regulations or laws are not always the only reason for bureaucratic obstacles. Very often they are also based on misinterpretations by individual parties involved in the process.

Bureaucratic barriers on the other hand, which are caused by ministry regulations, are reported to the Ministry and reviewed in the respective responsible functional sections. These, however, often face bureaucratic challenges themselves:

- *With administrative hurdles caused by legislative texts in particular, in many cases the lead responsibility for any legislative amendments lies with other federal ministries.*

In such cases, the Ministry of Defence relies on the groundwork from and cooperation with these, which can make it difficult to speed up the removal of identified obstacles. It is therefore a welcome development that the Ministry of Defence is always careful to review regulations within its own scope of responsibility as part of its **bureaucracy measurement** and to eliminate any increase in the administrative burden.

In general, it should be noted that the criticism of unnecessary bureaucratic red tape voiced by service personnel during troop visits sometimes originates outside the armed forces:

- *The postal sending of payslips, the detailed documentation and reporting of each batch of vaccination against COVID-19 and the annual instruction on occupational health and safety in the workplace also affect other areas of society in addition to the Bundeswehr.*
- *This also applies to the criticism of the bureaucratic burden when providing proof of continued receipt of the family allowance. The obligation and the frequency of the review are set out in the general administrative regulation of the Federal Remuneration Act.*

That the bureaucracy reduction contact point at least referred to the respective PDF forms on the website of the Federal Office of Administration in the course of the review is also a positive development. The fact, however, that the servicewomen and men concerned still have to complete and print out these forms again and again will surely not be met with friendly smiles.

In general, it should be noted that the regulatory density in Germany is continuing to increase, and therefore also has impacts on the Bundeswehr. The **National Regulatory Control Council**, an independent Federal Government supervisory and advisory body, presented its 18th annual report to the German Bundestag in October 2024. Entitled "Gute Gesetze. Digitale Verwaltung. Weniger Bürokratie." (good laws, digital administration, less bureaucracy), the report summarises the main results of bureaucracy reduction in Germany and makes recommendations on the current issue of better lawmaking. Laws within the remit of the Ministry of Defence were also taken into account here. In general, the report states that the overall findings on bureaucracy reduction in Germany in the period under review from July 2023 to June 2024 are positive for the first time in many years. The Ministry of Defence is not the frontrunner among the ministries with bureaucracy reduction, but nor does it lag at the rear.

The fact that **digitalisation** can be the greatest lever to drive forward debureaucratisation is not a new claim. The Ministry of Defence is therefore working at full speed to accelerate digitalisation in the armed forces and thus make processes more efficient. Finally, the use of digital technologies can automate many administrative tasks and therefore contribute to a reduction in form filling and long processing times. This is urgently required, as the prevailing flood of paperwork in the Bundeswehr continues to be regularly criticised by service personnel.

- *During a troop visit, for example, an officer told the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces that it takes "16,000 sheets of paper" to deploy a company.*

Neither the Ministry of Defence, which was asked to comment, nor the bureaucracy reduction contact point have any findings or reports to substantiate this. The Ministry does, however, comprehensibly confirm that operations deployments do generate increased administrative work, but not to the extent described. There is often a clash of different interests – those of the service personnel, who want a smooth and low-expense transfer, and those of the units, which are bound by the respective legal requirements and their documentation obligations.

The Bundeswehr has, however, already made some progress, particularly with regard to **filling out forms**:

- *A regular point of criticism levelled at the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and the regulation management and bureaucracy reduction group is that forms can only be signed by hand, which generates a considerable amount of extra work.*

The regulation management and bureaucracy reduction group has already been able to remedy this in places. Forms stored on the form server would be gradually extended to include the electronic signature function. However, as the digital signature is not always the less time-consuming processing method (in some processes a signature by hand is faster), there is now a choice between digital and analogue signatures. The number of dynamic forms that adjust themselves in content and length during processing based on data input is also increasing, so that only the required entry fields and texts are displayed. In addition to better overview, this also facilitates easier handling, which enables faster processing with fewer errors.

The use of forms, however, that are not necessary under certain circumstances is also a recurring topic with the bureaucracy reduction contact point:

- *There are facilities, for example, where, in addition to applying for leave in PrimeWeb with the appropriate form, applications also had to be submitted by e-mail or post. According to the corresponding service regulation this, however, is not necessary. Applications for leave can be processed in writing or verifiably in compliance with specifications in electronic recording systems. PrimeWeb is one of the latter.*
- *In another case, it was reported that, as part of reassignment or temporary duty orders, a data protection declaration must be signed to consent to the processing of personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) each time a person joins the receiving unit. This too is unnecessary. Such consent is initially given in the course of the application in the career questionnaire for the purpose of the aptitude test and, if the outcome is positive, as part of the recruitment process with the personnel questionnaire. This means that servicewomen and men must sign twice, but not with subsequent personnel measures after their active service begins.*

Both cases are examples of how work that complies with regulations can go far beyond what is actually required.

The use of specialised software in particular can optimise time-consuming processes for managing deployments, resources and personnel. A successful example here is the digitalisation of the **situation report for personnel operational readiness**. This is just one of many specialist situations, such as the logistical situation, training situation or the healthcare situation, which generate considerable knowledge accretion about the operational readiness or the equipment situation, digitalised and in real time, and in the best case scenario can represent an overall situation. The latter, unfortunately, is a long way off.

The Bundeswehr uses a completely new technology for the digital situation report of personnel operational readiness. It was developed in just 18 months, while keeping to the planned budget, which is a great success. The digitalised situation report will enable a daily overview, from company level upwards, of the personnel that are available, to what extent, with what training, and where and when they are assigned or not yet assigned. Senior captains in particular are therefore required to enter the necessary information into the situation report. When the system was introduced, the Ministry of Defence assumed that the additional work that was required at the beginning, and that was criticised by the service personnel affected, would gradually decrease as the system was continuously used. These improvements expected by the Ministry have apparently materialised. There were at least no more complaints in this regard with the troop visits in the year under review:

- *While service personnel of the 472 Logistic Battalion in Kümmersbruck were still complaining in 2023 about the high bureaucratic burden with manual data collection and query processes, this burden has since decreased significantly. With the appropriate prior knowledge, the effort can be implemented during the course of daily official business.*

Numerous reports have informed the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and the bureaucracy reduction contact point about the issues concerning **service vehicles and logbooks**:

- *Requests for vehicles must be made in writing and in good time, and a logbook must be kept manually. Invoices for booking a vehicle abroad must be sent by post to BwFuhrparkService GmbH.*

The Bundeswehr has examined these problems together with the Motor Vehicles Center of the German Armed Forces. The internal regulations in the trip ticket area, however, already meet the legal requirements as

unbureaucratically as possible. The procedures for requesting and using BwFuhrparkService GmbH vehicles also meet the respective legal requirements. The Ministry of Defence is working together with BwFuhrparkService GmbH on the implementation of an IT-supported vehicle request and provision system to ensure improvements here.

Digital training projects and e-learning modules are also key components of the digitalisation. They enable flexible and location-independent training and thus directly simplify and accelerate the training administration. Commanders, instructors and service personnel increasingly refer to such programmes during troop visits:

- *During a visit to the Naval School in Mürwik, the commander reported on the success of a digital learning platform that allows service personnel to study flexibly, while travelling by train, for example.*
- *The cyber and information domain training centre in Pöcking focuses on the Bundeswehr's "Link and Learn" project and rightly sees it as a way to increase digital thinking in training.*

The Bundeswehr and BWI GmbH are also jointly trialling numerous virtual training technologies, particularly in the virtual reality field. Theory-burdened lessons, such as hazardous material training, can be loosened up and taught more in a more illustrative way. This has been particularly successful at the Bundeswehr Military Police and Staff Duty School:

- *This supplemented the initial training and the advanced individual training with innovative digital training and study programmes. Recruits could access digital content via QR-codes with work and private IT. Remote learning during training relieves the burden on training staff and balances the training plan. In particular, it also generates a motivating sense of personal responsibility with the servicewomen and men.*

All virtual learning opportunities are extremely flexible and impart knowledge as close to reality as possible. This welcome addition to traditional training must be further expanded throughout the Bundeswehr. Service personnel who are confronted and trained with digital content right from the start of their initial training, will later contribute directly to the change in mentality called for by the Ministry.

The **Stiewi** IT application for making travel expense and separation allowance claims in the Bundeswehr's travel management system has been available to service personnel since 2022. This is also a welcome benefit, as the software replaces the manual application process with a fully electronic solution.

- *Service personnel are, however, still waiting for access to Stiewi via their private mobile phones.*

In January of the year under review, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support initiated the awarding process to comprehensively modernise the travel management system. The connection of mobile devices via an app is part of this modernisation. Unfortunately, the contract award originally targeted by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community and the procurement office for the end of 2024 did not materialise, and in fact the tender actually had to be cancelled completely. The reasons for the failed award will be evaluated and the project will now be put out to tender again. The entire course of the project will therefore probably be delayed by approximately one year. Connecting mobile devices via an app must absolutely continue to be a key focus of the Ministry of Defence.

Criticism that the use of Stiewi was not fully thought through and that specific solutions are taking too long was also expressed in the year under review:

- *One serviceman reported that Stiewi did not have a button for committee trips, which he, however, requires to organise a group trip for the staff council. He therefore cannot submit a group application for all staff council members. Instead, each and every person must submit their own application, even if they are all in the same organisational unit.*

The Ministry confirmed that it had already identified the need for such a button with Stiewi in 2023, a year before the petition. At the time, it commissioned the programmer company to add this missing function. The specific date of delivery of the programme extension and testing completion and implementation is, however, still uncertain. The Ministry of Defence nevertheless continues to push for a speedy delivery.

To test the project and process acceleration measures, the Minister of Defence will issue a decree in 2025 to begin the **RESET project**, which was originally initiated by the Navy. This is welcome news after the delays in the second half of 2024. The 3 and 5 fleet squadrons selected for the project are gathering knowledge here for a defence-capable Bundeswehr operating system by being given something of a "carte blanche" to enable

unbureaucratic freedom for pragmatic and practical solutions. This specifically relates to material procurement, for example. RESET is supported by experts who, among other tasks, contribute the findings and ideas of agile change management. On a visit to the Naval Air Command in Nordholz in August 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was informed about the project, which has been met by the responsible naval pilots with great interest and full support. To avoid further delays with the project, the necessary human and financial resources must now be made available, and the challenges with the organisational establishment of a secretariat as a necessary control element in the Ministry of Defence must be met.

Positive examples of digitalisation were found with reserve issues in the year under review. In addition to the “My Reserve” smartphone app, currently in test operation, the Bundeswehr has made it much easier for inactive duty personnel to book trips to their duty station by train:

- *While it was previously necessary to redeem a ticket voucher sent by post at a Deutsche Bahn travel centre, those on reserve duty now receive a voucher code with their call-up for such activities (Heranziehungsbescheid), which they can use to purchase a train ticket online.*

A major point of criticism continues to be the excessive bureaucracy in the Bundeswehr's **procurement system**. The endless procurement processes for major end items, equipment and material have been an issue for many years. There is no shortage of awareness here regarding the need to change the procurement structures and regulations within the Bundeswehr. However, this task is complex, and the regulatory density in this area is particularly high.

The **Bundeswehr procurement acceleration law** (BwBBG), which already came into force in summer 2022, applies to orders for the delivery of military equipment for the direct strengthening of the Bundeswehr's operational capability and to construction and maintenance services that are directly related to this military equipment. Its purpose is to utilise simplifications under public procurement law and to complete procurements more quickly. To this end, the BwBBG enables the Bundeswehr's awarding offices, federal companies and federal state building authorities, which act on behalf of the federal government on a loan basis, to utilise public procurement law simplifications. The evaluation of the BwBBG, which was submitted on time, found that the law had proved its validity in practice. It is an effective instrument in accelerating the execution of award procedures in the defence sector and has been used in approximately 20 percent of all defence and security-specific procurement procedures. On the whole, it saves time due, among other things, to lower workloads with regard to the basis for justifying joint tenders:

- *The average duration of the procedure for purely national awards was 8.2 months, with a range of 1 to 37 months. With Europe-wide tendering procedures, the average duration of the procedure is 10.5 months, with a range of 3 to 20 months.*

The big difference in possible procedure times is due to the fact that a multitude of different factors can influence the duration, such as the complexity of the procurement item, the correspondingly long tender preparation and negotiation phase and the evaluation of several tenders. In the case of projects where the EUR 25-million proposal must be submitted to the German Bundestag, the preparation and submission of these proposals to the Budget Committee and the time at which the project is discussed in the committee also influence the time it takes to conclude the award procedure. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces welcomes the fact that provisions of the BwBBG, originally set to expire at the end of 2026, will be retained by transferring them to other legislative and regulatory texts.

In April 2023, the Chief of Defence and the responsible state secretary in the Ministry of Defence also signed the **acceleration decree**, which focuses on the goal of extending the discretionary powers in procurement by immediately abrogating regulations that tighten the law within the Bundeswehr. This has been achieved in part at least. As a result, approximately 200 internal Bundeswehr regulations were affected by changes:

- *For example, in compliance with the provisions of the Federal Budget Code, the Ministry abrogated the internal Bundeswehr regulation on advance payment for goods and services, which tightened the law. According to the Ministry, the abrogation of the regulation makes a visible contribution to flexibility in the procurement system and expands the discretionary scope of those involved, without acting in a legal vacuum here.*

Nonetheless, service personnel are right to criticise the fact that the practical implementation of the continuing multitude of legal regulations, both national and European, is still a burden in day-to-day business. While on troop

visits, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces regularly hears that many units are frustrated or overburdened in this respect:

- *The service personnel's criticism is wide-ranging and extends from buying a cordless drill/screwdriver, which is considered excessively bureaucratic, a bolt cutter for the PUMA infantry fighting vehicle, or a bus, to the general procurement process via the DBAS system.*

According to the Ministry of Defence, however, which was asked to comment, the points raised about excessive bureaucracy are often incomprehensible or even unfounded. It believes, if the existing procurement or award procedures had been applied correctly, processes could have been completed much faster or sometimes even “problem-free”. To prevent such divergences in the future, all service personnel are urgently advised to contact the responsible body immediately if problems arise or to contact the bureaucracy reduction contact point. The causes of delays and difficulties can then be quickly investigated so that remedial action can be taken swiftly.

Some service personnel see the **economic feasibility studies** as a real disruptive factor in the procurement process. According to the Federal Budget Code, these must be carried out in an appropriate way for all financially relevant measures, insofar as they generate revenue or expenditure for the Federal Government.

- *One inventory control sergeant complained, among other things, that he had to carry out an economic feasibility study for the procurement of printer paper for his unit. The Ministry of Defence referred to the current legal situation and explained that the appropriate economic feasibility study when purchasing printer paper could basically be completed in a few moments by simply ticking the box on the form provided for this. The person completing the form is responsible for weighing up, within reasonable limits, which procurement requires a detailed analysis and which does not.*

It is understandable that the petitioner was not satisfied with this statement. Essentially, without legal or administrative training, an NCO cannot be expected to confidently deal with the intricacies of the Federal Budget Code. It is, however, also understandable that the legal requirements must be met and the economic feasibility studies must be carried out independently and appropriately in the units. The affected service personnel must therefore be supported as much as possible here. Only then can the change in mentality called for by the Ministry of Defence really take place. The fact that the Ministry contacted the petitioner again personally after the petition is very welcome. The budgetary law **instruction** and training courses offered must also be availed of more. Furthermore, the Ministry of Defence should step up its efforts to ensure a legislative amendment by introducing possible exemptions in the Federal Budget Code with the responsible ministry or department so that economic feasibility studies can be dispensed with up to certain award limits and thus relieve the burden on the units.

As a result, the Bundeswehr still has much to do to perceptibly reduce bureaucracy. The fact that the course has been set and the Ministry of Defence is always open to new ideas to reduce bureaucracy is of course very welcome. The increased involvement of the Bundeswehr's own university-level knowledge could be a beneficial factor here. These measures must also be effective now, because ultimately a successful bureaucracy reduction will have a positive impact on the Bundeswehr's attractiveness, increase its training and operational capability and motivate each individual servicewoman and man to take more personal responsibility.

6. Materiel

Full resourcing

The 19th Report of the Federal Ministry of Defence on Armaments Affairs, which is divided into a public section and a non-public section, provides information on key defence projects. It emphasises that the Bundeswehr must be capable of effective deterrence, which presents it with major challenges that must be met with ambitious, plausible and realistic plans. This also means that clear decisions on priorities are required. A high-performance and reliable defence industry is a must to close the Bundeswehr's capability gaps, which have emerged over the past three decades.

Drones and drone defence systems in particular have become increasingly more relevant in the Bundeswehr over recent years. The Federal Ministry of Defence set up the drone task force in November 2023. It finished its work in autumn 2024, and the Ministry of Defence plans to move this remit into the area of routine ministerial work. This is an important and necessary step to meet international challenges. The first symposium on drones and drone

defence was held in May 2024 under the patronage of the Bundeswehr's Chief of Defence, to create common understanding of the topic within the Bundeswehr and to initiate dialogue with the industry.

The Bundeswehr has a wide range of drones, which are mostly used for situation reconnaissance and mission monitoring. The use of German armed drones has long been controversially debated in the German Bundestag. The principles for the deployment of German armed unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) presented to the German Bundestag by the Ministry of Defence in December 2024 ultimately respond to the changed security policy framework conditions and define when and under what conditions the Bundeswehr can deploy such weapons. Along with drones, the Bundeswehr also has various drone defence systems. The purchase and use of drones for training purposes are issues that concern the troops. Some facilities utilise the option of purchasing commercial drones via flexible funding. Service personnel repeatedly emphasised the importance of training with drones:

- *The exercise is therefore essential in view of the experiences gained from Russia's war on Ukraine. But significantly more effort and input by the Bundeswehr is required, both in the area of drone deployment and use, and in the area of drone defence.*

Generally, training for reconnaissance, action and defence against small drones and micro-drones is provided in the Bundeswehr's battalions, units, schools and certified training facilities. Personnel authorised to train and inspect, who have undergone certified further training, are deployed here.

- *Service personnel criticised the insufficient regulation situation for drone defence capabilities and inadequate regulation for the use of their own drones. They also suggested practising drone defence in a special simulator.*

According to the Ministry of Defence, **drone defence** is part of the training required to achieve the operational capability for land-based operations in national and alliance defence. It is trained as part of the air defence of all forces.

The high psychological strain on service personnel who must operate drones and analyse aerial images is also especially relevant here.

- *When visiting troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces repeatedly hears that the psychological strain on drone personnel is immense, especially for those who analyse and evaluate horrific images from war zones.*

The service personnel concerned can perform their duties both in the country of deployment and in Germany. In the latter case the considerable contrasts between the mission situation on the screen and everyday normality outside the barracks can even mean greater stress than in the field. It is therefore a very significant step that the German Bundestag has decided, as part of the discussions on the Zeitenwende article law, to equate injuries suffered by service personnel while working in this procedure, known as "reachback", with an operational accident. This improvement is to be welcomed in every respect.

Numerous **drone sightings** over and near Bundeswehr bases in the year under review are also alarming. The Ministry could not conclusively assess whether these were spy drones, as the investigations into those behind them were unsuccessful. The drone sightings did however spread a sense of insecurity among the troops:

- *During the troop visit to Cham, a soldier pointed out that military security was becoming increasingly more important with regard to the overflight of drones or attack plans, and that maintaining the required personnel for defence was also necessary. In this context, the Ministry of Defence believes the number of personnel available for mission accomplishment must be reviewed.*

When unidentified drones fly over Bundeswehr sites, the troops are in danger. In addition to the extensive provision of drones for reconnaissance and effects, drone defence systems and the training for service personnel they require, better staffing is also required to protect and secure all Bundeswehr locations at home and abroad – and not just from spy drone attacks. In the year under review the Bundeswehr was at least able to increase the number of drones in its inventory, and upgrade and retrofit its drone defence systems. Due to the rapid developments in the area of drones and drone defence, further measures are urgently required to ensure the Bundeswehr can react swiftly to threats and is thus sufficiently defence-capable.

Following the considerable delays introducing the new **digital radio system** and all associated Bundeswehr digitalisation projects, there were some rays of hope during visits to the troops over the past year:

- *At the 393 Tank Battalion in Bad Frankenhausen the majority of the battle tanks are equipped with the Battle Management System, which has proven to be an excellent tool so far. The battalion will have a state-of-the-art system when all radio equipment is available.*
- *On a visit to the Nordic Response exercise in March 2024, the Mountain Infantry Brigade commander also confirmed that his unit is command-enabled and capable of digital, encrypted communication. This is possible with the use of the new radios and by linking the management information system to the Norwegian system.*
- *The service personnel of the 383 IT Battalion in Erfurt were also happy with the results: 61 vehicles are to be equipped with modern radios, beginning in 2025. In addition to the modern radios, the unit will then also receive the “Tactical Wide Area Network” system for land operations.*
- *Unfortunately, contrary to the Ministry of Defence’s announcement, the eFP Battlegroup still did not have digital, encryption-enabled radios at the end of 2024. A troop solution already described in last year’s annual report has, however, been enabling encrypted satellite-supported communication in a multinational network for some time now. In 2023, the unit even developed the system further, so it can also be used in a mobile capacity, installed on trucks.*

In January 2024, the Bundeswehr began the test integration of the radios for some of the vehicles, and in September 2024 the Budget Committee released funds for the procurement of 6,000 radios for vehicle-independent, dismounted use as “manpacks” with rucksacks and for use in vehicles. At the end of 2024, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support commissioned the industry to digitalise the command-and-control equipment of the land forces’ vehicle systems. Series integration will therefore begin in mid-2025 and will involve approximately 10,000 Bundeswehr combat and support vehicles. The conversion is expected to be completed by the end of 2030. This is good news, as the digitalisation of land-based operations and the associated conversion of the vehicles are more than urgent to ensure the Army’s combat capability.

Clothing and protective equipment

The uniform clothing worn by the Bundeswehr’s service personnel is their “uniform”. It is an identity-providing and distinctive feature of the troops, which is illustrated, for example, by the successful model of free rail travel in uniform. Fundamentally important for the troops is the protection it offers against possible dangers to life and limb, such as gunfire or NBC effects. The availability of military combat clothing therefore has a direct impact on the Bundeswehr’s operational readiness.

While service personnel have complained for many years about outdated, inadequate or simply not provided equipment, the “turning point” has resulted in a turnaround. In April 2022 the German Bundestag provided an additional EUR 2.35 billion for the Bundeswehr, enabling it to supply its troops with the armed forces combat clothing kit, the MOBAST protective vest system (modular ballistic protection and carrying equipment), the combat helmet (armed forces) and rucksacks more quickly than originally planned. In the year under review, the Federal Government and the Bundestag (parliament) consistently pursued the goal of achieving this **early full resourcing** by the end of 2025. In February 2024, the Budget Committee released a further EUR 2.2 billion for the procurement and regeneration of these items, among other things. The funds will also be used to invest in clothing and personal equipment for special forces and to introduce a new on-board and battle dress for the Navy. The decision to bring forward the full resourcing of the troops from the end of 2031 to the end of 2025, however, also posed challenges for the industry. While the **supply chains** were not yet running smoothly in all areas in 2023, they stabilised perceptibly in the year under review. The respective companies were even able to increase production and delivered the delayed quantities from 2023 and complied with the quantities delivered that had been agreed for 2024.

- *The fact that the 110-litre rucksack system, the first item of the procurements that had been brought forward, has already been delivered in full to the Bundeswehr, and that the delivery of the camouflage covers for the combat helmet (armed forces) has also been completed as planned, is particularly welcome.*

In November 2024, due to the available stocks, the Ministry of Defence was able to set aside the prioritisation measures that had applied until then. All active service personnel can now receive items from the advanced full resourcing, on prior arrangement with the respective responsible service points.

The procurement of 60,000 **headsets with ear defenders** by the end of 2025, which began in the year under review, is significant progress and a big improvement in service personnel's ability to command and perform with uninterrupted communication in combat situations. Further orders are planned for the years ahead. The headset consists of an active ear defender capsule, which can cancel noise and amplify quieter sounds, and a microphone for tactical communication with others. It can connect various radio devices, but can also work without them, which allows military personnel to talk at normal volume levels on firing ranges, for example, without being disturbed by the firing noise. This progress meets long-standing requirements to protect the troops stipulated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

There is good news for service personnel with **hearing loss** caused while on duty. The procedure instructions that came into effect in January 2024 to provide them with ear defenders suitable for each individual promise greater clarity with the application process and smooth procurement processes. The 91 Bundeswehr Technical Centre identified five further ear defender systems in the year under review, which are compatible with the combat helmet (armed forces), and which this category of people can therefore use without restriction. It is thus possible to choose the most suitable model for the specific activity from the various models available.

The Bundeswehr is well on the way to equipping its troops fully and appropriately with combat clothing and personal protective equipment. Digitalisation of the **process for issuing clothing** is also progressing here. A pilot project at the careers centre in Munich provided the first data sets of 750 people measured with body scanners in the year under review – not enough, however, to draw general conclusions for the multitude of sizes and items. The body scanners have therefore been in use at the service point in Germersheim since October 2024, to provide more comprehensive findings.

- *The establishment of a real-world laboratory service point in Troisdorf is a significant step forward. The Bundeswehr plans to test market-available solutions here, followed by tests under real service point conditions in day-to-day operation. The tests will focus in particular on the integration and technical combination of stationary and mobile measuring solutions. Sizes will therefore be determined, sent digitally and custom-made productions will also be derived from them. This applies equally to clothing and footwear. The Bundeswehr Research Institute for Materials, Fuels and Lubricants (WIWeB), whose tasks include the development of a mobile measuring solution, the creation of a data pool and the development of a fitting algorithm, also participates in the project.*

Further challenges for the Bundeswehr include the digitalisation of the service points, with, for example, the introduction of a stock management system and provision of a standardised and user-friendly interface for the IT processes. Finally, the introduction of a digital queue management system and, in the long term, the conversion to the new issue of clothing process are also necessary here.

The multitude of individual measures gives rise to fears that there is still a long way to go before the conclusive introduction of digitally issuing clothing in the Bundeswehr. It would therefore be a good idea to introduce individual, smooth-running components of the digital process for issuing clothing, independently of a well-functioning holistic “whole”.

- *According to the Ministry of Defence, this may apply, for example, to digital foot measuring, which it is currently testing together with a start-up company.*

Even without SAP integration, in other words without assigning the measurement and fitting results directly to the customer account, swift implementation should follow in this case.

The **issuing procedure** chosen for modern clothing and equipment is also a welcome development. Unlike when the combat boot (armed forces) was issued in 2022, the Federal Ministry of Defence has decided in principle to prioritise the equipping of permanent personnel with the new items, while recruits will only receive them after their initial training. This is appropriate and well-founded in view of the skills to be acquired during initial training.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces repeatedly heard examples of service personnel's satisfaction with the modern clothing and personal equipment in face-to-face discussions, and she rarely heard any complaints. Nevertheless, the new equipment is still being tested in practice, and the fact that the Bundeswehr is already working on a further developed MOBAST 2.0 protective vest with an improved design that promises to be lighter and more comfortable, is also welcome news. A trial at the Air Force Force Protection Regiment showed that this system fully meets the needs of the unit's specialist capabilities, such as snipers, service dog handlers, rescue and recovery specialists and air mobile protection teams, for example. This also applies similarly

to further specialist Bundeswehr forces. It is to be hoped that the planned delivery of MOBAST 2.0 at the beginning of 2027 remains on course.

The **MOBAST vest** was nevertheless occasionally criticised by service personnel in the Navy:

- *During a visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to the Sea Battalion in Eckernförde she heard that wearing the MOBAST together with the SECUMAR lifejacket could be life-threatening in the water, as they interfere with each other. According to the Ministry of Defence, the compatibility of both items was not a prerequisite for procurement. A subsequent examination showed that the MOBAST protective vest and the SECUMAR lifejacket can be used together without restriction.*

The Sea Battalion's specialist forces also rated the **combat helmet (armed forces)** as unsuitable:

- *The trial showed that it is not suitable for use on naval vessels and on-board infantry missions due to ergonomic restrictions and safety hazards that cannot be ruled out. The Ministry of Defence has therefore decided to equip the crews of naval rigid-hull inflatable boats with the combat helmet (special forces) in the future, as it is lighter and has better wear properties.*

This is a good decision, and the helmet must now be available quickly to protect the service personnel in question.

Cold-weather and waterproof protection gear is extremely important for the troops, who are regularly exposed to harsh weather conditions. In two cases, the request to return the protective clothing provided and initially received for this purpose caused some annoyance:

- *A member of the 62 Air Transport Squadron complained that he was not able to permanently keep his temporarily provided special cold-weather jacket, which is given to the service personnel of the Special Operations Forces Command (SOFCOM). This is unfortunate, as his squadron has the task, among others, of flying SOFCOM to where they also need this jacket. The Ministry of Defence arranged for the unit to be equipped with the armed forces combat clothing kit in summer 2024, the various items of which provide even better protection against the cold compared with the old 90 field clothing system.*
- *The service personnel of the Medical Corps Academy in Munich were also asked to hand in their cold-weather jackets, as they were not entitled to them according to the authorised allowance of equipment. A chief petty officer pointed out that the academy had the task of training and further training the potential medical service leaders at all times and in all weathers with no set limits. Normal clothing does not provide any real protection at temperatures below -10° Celsius. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support approved the request from the head of the academy staff at the Medical Corps Academy to continue equipping service personnel with this jacket after just two weeks reviewing.*

In both cases, the Bundeswehr responded specifically and expediently to the justified complaints from the troops. In particular, the speed with which the request in the last example went through the approval process and was successful must be positively emphasised here. This is how quickly service personnel would like otherwise dreaded bureaucratic procedures to run.

Exercises in special weather conditions, such as cold weather operations, for example, are also a regular reason to review the authorized allowance of equipment:

- *Alongside the Mountain Infantry Brigade, since 2020 the Sea Battalion has also been taking part in NATO's Nordic Response exercise in Norway, which focuses on combat in Arctic conditions, among other tasks. For the exercise in the year under review, the battalion requested, among other items, ski boots as temporary equipment for the twelve service personnel on the exercise. As the ski boots for the required special sizes and custom-made productions were not available in time, the service personnel could only take part in the preparation to a certain degree and could only participate in the exercise without skiing equipment. Based on these experiences, the German Army Headquarters and the Navy Headquarters have decided, after a general reassessment, to permanently equip the Sea Battalion with the specific additional equipment of the mountain troops, which in addition to ski boots, also includes skis and cold-weather and waterproof protection gear.*

This appears beneficial and logical in view of the special capabilities and mission scenarios of the two different military branches.

The clothing of the Bundeswehr's **music units** is also due for modernisation:

- *Military musicians complained about the sometimes long delivery times and the poor fit of the stage uniform, which dates back to the 1980s. In consultation with the Military Music Center of the Bundeswehr, the Ministry of Defence decided not to issue this uniform in the future. Instead, all members of the military music service will wear the dress uniform that is part of the basic equipment, as soon as it has been modernised. In this respect, 30 volunteers from the Music Service and the Guard Battalion have already had the opportunity to test and evaluate the quality and fit of the new service and dress clothing. Of them, 26 rated it positively and as an improvement. The lighter and more flexible material offers more freedom of movement, and the more modern fit and extended size range are also very welcome.*

The close integration of service personnel is logical and very welcome. Ultimately, their principal task is to represent the Bundeswehr externally at concerts, military tattoos or state visits, for example, which also applies when they appear abroad, as happened in the year under review with the Indo-Pacific Deployment 2024, when the German Navy appeared before international audiences at numerous events. These activities illustrate the importance of a modern and representative service and dress uniform.

The Ministry of Defence had already initiated a project to modernise this type of uniform in 2019 but initially concentrated on equipping the troops with combat clothing following Russia's attack on Ukraine in violation of international law. As this will be completed by the end of 2025, the Ministry raised the issue again and the German Bundestag's Budget Committee approved the corresponding procurement bill in December 2024. Before the resolution was passed, there were critical calls for the money to be invested in military equipment instead of clothing. In response to this, it should be noted that a review of the service and dress wear is long overdue, as the fabric used and the cuts are based on 50-year-old specifications from the 1970s. Many self-employed and part-self-employed accoutrement providers have gotten around this by purchasing service and dress uniforms made of a better fabric with customised cuts. This will no longer be possible when the clothing sales store is removed at the end of 2027, as all service personnel will then receive the officially provided service and dress clothing. The fact that it will then be a modernised and up-to-date uniform is of course very welcome.

The Navy's **on-board and battle dress** is also the subject of a review:

- *Some of those at the Mürwik Naval School in Flensburg criticised its quality. The Ministry of Defence also believes that the uniform, which dates to the early 1990s, is partially outdated and technically obsolete in its entirety. Individual items are not compatible with other items of clothing that have been introduced in the meantime. Up-to-date clothing standards must therefore be compiled for the on-board and battle dress. The new items will be available in 2025.*

This project also illustrates that the Ministry is continuously working on improving the various Bundeswehr uniforms. One positive aspect of the modernisation is that the Navy is now pursuing a holistic approach with comprehensive compatibility for the clothing system for on-board duty, which did not previously exist.

The importance of the **uniform** was not instilled with everyone in the year under review, as an officer candidate's petition showed:

- *He had no understanding for the fact that the management of the student section of the Bundeswehr University in Munich prohibited the wearing of privately purchased clothing together with uniform items. The Ministry of Defence reminded accordingly that uniforms must always be worn on duty and that disciplinary superiors order the respective uniform.*

There is nothing to add to the Ministry's reference to the current regulatory situation. In the past, service personnel wore privately purchased clothing out of necessity, but those days are over. It is therefore logical to insist all the more on the uniform regulations.

The daily influx of items of clothing and equipment and their management, however, pose challenges for the Bundeswehr. The issuing of items from the advanced full resourcing programme to the troops, for example, has pushed the **service points** at individual locations to their capacity limits:

- *After completing his initial training and being transferred to the 232 Mountain Infantry Battalion in Bischofswiesen, an enlisted soldier complained that he had tried several times over the past three months to obtain items specifically intended for the mountain infantry, without success. According to the Ministry of Defence, the service point in Bad Reichenhall, which is responsible for more than 2,500 service personnel, had to close again and again to be able to carry out the extensive issuing of clothing for initial training, training courses and exercises, as well as the changeover to the items of the advanced full resourcing. This*

was remedied by extending the opening hours and setting up a temporary issuing point at the Bischofswiesen base.

In future, modern technology will provide the required support. The Bundeswehr is currently working on the prototype of a digitalised service point, where the service personnel are only measured, and later receive the required items by post. The basis for this is already in place with a rented state-of-the-art warehouse in Magdeburg. To continue the professionalisation of the logistics processes, a further warehouse is being built in Walsrode, which will begin operations at the end of 2025.

There is still much need for additional and lockable **lockers and closets** for clothing and equipment, as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces regularly heard during troop visits. Even though the provision of additional furniture, such as the modified bed box for housing MOBAST equipment, is generally proceeding as planned, according to the Ministry of Defence, some facilities do not have the necessary space. It is important that those involved work out individual solutions quickly. The Bundeswehr could, for example, refurbish attics that are no longer in use in the barracks, because the positive response to the new equipment must not be lost by the appearance of further storage problems.

7. Infrastructure

Accommodation for servicewomen and men

In the case of many servicewomen and men, their actual place of residence and where they are posted to are separate places, which can cause considerable problems. Apart from the mental and physical strain caused by long train or car journeys at the weekend or even every day, commuting generally entails significant financial costs. The accommodation where they are posted is a key factor here.

Servicewomen and men up to the age of 25 are generally obliged to live in communal accommodation, whereby they are entitled to operational housing. The situation is different for those over 25, or the servicewomen and men not obliged to live in official accommodation – known as **NIUKS** in Germany. These can only be allocated living quarters if the required space is actually free, and the question of on-site accommodation is therefore often a considerable challenge for them, as illustrated during numerous troop visits:

- *In Dornstadt, servicewomen and men of the 3 Medical Regiment complained about the insufficient capacity to provide everybody with a communal accommodation space or a locker. This in particular applies to NIUKS and temporary needs, such as pending transfers or night exercises, for example. Rents in the surrounding area are very high and some servicewomen and men live in hotels out of necessity.*
- *Crew members- with Flotilla 1 in Kiel also described the accommodation situation as especially difficult. At the Sea Battalion, some of them shared a room with four people in it, and, apart from the lack of space, they were fine with it. Many fear moving out when they are 25, as housing for less than EUR 1,000 is hard to find in the popular holiday region. Seafarers -faced similar problems. Some slept in their cars or with others in a single room during the week. Unlike in Wilhelmshaven or Rostock, there is hardly any shared accommodation for service personnel.*
- *The NCOs of the 64 Helicopter Wing described Holzdorf/Schönewalde as a typical commuter location. Many live in a second home, which they can only afford if they receive the separation allowance. There are not enough accommodation options for all other NIUKS.*
- *The barracks commander of the Kyffhäuser barracks in Bad Frankenhausen commented that NIUKS have to move to civilian accommodation because of the increase in personnel, which causes considerable annoyance.*
- *At the Cham base, the commander of the 12 Armoured Brigade reported that there is not enough accommodation for NIUKS or for those who need official accommodation due to special circumstances. The comparison of the usual local rent and the cost of accommodation in the barracks was clear. While the cost of a NIUKS room is approximately EUR 100 per month, on average servicewomen and men would have to pay about EUR 420 per month in rent for a commuter-friendly two-room apartment in Cham.*
- *In Strausberg, the residents of a Bundeswehr residential building with 277 individual accommodation units will have to move out in the second half of 2025 due to an upcoming renovation. According to the Federal*

Ministry of Defence, this applies to approximately 80 percent of NIUKS. There are no other accommodation capacities. Servicewomen and men with no separation allowance entitlements would no doubt find it difficult to find affordable accommodation on the distressed housing market in and around Berlin.

In this context, the troops, especially those in the Army, repeatedly criticised the **single-occupancy rooms concept**:

- *At the 12 Armoured Brigade in Cham, the current construction standard with single rooms does not meet the requirements for national and alliance defence. Communal accommodation for the small combat unit would make more sense.*
- *Members of the 23 Mountain Infantry Brigade in Bad Reichenhall also said the single-occupancy rooms concept was detrimental to the cohesion of a combat company.*
- *In Burg, it was pointed out that the new accommodation building for the 171 Logistic Battalion with single rooms only provides space for 100 servicewomen and men, compared to 400 in the old buildings.*
- *According to the barracks commander of the Grenzland barracks in Oberviechtach, the facility has 216 rooms, of which 131 are single rooms and 85 are two-person rooms, with a total of 301 beds. By making the single accommodation concept more flexible or getting rid of it, he could provide up to 464 beds in a fairly easy and largely cost-neutral way. He emphasised that armoured infantry personnel are used to being together in very confined spaces, for days on end, with nine people on the PUMA infantry fighting vehicle, for example. For those over 25 years old, it would be much more attractive to have a bed in the barracks instead of having to pay EUR 500 in rent outside the barracks.*

The employer's **overall care responsibility** must also be taken into account in this context:

- *A soldier from the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion in Oberviechtach explained that daily armoured infantry duties regularly include demanding action duty and night training from time to time. He believes it is irresponsible to oblige fellow soldiers to commute very long distances after finishing duty.*

The troops are generally pragmatic and often willing to close ranks even more. The proposal to reintroduce **bunk beds** and more of them to quickly and cost-effectively increase accommodation capacity must certainly be considered.

The Bundeswehr should take the accommodation problem seriously and reconsider the rule that, from the age of 25 onwards, servicewomen and men may only live in the barracks when capacity is free. For many, the housing situation is closely connected with the attractiveness of the service. As is regularly heard during troop visits, the difficulties in finding accommodation and additional financial burdens cause too many servicewomen and men to decide not to continue and leave the Bundeswehr at the end of their service period. Many of those who do not receive a separation allowance simply cannot afford to stay in the Bundeswehr because of the commuting costs.

Facility condition and project duration

A characteristic feature of the armed forces is their presence throughout the country. The Bundeswehr's sites and facilities are situated on some 1,500 properties spread across Germany, which together are roughly the size of the German state of Saarland. The total usable area of the approximately 35,000 buildings with around 900,000 rooms is 27 km², in other words, the size of Frankfurt Airport, more or less. The 1,000 plus employees of the Infrastructure Department in the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Infrastructure, Environmental Protection and Services, which also includes the construction management competence centres, are responsible for the management of federal real property. The considerable volume of the Bundeswehr's infrastructure alone illustrates the challenges posed by this task. Additionally, the Bundeswehr must also integrate other authorities, such as the Institute for Federal Real Estate and the federal state building authorities, into the processes with many construction projects and building maintenance work.

These and other factors, such as inadequate funding, insufficient personnel and the capacity utilisation of the construction industry, have resulted in many barracks in Germany being in a deplorable state. The **Südpfalz barracks** in Gernersheim was an especially negative example in the year under review:

- *The poor condition of numerous buildings was evident during a troop visit in spring 2024, especially the teaching and accommodation buildings. Mould in rooms and sanitary facilities, water damage and plaster peeling off the walls were everywhere. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was told there were numerous planned infrastructure projects, ranging from the construction of new accommodation buildings to the renovation of the base's firing range and material and munition storage facilities. Altogether, the infrastructure requirements will cost more than EUR 125 million. The individual measures are processed according to a list of priorities. The original schedule, however, does not include any construction projects, and all measures are in fact not expected to be completed until the 2030s. The first prioritised construction project, an armoury, has been awaiting construction start since 2017. Instead of the originally announced completion in July 2018, it is now not expected until 2027. According to the Ministry of Defence, the federal state building authorities had also determined, during the planned renovation of two accommodation and company buildings, that a new building would be more economical, which is why the project has likewise been delayed. The construction of a new utility building has also been significantly delayed, whereby the interim solution planned for the construction period will be available in 2028. The new construction of the significantly outdated training facility base camp access (main gate), which is extremely important for the air force training battalion based in the barracks, will not happen until 2026 and 2027. It is not possible to accelerate these projects due to the personnel capacity problems of the federal state building authorities and the higher prioritised renovation measures. The completed new building of the medical centre had already been ready for use for over two years in the year under review. The reason for the enormous delay was the seriously deficient designs of the dry construction company, which were only rectified by a new company following legal proceedings. The handover was postponed again at the end of the year under review due to a serious defect with the heating system and is now expected in May 2025. The fact that there is no Wi-Fi in the 2nd company's building is therefore only a secondary issue. The Ministry of Defence announced a prompt solution provided by an external operator, but this did not happen in the year under review. It summed up by saying that the capacities of the Rhineland-Palatinate federal state building authorities were limited in their human resources, and they also prioritise the deployment of staff according to priority setting. This could, for example, be the implementation of the F-35A weapons system at the Büchel site or the reactivation of the Kriegsfeld munition depot. On the whole, however, they see no way to accelerate the construction projects in Germersheim.*

The high number of dilapidated buildings, their desperate need of modernization and the fact that there has been no significant improvement for years now, once again substantially emphasises the poor infrastructure situation in Germersheim compared to other locations. As all Air Force recruits basically have their first contact and encounter with the Bundeswehr here, high drop-out rates due to such conditions are especially unsurprising. The fact that those responsible say the precarious infrastructural situation in Germersheim is urgent due to the intervention of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and have revised the prioritisation of the various measures, is of course a welcome development. The accommodation-relevant projects are now the top priority, followed by the MWR food service area. For the future, it is important to strengthen the communication of those involved at all levels and to remain in constant contact. This enables the prevention of misunderstandings that can cause construction delays and the discussion of solutions that can be implemented as pragmatically as possible. One ray of hope here was the news from the Ministry of Defence that it had recruited a trained civil engineer as a reservist for the site, and thus an expert to accompany the construction projects on behalf of the Bundeswehr.

This example also illustrates the importance of the personnel tasked with infrastructure work at all levels. It is therefore crucial that the construction management competence centres have adequate staffing, both military and civilian, and can offer attractive framework conditions, as due to the long implementation times of infrastructure projects, the longer availability of the personnel responsible for them is also a major benefit. Competent contacts in the military facilities are indeed equally important. However, if the barracks commanders responsible for this and their support personnel can only perform their duties in a secondary role, this often leads to a noticeably high workload, as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces repeatedly hears on troop visits. It would therefore be beneficial to create more full-time posts for infrastructure staff, which would also be much more attractive for qualified specialists.

An ailing infrastructure is often caused by **installation closures** that were decided in the past and later revised:

- *The poor condition of a large number of buildings became apparent during a visit to the troops in the Strausberg Barnim barracks. The Ministry of Defence confirmed that it had not made any significant*

investments between 2013 and 2019, because the facility was not going to be used after 2020. This only changed with the decision in 2019 to station the CBRN defence regiment I there. As a result, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Infrastructure, Environmental Protection and Services immediately introduced a procedure to create 240 accommodation places.

This construction project was originally only due to start after 2030. The fact that the Ministry has agreed to review it as part of the Bundeswehr's accommodation construction programme is very welcome.

The **operator-user model**, which is ubiquitous in the Bundeswehr, was criticised in the year under review. While the respective Bundeswehr service centre is responsible for the operation of the building, the buildings' users have hardly any influence on how to have identified defects quickly removed:

- *When the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited the Bundeswehr University in Hamburg, the sports hall had already been closed for over six months due to mould infestation. Its removal was delayed due to a shortage of personnel and the need to commission an external company. According to the management on site, a fitness container set up as a replacement could hardly be used due to insufficient lighting options. There is no prospect of a remedy by the responsible Bundeswehr service centre due to personnel work overload. The university itself, however, may not install the lighting, although it has a workshop facility with 200 people, who are also qualified to rectify such defects.*

This lack of flexibility with damage repair is incomprehensible. There should be more possibilities to take the initiative in such cases.

Unfortunately, little has changed with the long timescales for the completion of **construction projects**.

- *In summer 2021, Germany and Norway agreed to procure identical submarines as a joint project. In order to be able to accommodate the appropriate simulator for training servicewomen and men, the 1st Submarine Squadron in Eckernförde requires a new building. While, at the beginning of 2023, the Ministry still expected completion by August 2028, it updated this in the year under review to 2031. Due to the planned delivery of the first submarine in 2032, having the training facility available in good time is absolutely urgent.*
- *In March 2022, bacterial contamination of the drinking water pipes in two buildings of the Schäfer barracks in Bückeburg meant the sanitary facilities had to be closed. While the Ministry of Defence announced that renovation of one building would be completed by the end of 2024, work on the other would continue until at least 2027. Due the limited capacities of the Lower Saxony federal state building authorities, the prioritised implementation of higher-priority construction work and the observance of and compliance with the legal situation, no further acceleration is foreseeable.*
- *Defective hall doors in the Falckenstein barracks in Koblenz in the past were the cause of serious injuries, such as the loss of fingertips. Replacement of the doors, which has been requested since 2017, still did not happen in the year under review and is now scheduled to begin in 2025.*
- *The planned construction of a new fire station at the Celle Army Airfield was postponed from February 2023 to November 2025. The Bundeswehr therefore does not expect the project to be completed until April 2028.*
- *Following the construction of two accommodation buildings, each with 100 accommodation units, in the Lucius D. Clay barracks in Osterholz-Scharmbeck, some 180 deficiency items at first prevented acceptance of the buildings. Although the handover went ahead in April 2023, 14 items were still unresolved in July 2024, which the building authority and the Bundeswehr service centre were able to resolve while the buildings were up and running. The internal IT- training network, which was particularly important for the training missions of the Bundeswehr Logistics School stationed there and had not been available until then, was finally available in September 2024.*

On a positive note, the close monitoring of the repair progress paid off and prevented further delays in commissioning the buildings.

- *The Institute for Federal Real Estate's project to build 3,000 new housing units for federal employees entitled to housing assistance, which may also include servicewomen and men with the exception of those doing voluntary military service and reservist service, on the other hand, is progressing slowly. The Institute fell well short of its target to complete this by the end of 2024. By the end of March 2024, it had completed just 300 new build units. The project is now scheduled for completion by the end of 2026.*

Initial responsibility for infrastructure issues in a facility lies with the barracks commanders- and the support personnel assigned to them. They regularly perform their duties as a **secondary assignment**, although there are exceptions to this that should be seen as positive:

- *The Navy's Special Operations Forces Command, for example, has a person responsible for infrastructure on a full-time basis with the rank of an officer, who had previously completed their training as a civil engineer at the Pionierschule in Ingolstadt.*

Examples such as this should be a matter of course for the Bundeswehr. The expertise of such military specialist service officers, who are certified civil engineers, can help to provide specific support for specific requirements of the respective service or the respective unit with the appropriate specialist knowledge. Finally, the infrastructural challenges facing the armed forces generally require a significant increase in the personnel responsible for this.

The poor structural condition of the **mess halls** at some sites is often due to years of only rudimentary investment. Necessary new buildings are often a long time coming, which makes the situation even more difficult:

- *The refurbishment of the mess hall in the Blücher barracks in Berlin-Kladow is a never-ending story. The construction project agreed in 2009 was originally due to be completed in the year under review, however it had not even begun. The responsible district authority has already extended the special approval that has long been required for continued operation "for the last time" several times, most recently until September 2025. The provision of the MWR food service in a modular building, which was then planned for a few years on an interim basis, but which is not due to be handed over until September or October 2025, will hopefully bring about a significant improvement. The new utility building is due to be completed at the end of 2029.*

The Bundeswehr is now being urged to adhere to the specified time frames and to prevent further delays.

Maintaining and increasing physical fitness is essential for servicewomen and men's operational readiness. A sufficient number of **sports facilities** must therefore be provided for training. If these are temporarily unusable, the Bundeswehr must be able to fall back on quickly available interim solutions.

- *The release for use of the diver training hall for combat swimmers at the Eckernförde naval base in April 2024 was long overdue. This finally brought to an end an odyssey that had begun in 2011 with simple renovation work.*
- *One officer complained about the inadequate provision of service sports facilities at the Rittersturz barracks in Lahnstein. The weights and fitness room here was initially closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will remain closed until further notice due to water damage. According to the Ministry of Defence, a military fitness training system as a container set-up will be installed as a replacement, with delivery scheduled for 2025. The Bundeswehr had also already begun the addition of a weights and fitness room to the existing sports hall in 2019. Due to the excessive personnel work overload of the responsible Rhineland-Palatinate state office for property and construction management, implementation of this measure is not expected before 2032.*

The fact that the Bundeswehr has concluded a framework agreement for the delivery of such fitness containers is to be welcomed. These should quickly provide a good bridging solution for short-term closures of sports facilities in the future.

The **building authorities** of the federal states, which are essentially responsible for the implementation of Bundeswehr construction projects, are often considerably overloaded. Unfortunately, statements by the Ministry of Defence, such as, "experience shows that the implementation of a construction project will not be possible in the coming decades at the earliest", therefore are not surprising. The following examples also illustrate this:

- *The musicians of the Naval Band in Wilhelmshaven complained about the lack of a goods lift in a building in the Ebkeriege barracks during a visit to the troops by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. With a lift, they would be able to move the instrument transport boxes, some of which are as tall as a person, from the rehearsal room on the first floor to the ground floor for performances. The Ministry of Defence sees no realistic possibility of providing capacity for new construction projects due to the continuing considerable work overload at the Lower Saxony building authority.*

- *Due to the construction of two new buildings on previous car park areas, the Heppenser Groden naval base lacks around 1,500 parking spaces, as servicewomen and men from the Naval Operations School, Wilhelmshaven branch, complained to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. According to the statement by the Federal Ministry of Defence, a solution is already foreseeable for 600 spaces. However, a development concept is still pending for the remaining 900 spaces, which the Bundeswehr already commissioned with the Lower Saxony federal state building authorities in June 2021. Its completion is not foreseeable in the medium term due to the continuing personnel work overload.*

The Army Officer School in Dresden illustrated that another option is also possible:

- *Storm water damage required the closure of the large sports hall in June 2023 and the replacement of the hall floor. In close and very pragmatic cooperation with the Bundeswehr service centre and the Institute for Federal Real Estate, the school managed to ensure the construction of a mobile sports hall in April 2024 with a shortened tendering process and only adhering to the respective minimum times. At the same time, the Saxony building authority commissioned a construction company for the renovation, with the result that the troops have been able to use the hall again since September 2024.*

The digitalisation of the **major training areas** and the further development of these areas in Bergen and Munster into a competence cluster for training and exercises gained momentum in the year under review. The projects are extremely complex, which is reflected most clearly in the number of people involved. In Munster and Bergen, the project management, armaments and infrastructure departments in the Ministry of Defence and the Lower Saxony State Office for Construction and Real Estate are involved in the further development of the training grounds and firing ranges. The ministerial working group for the further development of training grounds and firing ranges was added in 2023. Its main focus was primarily on synchronising the activities of all parties involved, which now appears to have been successful, as the Ministry has set a schedule for the construction periods. Firing range 3 will be completed by June 2028, followed by the multi-purpose and evaluation building a year later.

- *Other digitalisation measures relate, for example, to shooting safety, which the Bundeswehr is currently investigating in a non-technical study, and the initiative to procure a control and monitoring centre recording system. Virtual tours have also been set up at various military training grounds, in Bergen, Munster and Baumholder, for example, which also enable virtual initial terrain reconnaissance, at Bundeswehr service schools, for instance.*

Another very welcome development is the digitalisation of the **Schnögersburg military training town** at the Army's Combat Manoeuvre Training Centre in Gardelegen. The provision of digital evaluation systems now ensures realistic training activity. The Ministry no longer sees any digitalisation deficiencies here, however the issue of the continued operation of the combat training centre makes the service personnel in Gardelegen uncertain. The Bundeswehr has been operating the Army's Combat Manoeuvre Training Centre with an industrial contractor for more than two decades now. The centre will be transferred to state control in February 2026. The suggestion to go "back to the troops" is essentially to be welcomed, however a swift decision must be made to avoid uncertainties. Above all, it is crucial that the activities be maintained at the current high level of quality.

Furthermore, outfitting the facilities, for example, with the necessary **furniture and equipment**, is a criterion that is not to be underestimated for a location's attractiveness:

- *A serviceman at the Hachenberg barracks in Erndtebrück complained that there were not enough electrical cooking appliances in the kitchenettes of a newly constructed accommodation building. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Infrastructure, Environmental Protection and Services confirmed that this had not been planned at the time the construction contract was awarded and arranged for it to be retrofitted with water boilers, microwaves and induction hobs.*
- *During a visit to the troops by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in November 2023, servicewomen and men criticised the clearly outdated equipment of some of the rooms at the Naval Operations School in Bremerhaven. In some cases, there are only sofa beds instead of beds, which are often old, saggy and uncomfortable with up to 18 months of use. The inspection revealed that the sofa beds had been in use for more than 20 years. The step-by-step replacement of this furniture that was ordered subsequently will, however, continue into the spring of 2025.*

- *Smoke and loud crackling from a socket in her accommodation in the Hanseatic Barracks startled a servicewoman at the Bundeswehr University Hamburg. According to her petition, the fuse tripping prevented further damage. The Ministry of Defence's statement said this was caused by a faulty installation in the fuse box, which had been in operation since 2016. The inspection of the facility, which is actually required every four years, was not carried out because the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of the accommodation in 2020. Only after a new invitation to tender was it possible to carry out the required inspections successively from mid-2023.*

As the incident showed, this response was clearly too late, especially as the poor overall structural condition of the property and the age of the electrical systems would have required a complete inspection that went beyond the otherwise prescribed level of inspection. In the sensitive area of electrical engineering in particular, the Bundeswehr is also obliged to comply with the stipulated safety regulations.

The connection of barracks to **public transport systems** is also an attractiveness feature and important with regard to climate and environmental protection. This in particular applies to large Bundeswehr locations:

- *As a triangle in the Heide region of southern Lower Saxony with several thousand service personnel, the Bergen, Faßberg and Munster locations form one of the Bundeswehr's high population density areas. While those in Munster, the largest Army base in terms of numbers and the fourth largest in the Bundeswehr, benefit from the Soltau-Uelzen railway line, there is no longer any passenger transport on the remaining railway lines in Bergen and Faßberg.*

It would therefore make sense to reactivate these lines to provide the troops with good connections and environmentally friendly commuting.

- *Servicewomen and men of the Navy's Special Operations Forces Command in Eckernförde pointed out during a troop visit that there were no public transport connections close to the base. This is especially disadvantageous for those who do not have their own vehicle or commute by train.*
- *The Hardheim site is also very poorly connected without a car, as the Deputy Commander of the 363 Tank Battalion pointed out during a visit to the troops. There are therefore plans to set up a commuter bus. A possible expansion of the local transport system is, however, proving difficult.*
- *In Oberviechtach members of the 122 Armoured Infantry Battalion also expressed their desire for a bus connection between the barracks and the local train station.*

The fact that the mayor assured the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in a meeting in person that he would work to see this happen was very welcome.

Improvement measures by the federal and state governments

For some time now, those responsible in the Federal Ministry of Defence and in its respective subordinate area have been taking the long-standing complaints about the at times defective condition of the barracks and accommodation a good deal more seriously and are highly committed to developing strategies to rectify this situation. The fact that the Federal Minister of Defence has personally taken up the issue is especially encouraging. The first specialist conference on infrastructure was held in February 2024 on his initiative, at which representatives of the federal and state governments at the ministerial and state secretary level exchanged views on options for action in the area of infrastructure. The basis here was provided by the "Action plan for the accelerated provision of the necessary infrastructure for the Bundeswehr at the turning point", developed beforehand by the Ministry of Defence.

The basic aim of this plan is to speed up the completion of Bundeswehr construction projects. Among other elements, it provides for the increased use of general contractors, the promotion of standardisation and cross-state bundling of construction tasks as well as relief for the federal state building authorities by transferring sub-projects to the Ministry of Defence's area of competence. Similarly, the **Institute for Federal Real Estate** or other federal authorities will also increase their project work. Another proposal is the combined procurement of armaments and infrastructure, whereby defence companies will supply both military equipment and the armaments-specific infrastructure. The action plan is an important sign that the completion of military construction projects is being driven forward by the cooperation of experts at the federal and state level. In this context, the fact that the

Bundeswehr universities in Hamburg and Munich now offer study places for civil engineering, which the Bundeswehr makes available to the federal states for their recruitment of young talent in the construction industry, is also a positive development.

The federal and state governments set up a project group to work out the details, which presented its findings at the second specialist conference in September 2024. It had agreed on 38 specific measures to further accelerate and streamline military construction projects. This includes, among other things, raising the maximum value limits for a direct invitation to tender for contracts or an invitation to tender without competitive bidding. There will also be a central information platform for cross-state coordination. If a building authority does not have sufficient capacities, another federal state could assume responsibility, for example.

The more intensive exchange between the Federal Ministry of Defence and the federal states in the year under review is to be welcomed in every respect. It improves understanding of the respective difficulties and challenges and enables immediate consideration of realistic potential solutions. Some federal states, in particular **Bavaria**, have taken additional measures to support the armed forces:

- *In July 2024, the Bavarian State Parliament passed the Law on the Promotion of the Bundeswehr in Bavaria. Among other things, the law includes building law simplifications. According to it, from now on Bundeswehr construction projects within its properties will not require certain procedures. It can therefore build without planning permission, and prior inspection by the building supervisory authority will not be necessary. The state thus leaves it to the Federal Government as the client to plan its projects in accordance with the regulations. The Bundeswehr will also no longer have to comply with local building regulations within the barracks in future, and military use and national and alliance defence projects will take precedence over listed buildings under preservation order.*

The law supports the Bavarian military construction task force, which the Free State of Bavaria set up in 2022 to accelerate Bundeswehr construction projects. With the “Future of Federal Construction NRW” project, North Rhine-Westphalia is also pursuing the goal of planning and building federal construction projects more efficiently and more specifically with flat hierarchies and a clear distribution of roles. It would also be welcome if all state governments would compile comparable regulations. It might also be advisable to examine the possibilities for legislative adjustments at the federal level.

Large-scale projects for important defence plans are always a challenge for the Bundeswehr and the federal states concerned and require enormous effort to complete the necessary infrastructure on time.

- *One example here is the upgrading of the Holzdorf airfield at the Schönewalde site for the Boeing CH-47F CHINOOK heavy transport helicopter and the ARROW territorial missile defence weapon system. The two affected federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt have also set up task forces to ensure close cooperation between all parties involved, and thus the timely provision of the structural and municipal infrastructure.*

The site is therefore one of the fast-track projects, which also include the upgrading of the Büchel airfield for the F-35A aircraft system and the Nordholz naval airbase for the P-8A POSEIDON long-range maritime patrol aircraft. Due to their importance for operational readiness, the Bundeswehr is prioritising these projects and pressing ahead with their implementation.

At the federal level, the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building had already implemented a measure in October 2022 with the revision of the guidelines for the implementation of federal construction tasks (**RBBau**), which is also beneficial:

- *According to the Ministry of Defence, the newly introduced option of taking procedural steps simultaneously offers added time value. The reduction in testing offices and responsible parties also has an accelerating effect. Despite initial uncertainty and an increased need for coordination, both across ministries and within the Bundeswehr, there are clear signs that the new RBBau and the application of the designs issued for it have accelerated the implementation of infrastructure projects.*

All parties involved in the process should utilise the room for manoeuvre introduced by the changes. The Federal Ministry of Finance in particular can be called upon to swiftly review and approve Bundeswehr projects.

On the whole, the measures taken at all levels continue to show positive effects. In the past, the Bundeswehr realised significantly less than EUR 1 billion per year for larger construction projects in the area of capital construction. In the year under review, it increased this amount to approximately EUR 1.6 billion, which is another

significant increase on the previous year (2023: EUR 1.25 billion). The total investment requirement in the area of infrastructure, however, still ran to approximately EUR 67 billion at the end of 2024. EUR 24 billion of this are for the construction work requirement that has accumulated in the past to maintain and renovate accommodation, properties and depots. A further EUR 25 billion are required for the energy-efficient refurbishment of Bundeswehr buildings and to hit the German Government's climate protection targets. Finally, approximately EUR 18 billion are required for projects that have been added as part of the “turning point”.

As hopeful as it might be that there has been much movement in the modernisation of military properties, the challenges remain immense. In the long term, the scope of all planned projects exceeds the capacities of the federal and state building authorities by a factor of three on average. The operational readiness of the armed forces and the operational security of military installations and facilities must therefore be prioritised. This applies in particular to the aforementioned CH-47F CHINOOK, ARROW and P-8A POSEIDON fast-track projects, which have been prioritised due to their high military and political importance, are making good progress and are on schedule.

The troops, however, must endure painful adjustments if infrastructure projects have to take a back seat in favour of others, and are not delivered on time. It is therefore crucial that all parties involved continue to work on accelerating and improving the respective infrastructure procedures and processes.

8. Personnel

The Ministry of Defence has long since pursued the goal of increasing personnel strength to approximately 203,000 active servicewomen and men by 2031. At the same time, more personnel resources are required due to commitments made to NATO as part of the new NATO capability goals, and to implement the Operational Plan Germany. According to the Ministry of Defence, this all requires a continuous re-evaluation of the military target strength. In view of the Bundeswehr's largely unsuccessful efforts in recent years to ensure a substantial increase in personnel, a comprehensive and joint effort is required to achieve the necessary total strength. Sufficient and fully operational personnel are the key to defence capability.

Personnel situation

After military personnel strength continued to fall in 2023, the Bundeswehr significantly intensified its endeavours to recruit and retain personnel in the year under review. The focus here was primarily on the December 2023 findings report of the Personnel Task Force set up in August 2023. Its goal was to identify immediately implementable and effective measures to reverse the negative trend in the number of military personnel by 2024 and to achieve a moderate increase in personnel at the end of a twelve-month period. From some 200 proposals for improving personnel recruitment and retention, 64 measures were selected and implemented in the year under review.

The fact that both personnel recruitment and personnel retention have developed positively over the course of 2024 is also encouraging. The Ministry of Defence largely attributes these first successes to the measures of the **Personnel Task Force**. Whether or not these developments will result in an actual medium-term increase in personnel strength remains to be seen. In any case, the negative trend of recent years was finally at least halted at the end of the year under review, and personnel strength was kept just below the previous year's level, after the number of personnel had fallen to 179,317 servicewomen and men in September 2024, in other words, to the lowest level since 2018. At the end of the year under review, the military personnel strength figure was 181,174 active servicewomen and men, of which 57,813 were career soldiers, 113,019 were temporary-career volunteers and 10,342 were military service volunteers. This was practically the same as the previous year (2023: 181,514). Of 121,930 military posts in the NCO and officer categories, 24,258 posts were not filled. This is 19.9 percent of these posts (2023: 17.6 percent). Taking into account those service personnel who perform their duties outside of posts in what are known as “non-established posts”, the proportion of unfilled posts is reduced to 16.6 percent. Of the 45,555 military posts in the enlisted personnel category, 12,654, or around 27.8 percent, were unfilled. Including those who perform voluntary military service, however, who are regularly deployed outside of service posts, the filling level for enlisted personnel is over 95.8 percent.

Furthermore, the armed forces are also getting older and older. The **average age** of those in the military has risen steadily in recent years, increasing from 33.1 years in 2021 to 33.8 years in 2023 and 34 years in the year under

review. In addition to demographic change, this development is also due to the increasing percentage of career soldiers. While this was 30.1 percent in 2021, it increased to 31.9 percent in the year under review. Career soldiers and temporary-career volunteers were 34.8 years old on average in the year under review (2023: 34.6) and those doing voluntary military service were 20.2 years old (2023: 20.2).

The fact that there were also speciality and assignment series that were fully filled in this year under review is encouraging. For example, the information transmission, long-haul communication, air defence missile service for sergeants and petty officers and flying branch (unmanned aircraft and naval aviation operations duty) and flight safety for officers speciality and assignment series were fully filled.

Otherwise, however, there were still considerable shortages of personnel in many areas. For example, there were vacancies of more than 40 percent in the enlisted personnel career bracket in the canon artillery or electrical engineering careers. In the junior NCOs career bracket, vacancies of more than 40 percent affected the careers of special engineers, electrical engineering or CBRN- defence, for example, while in the senior NCOs career bracket, the careers of building trade engineers or electronics were affected. The shortage of skilled workers was especially evident here.

The number of **pilots** in the Bundeswehr has increased slightly across the board in recent years, taking the personnel currently in training into account. Nevertheless, the personnel situation remains stressed, with almost 390 vacant posts, which is an occupancy rate of just 79 percent (approximately).

The number of jet pilots at least remained stable. The Bundeswehr has also taken measures to ensure a long-term reduction in the waiting times for this training. This includes increasing the number of training places in the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Programme (ENJJPT) from 2026, utilising additional training places with friendly nations, and examining civilian-military cooperation from 2027 to 2029.

The slightly positive trend in the occupancy rate with Air Force helicopter pilots continued to stabilise. A further increase is also expected in the area of pilots and in the “Remotely Piloted Aircraft” career path, if the personnel currently in training can be deployed.

The inadequate personnel recruitment in recent years continued to have an impact on the Army aviation branch. Specific measures, however, such as extending the service period and recruiting a comparatively high number of career soldiers, for example, helped to ease the personnel situation. On the whole at least, the number of helicopter pilots in the Army remained stable.

Personnel coverage among naval pilots also remained very unsatisfactory. To make matters worse, weapons system training for the available helicopter pilots was not guaranteed in the year under review, due to a lack of flying hours availability for the NH-90 NTH weapons system. The introduction of the new P-8A POSEIDON and NH-90 MRFH weapons systems and the training and re-training required for them further exacerbated this situation. The measures taken since 2019 to recruit and retain personnel, the recruitment of lateral entrants and extending the length of service had an impact, but on the whole only resulted in a slight improvement.

The personnel situation in the **Navy** remains strained. Of the 14,600 military posts, 11,520 were filled at the end of December 2024, which is a vacancy rate of approximately 21 percent. In the year under review, 928 junior NCOs -were required, which is approximately 30 percent of this career bracket. In particular, there was a vacancy of 352 servicewomen and men, or approximately 48 percent, in the Navy Command Service. There was a shortfall of 76 officers (approximately 36 percent) in the Naval Aviation Service and 109 officers (approximately 19 percent) in the Maritime Operations Service.

With the crew members of the frigates, the vacancy rate is 27 percent. The highest vacancies are with the junior NCOs – weapons delivery (approximately 54 percent), enlisted personnel – electrical engineering (67 percent) and enlisted personnel – catering service (63 percent) assignment series.

In the period under review, the **rotational crew model** was also temporarily suspended in preparation for a multidimensional engagement. To increase the combat value and operational readiness, an increase in the number of crew members and their essential bond with the ships was determined.

The measures implemented by the Personnel Task Force in the year under review include the institutionalisation of monthly recruitment, the expansion of internship opportunities and the revision of the requirements for fitness for on-board duty with regard to military requirements. The revision of crew structures and the further concentration of assignment series also continued.

However, the wish expressed by the Navy in 2023 to reintroduce the rank of non-commissioned officer in operational service into the armed forces was not pursued further in agreement with the military organisational

components. This is because tasks and activities in such a post, which does not require a level of expertise equivalent to a professional qualification, can also be performed by an enlisted personnel grade trained in the post without time-consuming and cost-intensive career training. The posts, which hold original military command responsibility and were assigned to sergeants or petty officers in operational service, should continue to be performed with this higher career path.

Article 87b of the Basic Law stipulates that the Bundeswehr administration shall be run as a federal (civilian) administration with its own administrative substructure. The historical legislators pursued two objectives here: To relieve the armed forces of administrative tasks and to prevent power concentration in the military. The aptly-named **separation rule** demands a separation of the Bundeswehr administration and the armed forces for organisational, functional and personnel purposes. Essentially, service personnel are to be deployed in the armed forces and the administration is to be entrusted to civilian authorities. However, a razor-sharp dividing line between the civilian Bundeswehr administration and the armed forces is not always possible, and the separation rule is hardly justiciable. More and more servicewomen and men are being entrusted with administrative tasks that do not fall within their original remit and area of responsibility:

- *In the year under review, the Association of Civil Servants and Employees of the Bundeswehr criticised the fact that too many servicewomen and men were working in staff positions and in military and civilian offices and therefore were not operationally active. Some of them have been deployed to civilian posts for many years and have thus performed civilian tasks. These service personnel would therefore not be available for the core military business. It is incomprehensible that highly qualified specialists such as helicopter pilots or doctors are performing administrative tasks and are not among the troops.*

This practice could mean a waste of personnel resources, which is why the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces suggests that the corresponding Bundeswehr structures be fundamentally reviewed and adjusted if necessary.

Personnel recruitment

To achieve the strategic target of a personnel level of 203,000 servicewomen and men by 2031, in addition to a general increase in personnel, it is also necessary to compensate for the approximately 20,000 who retire from active service each year. For years now, the Bundeswehr has faced considerable challenges in recruiting personnel, which are being exacerbated by demographic change and competition on the civilian labour market.

Applications

The Bundeswehr once again intensified its personnel recruitment efforts in the year under review. It has in particular designed, trialled and implemented all the measures selected by the Personnel Task Force in this area.

The expansion of **regional recruitment** is especially welcome. The various posts received more freedom in the year under review to implement locational advertising measures on their own responsibility and independently of nationwide campaigns. The Bundeswehr thus addresses applicants where they want to live and work. The posts, units and facilities can specifically emphasise the respective distinctive features and benefits of their locations. During numerous visits to the troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces formed a comprehensive impression of the immense commitment of the troops on the ground and their diverse and creative ideas:

- *During a visit to Weiden in der Oberpfalz, the commander of the 375 Armoured Artillery Battalion described how members of the unit had taken part in the basketball camp in Weiden. Own information events, such as parents' evenings and a series of lectures about the battalion were also organised, and the commander had authorised all superiors to invite interested parties to do an internship at any time.*
- *In Prenzlau with the 610 Signal Battalion, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited a permanent regional exhibition on the site's history and the signal battalion's mission. The exhibition is well received by the public and thus also aids personnel recruitment.*
- *The 232 Mountain Infantry Battalion in Bischofswiesen provided information about the regular organisation of troop visit weeks, when interested parties can enjoy an insight into the work on site. The parents of recruits*

are also invited at regular intervals so they can get an idea of the working conditions in the barracks. By involving parents and other family members, the battalion was able to raise awareness of the mountain infantry and their activities.

- *The 231 Mountain Infantry Battalion in Bad Reichenhall reported that it had produced its own flyers briefly presenting the battalion. The soldiers are also present at town festivals to promote their unit.*
- *Together with the regional territorial command, the 171 Logistic Battalion in Burg runs its own Facebook page and organises regular intern programmes and visits by the youth fire brigades.*
- *A company command of the 26 Parachute Regiment in Merzig reported on a self-designed flyer with information on initial training and the location, as well as a self-made video, “Fit for the paratroopers”, for applicants before recruitment.*

By extending the possibility of regional personnel recruitment, the Ministry of Defence has responded to long-standing requests from units, posts and facilities for more co-determination and responsibility on the part of local leaders. At the same time, it also continuously evaluates this type of advertising with regard to its numbers, the budget used and the first consultations held.

The Bundeswehr is also focussing on **job advertisements** in online portals such as indeed, Stepstone, Jobware, kliniken.de or studysmarter. It placed around 13,000 adverts here in the year under review. It was also represented at numerous specialist, consumer and career trade fairs. The Bundeswehr’s careers centre held a total of 85 application days. Other recruitment events were also organised, such as the Bundeswehr Discovery Days, which were held with the Air Force in Fürstenfeldbruck and at the Bundeswehr Logistics School in Garlstedt. The Bundeswehr Day in June 2024, with which the Bundeswehr provided an insight into the armed forces at nine locations throughout Germany, was also a huge success with more than 230,000 visitors.

The regional presence of the career centres is also important for the success of the Bundeswehr’s personnel recruitment. The staff at the local careers centres are familiar with the local conditions, and interested parties can find out about military and civilian careers in the Bundeswehr in face-to-face conversations. At the same time, they also support the troops on site with their individual advertising measures.

The Bundeswehr’s intensified efforts had the desired effect. Some 51,200 people, or 18.5 percent more than in the previous year, applied for military service in 2024. After the number of applications fell significantly in 2023 and 2022 to 43,200 and 43,900 respectively, compared to 49,200 applications in 2021, there was a significant increase in the **number of applications** across all military assignments in the year under review. For the first time, the Bundeswehr was thus almost able to return to pre-pandemic levels (2019: 53,100). There were significant increases here in the NCO career bracket. In view of the shortage of skilled workers, the increase in applications for sergeants in specialist branches, at approximately 18 percent, and NCO specialists, at 26 percent more applications compared to the previous year’s reporting date, is particularly encouraging.

With the goal of strengthening military recruitment, the Minister of Defence and the Chair of the Executive Board of the **Federal Labour Office** signed the “*Gemeinsam für eine starke Bundeswehr: Die Zeitenwende personell gestalten*” (together for a strong Bundeswehr – shaping the turning point with personnel) overall agreement in November 2024. The plan is to further expand the Ministry of Defence’s long-standing cooperation with the Federal Office. The key purpose of the overall agreement is to find suitable personnel for the Bundeswehr’s growth in an expedient and needs-based way. The Federal Office will therefore offer interested, capable women and men attractive career prospects as servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr. With nationwide training, study and qualification opportunities in particular, the Bundeswehr has a wide range of options to offer, combined with meaningful work. The Federal Office’s counselling and placement officers will, for example, receive regular information about the Bundeswehr as an employer. The Bundeswehr will also be able to recruit specifically in the Federal Office’s properties, thus enabling it to address more potential interested parties.

Unfortunately, it is still not possible to provide and process application documents digitally via the e-recruiting system. Applicants can actually download the application questionnaire online, but they can only submit it by post or in person. The data protection audit for the processing of corresponding personnel data was completed in the year under review, however it has not yet been possible to complete the adjustments and changes required, for example, with the information security and data protection concept or with the list of processing activities. On the positive side, on the other hand, the first part of the “Progressive Web App” for the application portal went live in summer 2024. With it, applicants can therefore use the functions of their smartphone, the camera for example, when making their application. The Bundeswehr is also finally using the **e-recruiting** system to digitally record

and analyse the reasons why applications were rejected. Applicants may, for example, not meet the appropriate health requirements or only want to work in a certain region. Others may not have the necessary qualifications for a desired position or may fail the recruitment test. It should have been possible to record the reasons for refusal since 2020, however completion was repeatedly delayed for technical reasons.

There is an obvious need for optimisation with the pre-employment medical examination process by the careers centre:

- *Medical negligence by the careers centre is a frequent complaint during visits to the troops. For example, it gave incorrect health figures or did not adequately enquire about possible alcohol or narcotics abuse. The insufficient examinations sometimes resulted in the recruitment of unsuitable or only partially suitable servicewomen and men. The medical service, however, only has one month to clarify these issues and change medical fitness categories after the required further examination when joining the service. After that, only a procedure to determine unfitness for service can be considered, which usually takes several months. The Bundeswehr is consequently burdening itself with partially unsuitable new recruits.*

It is reasonable to assume that this could be due to meeting recruitment targets. However, it does not help the Bundeswehr if generous interpretations at the beginning of the recruitment process later lead to significantly higher clarification work and possibly to the dismissal of the supposedly recruited junior staff.

Onboarding process

Experiences over recent years show that the more time passes between receipt of the application and attendance at the assessment centre, the greater the risk that applicants will apply elsewhere, receive better job offers and subsequently withdraw their application. The Bundeswehr has therefore set itself the goal of organising the onboarding process as quickly as possible and, as far as possible, taking the needs of the applicants into account. On average, interested parties received an offer of a first counselling session in a Bundeswehr careers information office within seven days. Nevertheless, during visits to the troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces repeatedly hears of individual cases in which applicants wait too long for a reply:

- *One serviceman, for example, reported that he had given massive support to two friends from his circle of acquaintances during their respective application processes, because they had hardly been able to reach the careers centre staff by phone.*

The average waiting time from receipt of the application until assessment start was generally eight weeks in the year under review. In principle, attendance at the assessment centre was even possible within one week of receipt of the application. The appointment, however, was frequently postponed due to the personally preferred date of those in question.

After the successful completion of the assessment, the Bundeswehr's goal is to provide applicants with a binding **pledge to recruit**. Various aspects, however, such as outstanding specialist medical reports, military pre-employment vetting or the checking of other possible obstacles to recruitment (such as criminal offences and debts, for example), can cause delays. Binding schedules only follow after all necessary documents have been submitted.

During visits to the troops, service personnel repeatedly criticised the counselling provided by the **careers centres**. In some cases, this paints a false picture of service in the Bundeswehr, and does not sufficiently consider wishes and expectations:

- *During a troop visit to the 292 Communication and Information Systems Support Battalion in Dillingen an der Donau, a serviceman explained that he had wanted to join the mountain infantry but had been assigned to the Navy in Bremerhaven. Another said he had been offered the opportunity of learning highly specialised IT skills at the Dillingen site, which was nowhere near his daily service as an enlisted soldier in the battalion.*
- *At the Electronic Warfare Battalion 931 in Daun/Eifel, a serviceman reported that he had stated during counselling that he did not want to do an office job. The careers centre, however, had entered "staff soldier" as his request for his first assignment.*

- *Service personnel also criticised the fact that the counsellors in the careers centres did not refer sufficiently to the basic readiness required for nationwide mobility. Finally, the reassignment could also be carried out against the will of the person concerned in case of doubt.*

It is regrettable if the requests expressed in discussions with the career counsellors are not taken into account when scheduling and during the service period. Individual and flexible personnel management in the Bundeswehr should aim to offer applicants a post that matches their qualifications and personal wishes as much as possible. This is certainly true for those in voluntary military service, as they should first familiarise themselves with the Bundeswehr and the wide range of career opportunities it offers. Also essential here is open communication and early information about the fact that, in a large organisation such as the Bundeswehr, not all individual preferences can be taken into account, but rather that ultimately the interests of the service are decisive when filling posts.

In the year under review, the Bundeswehr optimised the multi-stage **applicant retention portal** on the Bundeswehr's website, which was introduced in 2023 and will improve the onboarding process. The careers centres introduce themselves to the applicants here and provide information about how the upcoming assessment is performed. In a second step, the initial training units present themselves and provide an insight into the training centre, the performance of the initial training and the sequence of the first days in the barracks. It is important to provide prospective recruits a realistic picture of the Bundeswehr in order to counteract overburdening, differing ideas about service and premature initial training drop-outs. The applicant retention portal makes an important contribution here.

Another important measure taken by the Personnel Task Force is the introduction of a monthly start of duty. The Bundeswehr thus aims to take applicants' wishes into account as much as possible and shorten the period between assignment and starting duty. As initial training does not begin every month, those recruited immediately receive **military pre-training** to bridge the gap and prepare them for the later training phases.

- *This was criticised by the troops. The military pre-training is a further additional task and burdens the instructors. It requires a great deal of effort in relation to the small number of participants. It is also unfortunate that the recruits often do not remain in the unit, but instead transfer to other units, which means they cannot create a bond with the respective branch of service.*

Appointments and terminations

In the year under review, approximately 20,290 service personnel (9,790 voluntary military service members including voluntary military service in home defence and 10,500 temporary personnel) began their service with the Bundeswehr, an increase of eight percent on the previous year (2023: 18,810). This was the strongest year for recruitment in five years. The increase in applications is therefore also reflected in the number of those starting duty, albeit to a lesser extent. An increase of almost seven percent was also achieved with assignments (2024: 20,420 – 2023: 19,115). Particularly encouraging here is the significant improvement in the recruitment of skilled workers compared to previous years, with 1,678 assignments (2023: 1,090) with sergeants in general specialist branches and 1,608 assignments (2023: 1,178) with NCO specialists. However, due to the intensive competition on the civilian labour market, considerable challenges remain when recruiting personnel for IT and technical careers, as well as in the aviation and air mission control service. Whether or not the increase in applications and assignments will lead to an increase in personnel in 2025 remains to be seen. If the positive trend continues, we can expect at least a moderate increase in personnel strength in the coming years.

In the year under review, the Bundeswehr successfully implemented the new option developed and created by the Personnel Task Force to recruit and re-enlist personnel in the area of up to **130 percent** of the planned organisational scope of the post. This gives military superiors on the ground significantly more flexibility for both recruiting and retaining personnel. In regions and units with particularly high demand, the Bundeswehr can recruit up to 30 percent more applicants thanks to these additional regional capacities. By the end of the year under review, it had recruited around 690 service personnel via this programme and retained 270 as part of re-enlistment. Some 230 further schedules for recruitment were also made in 2025.

As pleasing as the increase in the number of applications and appointments is, the high level of those leaving the service during their probationary period remains extremely problematic. In 2023, of the 18,810 service personnel who joined, 5,100 (27 percent) left the Bundeswehr again: 4,900 at their own request by revoking the declaration of commitment within the six-month probationary period and 200 through dismissal. This means one in four people leave the Bundeswehr again within six months. Of the approximately 20,290 service personnel who joined

in the year under review, approximately 3,870 (19 percent) had left by the end of the year, although the six-month probationary period had not yet ended for all those who had joined. The Ministry of Defence emphasises, that no matter how successful personnel recruitment might be, it cannot compensate for such a high loss rate. It does not, however, foresee a significant reduction in drop-out rates, and an increase in personnel will therefore not be possible.

The Bundeswehr records the reasons for early termination as part of a voluntary and anonymous survey of service personnel who leave the service prematurely. It shows that approximately 40 percent of those leaving in 2023 primarily cited private, personal or family reasons for dropping out, with some also stating health reasons or other expectations of the service. A further 40 percent also said that the location was too far away.

To reduce drop-outs, strengthen personnel retention and create flexibility in training performance, the Army began to introduce the concept of six-month **basic training** in the year under review. It will replace the initial training programme in the long term and be gradually implemented in the units by 2026. It combines the three-month initial training and the subsequent three-month advanced individual training at one location, preferably in the future parent unit. The Bundeswehr will thus ensure recruitment in a regional environment and the performance of an uninterrupted and continuous six-month training programme in the parent unit. As a positive result of this change, German Army Headquarters are hoping for a reduction in transfer requests and terminations in the first few months of service. Both basic training and initial training, up to its complete replacement, start at the beginning of each quarter.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces formed an impression of the units' first experiences on the ground during visits to the troops:

- *The 232 Mountain Infantry Battalion in Bischofswiesen, for example, reported that the basic training concept had already been implemented well, but that the additional personnel required for the training were not available.*
- *The 10th company of 26 Parachute Regiment in Merzig, responsible for recruits' initial training until the end of the year under review, switched to the basic training replacing initial training in January 2025. The company command reported that it was highly motivated to get on with this, but that there was still much to do. In particular, the 38 instructors ready for deployment were not enough for the approximately 200 recruits, which resulted in high workloads. The necessary equipment and materials are also not available, and bureaucratic processes are extremely demanding.*
- *Members of the 363 Tank Battalion in Hardheim criticised the fact that it was unclear who would be taking part in the basic training until a week before it began. They cited the reason for this as being the divergence of two different IT- systems, which are not synchronised.*

How successful the new concept will be remains to be seen, however it must be ensured that the training companies are provided both sufficient personnel and equipment, accommodation and information, in order to be able to perform the basic training appropriately.

According to the Ministry of Defence, one promising measure to reduce the high drop-out rate is a new regulation introduced in the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act at the end of 2023. According to § 58h of the Act, voluntary military service members can no longer terminate their service at any time, as was previously possible, but rather, within the first five months, they must now give one month's notice to the 15th or last day of a month at their own request. A corresponding revocation period for the declaration of commitment has applied to temporary-career volunteers since the beginning of the year under review. The introduction of this notice period will discourage hasty decisions to leave the service, which soldiers may regret in hindsight. The troops had already had experience of this in individual cases:

- *At the 610 Signal Battalion in Prenzlau, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learnt that voluntary military service members often reported sick after termination until they were discharged. The decision was not reconsidered and was not expected to be reconsidered, because the reasons given were distance from home and the circumstances of life in the armed forces.*

It is important to generally improve the satisfaction of servicewomen and men during initial and basic training, so that the wish to end their service prematurely does not arise in the first place.

Re-employment and lateral entries

When former service personnel return to duty, they bring valuable military experience, qualifications and expertise back into the Bundeswehr. They know the structures, processes and requirements of military service without having to intensively learn the ropes. The willingness to return to the services is also frequently associated with a high level of motivation and identification, which on the whole promotes team spirit and commitment. Particularly in times of skilled worker shortages, **re-employment** is an important resource for covering personnel requirements and strengthening the operational readiness of the troops. The number of people who applied for re-employment by the end of 2024 was 4,433 – an increase of 18.1 percent compared to the previous year (2023: 3,753). The increased number of applications, however, did not yet result in more re-employment in the year under review, with appointment numbers instead falling to 1,367 compared to the previous year (2023: 1,655). Of those starting duty, 131 were over 40 years old.

The Bundeswehr offers lateral entrants, in other words, people who have not taken the traditional route via military initial training or started a career as a servicewoman or man, a wide range of opportunities to join the service. In particular, this measure will also deal with the shortage of skilled workers and attract highly qualified personnel. Lateral entries into technical and information technology careers, in the IT sector as engineers or specialists in cyber defence, for example, are in especially high demand. And they are also just as important in the medical area. Doctors, nurses and medical-technical assistants in particular are urgently needed in the medical service or in the Bundeswehr hospitals. Applications for lateral entry into the Bundeswehr increased by almost 17 percent year-on-year to 10,932 (2023: 9,347). The Bundeswehr recruited 534 of the applicants (2023: 667), of which 16 were older than 40. The most common reasons for rejection are insufficient involvement, health reasons, mental or character weaknesses and a lack of qualifications.

It is annoying for applicants when the Bundeswehr offers them the prospect of a **lateral entry**, but then cancels the application and recruitment procedure, which takes several months, in the final phase due to the lack of established posts:

- *In February 2024, a petitioner had applied as a lateral entrant with a higher rank for a position in the operational service officer career bracket. In May 2024, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management initially offered him a position at the cyber and information domain training centre. It informed him that, in principle, the Budget Division must give its approval before an appointment. The budget unit would be requested as soon as he had agreed to a post. Approximately two months after its approval, the Federal Office withdrew the offer. It justified this by citing the difficult situation regarding established posts for officers, which is why no post was available for a lateral entry. It could not present him with another assignment option.*

The fact that in August 2024 the Federal Office decided to determine whether an established post is also available for the external filling of a post during the needs assessment in future, instead of only when an applicant has agreed to a designated position, is to be welcomed.

Appointment of 17-year-olds

The recruitment of 17-year-olds into the Bundeswehr is repeatedly criticised. According to an optional protocol for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a minimum age of 18 years applies to the armed forces. The Bundeswehr, like others of the 171 signatory states, makes use of the exemption and also recruits minors. With the consent of their legal guardians, 17-year-olds may begin training with the Bundeswehr. Their recruitment must be viewed critically due to their increased **need for protection** and must remain the exception.

With comprehensive information and advice on the opportunities and risks of the military profession and a scientific assessment procedure, the Bundeswehr will ensure that it only recruits 17-year-olds who have informed themselves about the requirements of a career in the services and have the necessary mental maturity. As service in the Bundeswehr begins with initial training, of which weapons and gunnery training is an integral part, it is provided to 17-year-olds under stricter supervision. After completing initial training, 17-year-olds do not serve in the armed forces until they reach the age of majority and do not take part in guard duties or missions abroad. They are also given separate accommodation rooms and a contact person, who introduces themselves to them personally and looks after them. Deviations from this are prohibited, even if the young person or their legal guardian have given their consent.

Compared to the previous year, the number of 17-year-olds recruited in the year under review rose slightly to a total of 2,203 (10.9 percent of all those starting duty; 2023: 1,996 or 10.6 percent of all those starting duty). Of these 1,882 were men (85.4 percent) and 321 were women (14.6 percent). Of the 17-year-olds recruited, 29 percent reached the age of majority within the first three months of service. After six months of service, 53 percent had reached the age of 18.

426 of the service personnel recruited as 17-year-olds in the year under review had exercised their right of revocation during their probationary period by the end of 2024, which is 19.3 percent. As the six-month revocation period for service personnel recruited in the second half of 2024 had not yet expired at the end of the year under review, this figure may still rise. Although the drop-out rate was also slightly higher in 2024, compared to those of legal age it was only two percent (2023: six percent). The reasons for leaving the Bundeswehr prematurely were also given voluntarily here – the majority of respondents did not give a reason for leaving. Among the 17-year-olds who provided this information, however, the reasons for dropping out did not differ significantly from those aged 18 or over. They mostly mentioned personal or family issues. At five percent each, alternative job offers or overburdening were also reasons for dropping out.

Age limit

Section 48 of the Federal Budget Code stipulates an upper age limit of 40 years old for an appointment as a soldier or for changing service status to that of a career soldier. Similar regulations apply, albeit with higher age limits, to federal civil servants. The reason for the age limits is that service personnel and civil servants receive pensions after their active service. To ensure the systems remain financially viable, a sufficient ratio between the period of active service and the subsequent pension must be guaranteed. Serving in the armed forces also requires a high level of physical and mental resilience in many areas. This naturally decreases with increasing age and can limit the ability to meet military requirements. A maximum age limit will ensure that servicewomen and men remain fit for duty for the entire planned service period and thus guarantee the Bundeswehr's operational capability.

The law, however, also provides for **exceptions** to the age limit. Recruitment as a soldier or appointment as a career soldier, for example, is also possible after the age of 40 if there is an exceptional shortage of equally suitable younger applicants and the appointment or reassignment provides a significant advantage for the Federal Government. Exceptions also apply to people who have already acquired pension entitlements in other employment relationships, paid out by the Federal Government. The conditions for the application of the exceptions for appointment or change of status after the age of 40 are complex in detail and controversial with the respective budgetary and pension legislation. In some cases, this results in uncertainties with the personnel management offices with regard to when the exceptions apply to servicewomen and men over the age of 40. The Ministry of Defence therefore announced a ministry-coordinated guideline at the end of 2021 and issued it in December 2023. This clarifies, among other things, that it is sufficient for an exception to apply if a period of service of at least 15 years remains in the current service status until the respective special age limit for retirement is reached. These periods of service include periods of employment that provide entitlement to a pension paid out by the Federal Government (with a civil servant position with the Federal Police, for example). Fortunately, the guideline provides the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management greater room for manoeuvre in dealing with applicants who position themselves in the selection conference as part of the suitability and performance comparison in the transfer area and are included in the criteria of Section 48 of the Federal Budget Code. The 15 years' service requirement, for example, can also be met by setting an individual retirement date beyond the special age limit if necessary, and in consultation with the people concerned.

- *This regulation benefited a petitioner who applied for his service status to be changed to that of a career soldier in January 2022. He did actually position himself in the transfer area in the corresponding selection conference in the suitability and performance comparison, but as he had already reached the age of 49 at this time, in his case the Ministry had to examine the requirements of Section 48 of the Federal Budget Code. When the review had still not been completed in January 2023, the petitioner again applied for a status change and was again able to position himself in the transfer area. Although the total service period in his current service status until his retirement (as required by Section 48 of the Federal Budget Code) was no longer 15 years, with the guideline the petitioner was able to declare his willingness to serve beyond the special age limit for regular NCOs and thus meet the criterion of "15 years in the current service status".*

As annoying as the delays due to the ongoing ministerial review were, it is nevertheless encouraging that the change of status was now possible, provided proof of health suitability is a given.

Personnel retention

Re-enlistment

With the re-enlistment option, the Bundeswehr ensures that suitable, experienced and appropriately qualified service personnel remain in the service of the armed forces for longer. This is especially important in view of the ongoing shortage of skilled workers. Fortunately, the Bundeswehr's intensified efforts have also delivered successes here.

The willingness to commit to the Bundeswehr beyond the previously stipulated service period increased significantly in the year under review compared to 2023. By the end of the year, a total of 10,110 temporary-career volunteers had extended their service status, 25 percent more than in the previous year (2023: 8,072). In particular, an increase was seen here in the sergeant and enlisted personnel career paths. The average length of an extension fell slightly to three years in the year under review. The willingness to commit to the Bundeswehr in a higher career path or subsequently to voluntary military service has also increased significantly. By the end of the year under review, 2,800 career advancements (2023: 2,522) and 2,859 initial voluntary military service enlistments (2023: 2,164) had been recorded.

On this basis, it is clearly unacceptable that, despite the Bundeswehr's fundamental need to retain good personnel, the increasingly difficult situation with **established posts** also results in applications for re-enlistment having to be rejected. Officers in particular were affected here. The respective decision on extending a service period is at the discretion of the employer and largely depends on the interests of the service in the extension. All circumstances necessary for personnel planning and staffing in line with the task at hand must therefore be included in the consideration, and always in relation to a specific career path and post. At the same time, an increase in the re-enlistment practice ties up established posts, which are then not available for the urgently required recruitment of new personnel. Because there are not enough established posts, the Bundeswehr is therefore compelled to prioritise the requirements for personnel coverage according to urgency, in order to also prevent excess planning. As a result, re-enlistments in the year under review were thus primarily made in underutilisation areas.

It is unacceptable and cannot be communicated to the public that the Bundeswehr urgently needs more personnel to be able to perform its national and alliance defence tasks, but at the same time is letting good and experienced soldiers go against their wishes. It is also incomprehensible for those affected that the Bundeswehr refuses to extend the service period they have applied for, despite the shortage of personnel and the intensified efforts to recruit new personnel:

- *One such lack of understanding was expressed, for example, by a captain in the Cyber/IT Service speciality and assignment series. He believes it is a disastrous signal and contrary to the objectives of the Personnel Task Force, if trained and incorporated personnel cannot be re-enlisted due to a lack of budgetary funds. Assessment errors, however, were not found in the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management's decision to reject his application to extend his service period. The established posts available for individual re-enlistment had been allocated as part of a critical review and in accordance with prioritised personnel coverage requirements. The petitioner's career path was no longer part of the underutilisation areas, so that due to a lack of sufficient established posts at the time of the decision, an established post was not available for the petitioner's re-enlistment.*

Service personnel can submit another application for a service period extension at any time, which could then be approved if, for example, an established post is vacant. In such a situation, however, there is every reason to fear that those affected will see their future with the Bundeswehr as uncertain, already look for alternatives on the civilian labour market at an early stage, and thus no longer be available to the Bundeswehr in the long term. The armed forces consequently lose good and experienced servicewomen and men.

Personnel retention is, however, not the sole responsibility of the Bundeswehr, as the **budget legislators** indeed must provide sufficient established posts, so the armed forces can continue to deploy motivated, qualified and proven servicewomen and men at their request, and wherever they are required.

Qualified service personnel and their respective knowledge can be lost by focussing on underutilisation areas because of the lack of established posts:

- *This was vividly demonstrated by the petition of a youth officer deployed in Bavaria, whose application for re-enlistment was rejected with a reference to insufficient established posts. During his service, the petitioner had built up an extensive network and in recent years far exceeded the targets for the number of appointments attended and, in particular, the number of citizens he informed. He thus made an important contribution to the Bundeswehr's public relations work.*

The fact that the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management will in future afford greater importance to individual cases as part of re-enlistments must therefore be welcomed. It will, for example, give special consideration to essential qualifications, expertise or special skills, which cannot be acquired in good time by successor personnel when deciding on an application for a service period extension.

Transfer to career soldier status

In the year under review, the Bundeswehr appointed a total of 2,520 temporary-career volunteers as career soldiers, in other words, 239 fewer (8.7 percent) than in the previous year.

Time and time again, **enlisted personnel** say they want to become a long-term career soldier, which is an understandable wish and would increase the attractiveness of the service for this category of people. The Bundeswehr, however, generally refrains from doing so, partly because of the physically demanding work involved in this career path. It should nonetheless consider authorising exceptions in justified individual cases. This particularly applies if there is a requirement for a special qualification with the armed forces and there are no obstacles to filling the respective post.

Occasionally, there are also posts in the Bundeswehr whose performance makes it difficult for servicewomen and men to be taken on as career soldiers. This includes **youth officers**, for example, who have an important task, represent the Bundeswehr externally and are multipliers with strong networks in the federal states. It would therefore be a good idea for them to have a long-term bond with the Bundeswehr. One starting point here would be to integrate them into a career path and enable status group changes for them. As they also communicate and represent in a target group-oriented way, it would make sense to strive for equal representation in the posts, which currently is not the case. The share of female youth officers in the Bundeswehr is below average.

Bonuses

The payment of a bonus for an initial enlistment or re-enlistment to temporary-career volunteers is essential for personnel recruitment and retention. Until the entry into force of the *Zeitenwende* (turning point) article law, the legal situation restricted the granting of an **enlistment bonus** to certain speciality areas with a legally defined shortage of personnel and was aimed in particular at military specialities or speciality-related areas. The Ministry of Defence had defined 194 such shortage areas for 2024 (2023: 159 – 2022: 186) and thus significantly increased the number of areas eligible for bonuses again. Most of the shortage areas were in the Army organisational component with 67, followed by the Air Force with 59. In the year under review, the Bundeswehr deployed 163 servicewomen and men, in other words, a significant increase on the previous year (2023: 85 of the 159 shortage areas).

To increase the Bundeswehr's competitiveness on the labour market and the average re-enlistment period, the *Zeitenwende* article law has simplified and expanded the conditions for granting bonuses. This will afford the Bundeswehr more flexibility to be able to react to changing personnel requirements at short notice.

The relevant decision-making criterion for granting an enlistment bonus is now the assurance of the Bundeswehr's operational readiness, taking military personnel planning and specialist military requirements into account. This includes the personnel requirements defined by legislators in budgetary and organisational matters as well as situations in which, from a military point of view, an unforeseeable increase in personnel or an unplannable personnel requirement arises at short notice. The Ministry of Defence expects that the change in the law will significantly increase the amount of enlistment bonuses for new recruits as part of the recruitment advertising process. Personnel recruitment now has the option of directly advertising specifically with financial bonuses for entire deployment areas, such as seagoing assignments or specialist service careers.

For the extension of the application area to grant an enlistment bonus for temporary-career volunteers, as enforced by law, to have an effect, it is imperative that the corresponding budgetary funds are made available. In the year under review, the Bundeswehr budgeted approximately EUR 19.16 million for enlistment bonuses and paid out nearly the entire amount – approximately EUR 18.71 million. This means it was able to budget roughly the same amount of money for enlistment bonuses to temporary-career volunteers as in the previous year (2023: EUR 18.9 million). Approximately EUR 3.11 million were earmarked for the recruitment and retention of career soldiers (2023: EUR 2.65 million) for bonuses and paid out in full (2023: EUR 2.22 million).

The Bundeswehr must inform the careers centres and those entitled to bonuses in detail about the simplified and extended requirements for a bonus payment that have been amended by the Zeitenwende article law. In view of the broad factual preconditions, particularly with the granting of bonuses for re-enlistments, the Bundeswehr should ensure transparent communication to implement the positive effects intended by the Zeitenwende article law.

Higher education

In the year under review, 1,089 (2023: 1,183) servicewomen and men began a bachelor's degree programme at one of the Bundeswehr's two universities in Hamburg and Munich. The highest number of students enrolled on the 25 study courses was in education and educational sciences, closely followed by political and social sciences and business administration. The logistics, mathematical engineering and engineering science subjects had the lowest number of new students.

The degree programme is an integral part of the training of armed forces' officers who will perform their future duties in the Bundeswehr on the basis of an academic education with the help of scientific skills. At the same time, the Bundeswehr offers many non-military study courses, primarily for attractiveness reasons, so graduates can use their degree for their future careers after completing their service. The assignments of officers in operational service are regularly characterised by the assumption of the most diverse command responsibilities. The degree is frequently not required for the later assignment, which often leads to dissatisfaction among the respective servicewomen and men.

The Ministry of Defence had already begun to develop new career models in 2021, which will enable the **“specialist careers”** in the respective organisational component. These were specified in more detail with the publication of the general regulation on the assignment pattern of officers in operational service in September 2024. Such a specialist career includes the sequence of different assignments within a career path, area of competence or a further specialist area, with which the focus is on specialist expertise. It is only possible in the career bracket of an officer in operational service. The expertise acquired during certain study courses in particular will be increasingly incorporated into the task performance, thereby increasing the attractiveness of the service for graduates of such courses. This applies in particular to the fields of maths, computer science, natural sciences and technology. Due to the shortage of skilled workers, the recruitment, retention and development of qualified specialist personnel is extremely important for the Bundeswehr, whereby specialist careers are especially suitable for the recruitment and assignment of lateral entrants. These are generally characterised by longer assignment periods to certain posts or in specific facilities.

Additionally, with a view to national and alliance defence, it is also important to adapt the range of study courses more specifically to the needs of the Bundeswehr and thus create more references to professional sources between the degree and the later assignment:

- *During a visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to the Bundeswehr University Hamburg, a servicewoman described how divided the students were with regard to their motivation to study. There are those who are absorbed in their studies and those who only see it as a necessary service task of their officer training. She therefore suggested more Bundeswehr-specific study courses with practical relevance, which would be useful for the Bundeswehr and whose knowledge could be used in the service. The Ministry of Defence shared that it was working on implementing this very welcome proposal. In the “Engineering Science: Defence Systems” study course, for example, it has introduced the additional “Effector, Protection and Security Technologies” focus area.*

181 students broke off their studies in the year under review for various reasons (2023: 246). The main reasons were poor academic performance, a lack of subject knowledge, insufficient motivation, poor self-management, and health or personal problems. As the Bundeswehr does not want to lose these servicewomen and men when

new recruits are in such shortage, they can apply for re-enlistment as officers without studying for a specific career path. In the year under review, the Bundeswehr managed to re-enlist 31 service personnel who had terminated their studies between 2021 and 2024 as officers in operational service – a significant increase on the previous year, as in 2023 it was only seven.

Postponement of retirement

With the retirement of career soldiers, the law distinguishes between the special age limit and the later general age limit. The age limits vary here depending on career path, rank and deployment area. For example, the general age limit for generals and colonels as well as for officers in the medical service is 65, while for all other career soldiers it is 62. Captains, lieutenants and second lieutenants reach the special age limit at the age of 56, while NCOs already reach it at the age of 55. They generally retire when they reach the special age limit. As in the previous year, the Bundeswehr retired a total of 1,979 career soldiers in 2024, 1,316 on reaching the special age limit and 544 after exceeding the special age limit. Of the career soldiers, 119 left the service for other reasons, such as unfitness for service.

To retain qualified and experienced personnel for longer and to prevent vacancies, the Bundeswehr has already been using a case-by-case procedure for several years to postpone the date of retirement by mutual agreement. Retirement is determined here on a flexible and needs-oriented basis within the respective speciality and assignment series or the respective career path or area of competence. A total of 719 career soldiers made use of this in the year under review-, an increase of 11.6 percent on the previous year (2023: 644).

The statutory stipulated increase in the average retirement age of career soldiers by two years from 55.2 to 57.2 years, which was set for 2024, was already achieved in 2021. The average retirement age has since stagnated. In the year under review, it was 57.5 years. According to the Ministry of Defence's current forecast, it will remain at this level until 2028.

In this respect, however, special features must also be taken into account when calculating a **pension**:

- *As the decision to retire career soldiers before they reach the general age limit is at the Bundeswehr's discretion, those affected may no longer be able to complete the minimum 40 years of service required to qualify for the maximum pension rate. When calculating their pension, they therefore receive a supplement in accordance with the provisions of the Military Pensions Act, which closes any resulting gaps. If, on the other hand, they continue to serve beyond the special age limit and then retire due to unfitness for service, they do not receive this compensation, and under certain circumstances may therefore receive a comparatively lower pension.*

Due to these possible, not insignificant consequences, it is very important that the Bundeswehr inform and explain these circumstances in detail to the troops. To also make the services more attractive beyond the special age limit, Parliament should consider adjusting the relevant regulations.

Appointment as a temporary-career volunteer is permitted for a maximum service period of 25 years, but not beyond the age of 62. If urgent service reasons necessitate this in individual cases, an appointment is possible until the age of 65 at the most, however this is an exception. For reserve duty personnel, it is possible up to the age of 65. The existing **age limits** repeatedly cause annoyance among servicewomen and men who want to continue serving beyond the age limit:

- *Several petitions criticised the fact that the statutory age limits are no longer up to date.*

In the year under review, the Ministry of Defence rejected an increase in the age limits due to concerns about the armed forces' personnel getting too old. It reasoned that service in the forces entails particular physical and psychological demands, which become more difficult for service personnel to meet and satisfy as they get older. In view of the current security situation, Germany's defence capability requires all military personnel to also be fully deployable for military operations. On the one hand, the existing regulation ensures the armed forces' operational readiness and on the other hand takes into account the idea of caring for the physical integrity of older servicewomen and men. These considerations are understandable, and the Bundeswehr should of course adhere to the existing age limits. If individual servicewomen and men are willing, motivated and in good health to serve longer and there is a corresponding need, a more flexible approach to age limits could help to minimise the shortage of skilled workers and would also be an attractive retention measure.

Making the Bundeswehr more attractive for existing personnel

The top ranks introduced in 2021, **corporal and staff corporal**, open up additional development opportunities within the enlisted personnel career path. With their introduction, the German Bundestag pursued the goal of offering an attractive career option for qualified and motivated servicewomen and men who aspire to a specialist assignment without necessarily taking on command responsibility. At the same time, this is also an important sign of the appreciation for these experienced service providers-.

The success that was hoped for, however, has not yet materialised, so a significant number of the posts earmarked for this purpose therefore remained unfilled in the year under review. Of the 2,260 posts set up by 31 October 2024 at the remuneration level of corporal and staff corporal, a total of 833 were vacant by the end of the year under review, in other words, 36.9 percent (2023: 1,754 posts, so 33.8 percent). The number of lance corporals awarded the rank of corporal was 394, and 132 servicewomen and men were awarded the rank of staff corporal. Approximately 400 additional posts will be set up by April 2025 as planned, with a total of 5,000 of these posts set up by 2031.

Many petitions and troop visits showed that it is still unclear in which areas and under what conditions corporal and staff corporal posts will be created.

- *A staff assistant of the 3rd Minesweeper Squadron complained that a promotion to corporal was not possible in his assignment series. Navy Headquarters confirmed that the majority of these posts are planned for the Navy's Sea Battalion and on board seagoing units. It comprehensibly justified this by explaining that the corporal posts essentially resulted in longer personnel retention and the assignment of already trained personnel. They are therefore located where special expertise and experience are required to a particularly high degree or where the performance of a post involves a long training period. Qualified enlisted personnel- who cannot or do not wish to advance to the career path of NCOs should also be offered an incentive to remain in the naval forces for longer. In the petitioner's assignment series, however, there were no personnel requirements that made a longer retention necessary.*

In the year under review, the Ministry of Defence evaluated the overall personnel selection process for corporal and staff corporal posts to provide insights into how to increase the occupancy rate. One result was that suitable lance corporals refrained from applying for a reassignment to corporal and staff corporal posts due to the Bundeswehr's reorganisation and the associated uncertainties, among other factors. They also cited more limited opportunities for a close-to-home assignment and a lack of willingness to be reassigned to a more favourable position within the unit as reasons for not doing so. To increase the motivation of potential applicants, it is therefore important to communicate directly with superiors and to inform the respective units about organisational changes at an early stage. Personnel management in the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management could also be included here. In the opinion of the posts and units surveyed, there is generally no need for action with regard to the arrangement of the selection procedure. At the request of some units, however, in order to provide support, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management will draw up a check-list for the personnel selection procedure for corporal and staff corporal posts. The Ministry also recommended that the responsible commands, offices and facilities check, among other things, which qualifications required for the respective posts can already be provided by the applicants before a selection decision can be made. If there are insufficient training capacities, the responsible entities should also reassess the definition of the training programmes that must be completed before a selection decision is made. Whether the findings of the evaluation will actually lead to a higher occupancy rate remains to be seen, but it would appear doubtful given the fact that little is likely to change with the existing procedures. It would therefore be desirable to have active support from the relevant offices and units, both in adjusting the job requirements and with regard to communication with potential applicants. If this low occupancy rate continues in the coming years, the Bundeswehr should critically review whether or not it is really necessary to retain these additional ranks.

As a further measure to increase attractiveness, since 2019 the Bundeswehr has been offering service personnel the opportunity to catch up on their **secondary school leaving certificate** in a six- or twelve-month qualification programme while continuing to receive their pay. In addition to the training required for their post, these qualifications are a requirement for promotion to the NCO or sergeant career path. In the year under review, an average of 2,738 (5.4 percent) of active service personnel did not have a school-leaving qualification (2023: 2,268 so 4.4 percent).

Despite intensive advertising measures, however, interest in a lower secondary school leaving certificate is so low that there was no course in the first half of 2024 and only six service personnel obtained the lower secondary school leaving certificate in the second half of 2024 (in 2023 it was eleven). Taking into account the experience with this measure, the Ministry of Defence attributes the low numbers to the fact that only a few of the servicewomen and men who were suitable for participation in principle were interested in a career advancement. This was due, among other things, to a lack of willingness to change their duty station.

Encouragingly, there is greater interest in the qualification measure for the intermediate secondary school leaving certificate. Out of 116 participants in 2023, 92 passed this school leaving certificate. A total of 115 service personnel took part in the measure in the year under review. The existing programme is expressly to be welcomed, as it both opens up the prospect of remaining in the Bundeswehr for longer and provides opportunities for better integration into civilian working life after the end of service.

For career soldiers, an upcoming retirement is associated with a major turning point – the end of active service and the transition to civilian life. As a supportive measure, the Bundeswehr offers customised **seminars** for retiring career soldiers, which are designed to comprehensively prepare them for this new phase of their lives. It is especially positive to emphasise that, in addition to individual seminars, there are also partner seminars that enable partners to be involved. It is therefore not surprising that the seminars are all well received, and demand of course quickly exceeds supply, which can lead to waiting times. Interested parties should therefore try to attend the seminar in good time before leaving active service and be flexible in their choice of seminar location.

Internal labour market

The Bundeswehr's internal labour market aims to retain qualified personnel in the Ministry of Defence's area of competence for the long term. With it, members of the Bundeswehr can change from one of the three status groups, service personnel, civil servants and employees covered by collective agreement, to one of the other status groups. The internal labour market in particular will offer temporary-career volunteers an attractive continuity perspective by taking them on in a civilian employment relationship with the Bundeswehr after they leave the services.

Regrettably, as in previous years, the Bundeswehr only filled a few civilian positions with former service personnel in the year under review. A total of 11,864 temporary-career volunteers left military service in 2024 (11,449 in 2023; 11,200 in 2022). Of this total, only 328 changed to a civilian employment relationship (221 in 2023; 251 in 2022). Of these, 122 began a career training programme to become a civil servant and 48 were taken on in a training relationship. The Bundeswehr appointed 65 directly in a civil servant status and 93 changed to non-civil-servant public service employment. This means that only 4.4 percent of the 7,383 new civilian employees recruited with the Bundeswehr were former servicewomen and men. Compared to previous years (2023: 3.3 percent; 2022: 4 percent), the share therefore remains essentially unchanged once again. In view of these still extremely low figures, we can conclusively say that there is no Bundeswehr internal labour market. There is an urgent need for action here.

During visits to the troops, however, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces repeatedly hears how important it is for the Bundeswehr to retain the qualifications, skills and, in particular, the extensive professional experience of retiring servicewomen and men:

- *For example, the commander of the Bundeswehr Signals Intelligence Technical Analysis Centre emphasised the huge loss that would be incurred if it were not possible to retain the highly specialised service personnel employed here by transferring them to civil servant status at the end of their service.*

The fact that a change of status is basically only possible via a new appointment remains a major obstacle to a transition to the civilian sector. This requires a public invitation to tender and a selection procedure in compliance with the constitutional principle of merit under **Article 33 (2) of the Basic Law**. This also applies when service personnel, who have already acquired the required expertise for this in a military post, apply for civilian posts. Only the knowledge and experience gathered during military service, with otherwise equal qualifications, can be taken into account as a preferential criterion in their favour in the selection procedure.

To make it easier for service personnel to change from the military sector to the civilian sector, the Ministry of Defence therefore sought to amend the **law governing public service careers** as part of the inter-ministerial coordination on the amendment of the Federal Ordinance on Careers and Promotion of Public Officials, under the leadership of the Federal Ministry of the Interior during the year under review. It proposed the introduction of a

legal basis that makes it easier for retiring temporary-career volunteers to acquire a civil service career qualification by recognising and crediting the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their military service. Such a new regulation would be very welcome, and it is to be hoped that both the Federal Government and the German Bundestag will take up and implement this proposal in the 21st legislative term.

To take advantage of the opportunities offered by the internal labour market, it is important to provide servicewomen and men comprehensive advice and information on the necessary qualifications in good time before they leave, as they are of course interested in the internal labour market.

It is additionally encouraging that the Personnel Task Force also focused on the improvement of the internal processes and **communication** connected with the internal labour market. For example, in future, the Vocational Advancement Service will address and advise retiring service personnel individually and increase their awareness of the possibility of changing status groups within the Bundeswehr significantly more than before.

Time and again, applications by temporary-career volunteers to reduce their service period are unsuccessful, when they want to change to a position in the civil service:

- *A lance corporal had successfully applied for a position at a prison. To take up the position, his service period would have to have been reduced from twelve to eleven years. The Bundeswehr rejected the application made here.*
- *A staff sergeant applied for a reduction in his period of service from twelve years to nine years and eleven months so he could take up a position at a customs office. The Bundeswehr also rejected this application.*
- *It likewise rejected the application of a lance corporal, who had successfully applied for a position with a professional fire brigade, to have his period of service reduced from 15 to nine years.*

A request by servicewomen and men to leave the Bundeswehr in these cases is understandable, but according to the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, it must also be in the official interests of the Bundeswehr. The legislators thus aim to prevent the departure of qualified personnel and to maintain the Bundeswehr's operational readiness. There is therefore only an official interest in shortening the period of service if, for example, the post in question is no longer required and the Bundeswehr does not need the servicewoman or man in any other post, if the qualifications are no longer needed, or if there is a surplus in the respective birth cohort. This is usually not the case, which is why the Federal Office of Personnel Management regularly rejects applications. Only a case of personal hardship could justify a reduction in the service period in individual cases. According to case law, however, this is subject to very strict requirements. A desire for vocational reorientation is not enough. However, at least in cases where the remaining period of service is only a few months, it is questionable whether the assumption of an official interest in the servicewoman or man in question remaining in the Bundeswehr is in fact warranted. A little more flexibility at this point could also contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr as an employer.

Military performance evaluation system

The Bundeswehr's new military performance evaluation system, introduced in 2021, has generally proven itself. The key element of this reform was the introduction of **benchmarks**, which set the maximum share of the three highest evaluations "A", "B" and "C" within the comparison groups based on a grading scale from "A" to "G". The goal here was to prevent the inflationary awarding of top marks. This should make it easier for personnel management to select the best as stipulated in Article 33 (2) of the Basic Law when making favourable selection and assignment decisions or when forming promotion sequences.

The assessment of the last performance evaluation phase on the evaluation cut-off date of 31 July 2023 showed that the benchmarks were largely met at all levels of the overall responsible people. Minor overruns in the guideline-based grade range are caused by the fact that, in some organisational areas, there were fewer than 20 people in the overall comparison group to be formed there, even at the overall responsible person level.

A top mark is not necessarily required for favourable selection decisions:

- *As in previous years, some petitioners felt they were excluded from promotion opportunities with an overall grade of "D". As shown by the results of past selection conferences, according to the Ministry of Defence this concern is unfounded. For example, at the 2023 career officer selection conference, 109 out of a total of 571 service personnel were accepted into the career soldier service status with an overall grade of "D", which is*

19 percent. A total of 14 officers, or 17.95 percent, received an overall grade of "D" and were accepted to participate in the -National General/Admiral Staff Officer course (NGASOC).

Discussions between the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and the troops, and numerous petitions, however, have shown that, three years after the introduction of the new evaluation system, there are still **uncertainties** in dealing with the new regulations among both superiors and service personnel being evaluated, and the evaluation system is still being rejected in some quarters.

- *As before, the implementation of the decisions of the overall responsible parties regarding the guideline-based top grades, the formation of the comparison groups and the top grades quota scheme in small comparison groups were the centre of criticism. This is probably due in part to the fact that the complex coordination process is often perceived as non-transparent by those being evaluated and is therefore difficult to understand.*

With this in mind, the fact that the Bundeswehr has been assessing the performance evaluation system since 2023, and on this basis put the comprehensively revised "Service personnel performance evaluations" service regulation into effect in July 2024, is a positive development. This now substantiates the evaluation process. For the evaluation system to be accepted, it is essential that the regulations are comprehensible and coherent for all involved.

- *In many cases, there was a lack of understanding when the person with overall responsibility downgraded the overall evaluation planned by the first and second evaluator in the draft. This also gave some evaluating superiors the impression that higher superiors were exerting undue influence on the assessment of the first and second evaluators and thus interfering with the latter's evaluation competence.*

A possible downgrading of performance evaluation grades is, however, expressly provided for in the performance evaluation procedure. Those with overall responsibility, in other words, the chiefs of service and the heads of the respective organisational components, must ensure that the defined benchmarks are complied with in their entire area. If this is not initially the case, they must specify a comparable evaluation standard across hierarchical levels, without knowledge of the respective individuals, in order to comply with the benchmarks. The second evaluators, together with the first evaluators, must implement the instructed changes to the voting results in the performance evaluations. They have the final decision on which people are affected by the instructed changes, in other words, by the downgrades.

Such downgrades can happen in small **comparison groups** in particular. In the interest of fairness in individual cases, the benchmarks should not be strictly applied in comparison groups with fewer than 20 people, but, far more importantly, the performance evaluations must be appropriately differentiated. There is no minimum size for a comparison group. It can, for example, also consist of just two people. Theoretically, therefore, a top grade can be awarded in every small comparison group.

Overall comparison groups must be formed from the comparison groups at the overall responsible person level. If such an overall comparison group consists of more than 20 servicewomen and men, however, the benchmarks apply strictly. This means that the overall responsible person must impose conditions that then result in downgrades to ensure compliance with the benchmarks in the overall comparison group. If, however, the overall comparison group also has fewer than 20 people, the benchmarks are not applied directly here either.

With the revised performance evaluation regulations in the year under review, the Ministry of Defence is responding to the request of the organisational components to specify the regulations in practice. The Ministry therefore specified how the voting results must be presented to the overall responsible people, how they are to specify the comparable performance evaluation standard across hierarchical levels with non-compliance with the benchmarks and how the voting results can be implemented in their respective areas.

First and second evaluators must be equally responsible when awarding grades, which was not always the case in the year under review:

- *If, for example, first or second evaluators talk to the servicewomen and men to be assessed about grades at the draft stage, even though these have not yet been agreed and approved, this can contribute to frustration, disappointment and, in particular, a loss of trust in the system in the event of a downgrade.*

It also resulted in great resentment when it appeared that performance evaluations were not based on actual performance, but rather were based on tactical considerations:

- *Both in petitions and during troop visits, service personnel described their impression that younger service members received better performance evaluations because they were considered more worthy of promotion than their older fellow soldiers, simply because of their age. The inclusion of career soldiers and temporary-career volunteers in the same comparison group was also criticised. According to some competitors, temporary-career volunteers who intended to take part in a selection process to become a career soldier would be evaluated more favourably than those who had already completed the change of status.*

Such tactical performance evaluations are inadmissible and incompatible with the evaluation regulations. It is, however, scarcely possible to verify this criticism.

Differentiating between status groups to form the comparison groups is unlikely to solve the problem in any case, and nor would it be appropriate. The performance evaluation regulations stipulate that comparison groups must be formed irrespective of the rank, salary group or status of the service personnel being evaluated. Allocation to the respective comparison groups is made more appropriately on the basis of filling posts or the function level. Within these groups, service personnel will be evaluated according to whether and to what extent they meet the specific requirements of their respective post in the comparative analysis, regardless of their status. A differentiation according to status group would also run counter to the aim of forming comparison groups with at least 20 people where possible, in which the benchmarks can be applied directly. And finally, even comparison groups that take into account the status of those being evaluated cannot prevent tactical considerations in the performance evaluation, with regard to future promotions, for example. Given the immense importance of performance evaluations, it is all the more important that superiors must meet their responsibility and ensure that they evaluate servicewomen and men objectively and independently of extraneous aspects with regard to selection and promotion decisions.

It is therefore still important to regularly train all people involved in the performance evaluation process, primarily the superiors doing the evaluation, to apply the evaluation regulations correctly. This helps to steadily increase understanding and acceptance of the evaluation regulations, clear up any misunderstandings that may exist and ultimately minimise annoyance and disappointment for all involved.

According to the Ministry of Defence, conferences and training courses are offered, which also deal with the topic of the importance of the overall responsible people and their obligation to comply with the benchmarks. On the Bundeswehr intranet, the Bundeswehr also provides all service personnel with regularly updated online training courses and short video tutorials, as well as comprehensive user manuals on the performance evaluation subject. The latter are, for example, tailored to the various people involved in the performance evaluation process and provide appropriate information. They help people find their way around the system here and perform the performance evaluation process correctly.

The new version of the performance evaluation regulations after the evaluation includes an adjustment to the requirements for **forming comparison groups**. Disciplinary superiors, evaluating superiors and also company sergeants are now always assigned to comparison groups with a leadership function. The term "leadership function" is also defined and is largely distinguished by the fact that servicewomen and men have considerable responsibility for and lead subordinate personnel.

The performance evaluation regulations were also significantly amended with the abolition of the second occasion-related performance appraisal in the sergeant career paths. The first occasion-related performance appraisal for sergeants and petty officers, as well as staff sergeants and chief petty officers, will continue to be issued after twelve months of performing the functions of a post corresponding to their rank. For those recruited with the rank of sergeant, this applies accordingly twelve months after recruitment. Instead of on an individual cut-off date, as was previously the case, the second performance evaluation is only made as part of the routine performance evaluation of the respective comparison group corresponding to the rank on the routine performance evaluation cut-off date. The Ministry of Defence points out that the removal of the second occasion-related performance appraisal increases the size of the respective comparison group and thus improves the comparability of those evaluated.

This change may, however, have an influence on participation in the **selection conferences** to become a career soldier:

- *For example, several petitioners complained that the new regulation meant the second occasion-related performance appraisal, originally planned for 31 July 2024, was cancelled. The next routine performance evaluation will not be until 31 July 2026. They would therefore not be able to take part in a selection*

conference in 2025 – the first time would actually be in 2027. This delays and worsens their chances of being accepted into the career soldier service status.

To at least partially compensate for this effect, the Ministry of Defence simultaneously changed the selection conferences system. Instead of uniform annual acceptance rates, these are increased in the years following the evaluation dates of 31 January and 31 July in even-numbered years (2024, 2026, 2028 and so on), as up-to-date performance evaluation findings are then available for the applicants across the board. The higher acceptance rates will offer high-performing sergeants, who were able to assert themselves in a broader comparison due to the larger comparison groups, more opportunities for a change of status and help retain them in the Bundeswehr earlier than before. Lower acceptance rates are then planned for the respective following years.

It remains to be seen how the planned different distribution of acceptance rates will affect service personnel satisfaction. It is fundamentally positive that the change will result in better compliance with the benchmarks, because the comparison groups were frequently too small to be able to apply them directly in the second occasion-related performance appraisal. This harboured the risk that more top grades were awarded than the benchmarks actually allowed.

If sergeants or petty officers are unable to meet the basic requirement of two performance evaluations for participation in selection procedures during their specified service period, because they will not receive a second performance evaluation in a sergeant career path until the end of their service, the **first applicant rule** shall apply. Accordingly, the sergeants and petty officers in question must be given at least one opportunity to be considered in the selection process.

In addition to the service performance evaluations and the personnel development assessment, the result of the **assessment of potential procedure** has also served as an additional selection criterion for favourable selection decisions regarding a change of status or career for senior NCOs. This procedure, developed by psychologists, determines the mental and character potential of service personnel for probation in the career path of an officer in specialist service or for career soldier status.

The Federal Administrative Court, however, ruled in October 2024 that the use of the assessment of potential requires a legal basis and may therefore no longer be used as a selection criterion for status or career changes for the time being. It is indeed not inappropriate to also take into account the mental and character potential determined by the assessment of potential procedure. In this respect, the employer is free to use a psychological test procedure as a further personnel selection instrument. According to the Federal Administrative Court, however, the principle of legislative reservation requires that the legislator itself must determine the relevant comparison instruments for selection of the best candidates when awarding public offices in accordance with Article 33 (2) of the Basic Law.

The Federal Administrative Court has rejected a transitional period during which the legislator can enact a statutory standard and the old regulatory situation would continue to apply until then. Therefore, all Bundeswehr selection decisions that were not yet final until the decision of the Federal Administrative Court, in which the assessment of potential had been used in selection procedures, had to be cancelled and a new decision made without taking the results of this assessment into account. The Ministry of Defence is currently examining whether the decision of the Federal Administrative Court will also have an impact on other selection processes in which psychological test methods are used, such as in recruitment procedures in the careers centres.

In 2023, the Federal Administrative Court also ruled that both the military performance evaluation system and the personnel development evaluation introduced on a supplementary basis require a legal basis. The German Bundestag reacted immediately and passed the corresponding regulations.

The legal standards required to utilise the assessment of potential must now be swiftly compiled. Even if it is not always fully accepted in the petitions, this is the only procedure that is independent of the superiors' evaluation. The fact that the assessment of potential is a suitable selection criterion is sufficiently proven by scientific studies.

Promotion

In her annual reports, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has been pointing out the highly problematic situation with promotions in the Bundeswehr for some years now and has called numerous times for a reduction in waiting times. She has also repeatedly and emphatically called for an improvement in discussions with the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management.

Regrettably, however, little has changed in the year under review. Despite meeting the respective career law requirements, the servicewomen and men affected must wait months, and in some cases even years, for their promotion due to a lack of sufficient **established posts**. The fact that the entirely understandable frustration with this is growing among the troops is also demonstrated by the numerous petitions on this topic in the year under review. Servicewomen and men are not only concerned about the financial implications. Many also associate the prospect of a promotion with an appreciation of their proven performance, motivation and commitment. If the promotion does not happen, the result is disappointment and job dissatisfaction.

Promotion decisions in the civil service, and thus also in the armed forces, must be made in accordance with the principle of selection of the best candidate, as stipulated in Article 33(2) of the Basic Law . If the available established posts are insufficient to promote all servicewomen and men promptly after they have met the respective career law requirements, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management will determine **promotion and assignment sequences**, in particular on the basis of the performance evaluations. According to case law, however, there is no entitlement to promotion, even if all requirements are met and the end of the service period is approaching.

As the sequences are subject to constant changes due to the addition or loss of service personnel who are ready for promotion and the number of established posts available in the future cannot be predicted, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management is also unable to make any binding statements about a specific promotion date. Servicewomen and men therefore do not know if and when they can be promoted.

Not all ranks are affected by the **promotion backlog**, which primarily affects the careers of senior NCOs and officers. It is therefore urgently necessary and is the task of the budget legislator to provide a sufficient number of established posts. Despite the ongoing promotion backlog, however, the 2024 Finance Act did not provide for any increase in established posts for the defence department's budget either. The number of planned established posts in the 2024 budget remained roughly the same as the previous year at 182,700 (2023 budget 182,721).

The changes to the staffing plan provided for in the 2024 Finance Act due to 1,770 increases in established posts did not produce any tangible relief either. The resulting increase in posts for the A 8 salary group with supplementary allowance (A 8 Z), which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces already called for in the 2022 annual report, is particularly encouraging. The number of established posts increased here by 1,435 from 24,480 in the 2023 defence budget to 25,915 in the 2024 budget. As of 31 August 2024, there were 2,178 NCOs still in the promotion and assignment sequences for the A 8 Z salary group, meaning that the number of those waiting fell by almost 24 percent compared to the previous year (August 2023: 2,867). On the whole, however, the number of service personnel waiting for promotion remained almost the same in the year from August 2023 to August 2024 (2024: 4,006 – 2023: 4,047). In August 2024, for example, there were 708 officers in the promotion- and assignment sequences for A 14, 183 for A 13 and 550 for A 12.

It is particularly bitter for those affected if they have been transferred to a higher graded post, perform the tasks required in this post and still have to wait months or sometimes even years for the corresponding promotion or assignment.

- *Since as early as August 2021, a petitioner who was transferred to a post in the A 16 salary group met all the requirements for promotion to colonel (A 16). In September 2023, he was selected to fill another post in the A 16 salary group and was transferred to this post in April 2024, without being promoted in the meantime.*
- *A serviceman who has been waiting for a promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel (A 14) since October 2021 complained about a similarly long waiting time.*

This already very stressful situation is made even more difficult when it affects the calculation of the respective **pension**:

- *A captain, a specialist service officer, complained that he had not yet been assigned to the A 12 salary group, although he had been in his current A 12-graded post since April 2023 and met the promotion requirements. Whether and when a promotion can be made is not foreseeable. He is expected to retire in September 2027 after almost 37 years of service. In addition to the financial losses, also with regard to retirement provision, the still pending promotion is a sign of a lack of appreciation for him.*
- *One petitioner reported that, without being assigned an established post, he had been working in an A 12-graded post and performing the corresponding tasks since October 2023. He feared that this position would not be taken into account when determining his pension, and the Ministry of Defence confirmed this fear.*

In the worst case scenario, those affected are so unhappy with the situation that they even leave the service:

- *A commander decided to leave the Bundeswehr at his own request after 24 years of service with career soldier status, due to his lack of promotion. Since September 2021, he has essentially met all requirements for assignment to the A 15 salary group, but due to a lack of established posts no promotion could be made. Although he had initially agreed with personnel management on a subsequent assignment as a consultant in the Ministry of Defence, he ultimately left the service with effect from September 2023. As his reason, the petitioner informed personnel management that he was bothered by the fact that, although he was being used favourably, he had not yet been assigned and, in his own view, this would not happen in the foreseeable future either.*

In addition to the long waiting times, servicewomen and men also criticised the lack of information in this regard. Transparent **communication** by the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management would be desirable here.

The Ministry of Defence generally assumes that the number of service personnel waiting for a promotion or assignment to an established post in a higher salary group, despite meeting the respective career law requirements, will continue to rise. The positive effect of new established posts or of increases in established posts, will be overlapped over time, on the one hand by the creation and filling of new posts, and on the other hand by the increase in the number of personnel ready for promotion.

After no new established posts were planned in the draft of the 2025 federal budget, the situation for 2025 initially appeared to be even more dramatic, because the further planned increase in the number of officers was already largely completed with the recruitment of officer candidates in 2022 and 2023, but could not be implemented with the number of established posts available in the year under review. Without additional established posts for officers, there was a risk that the promotion of officer candidates would not have been possible in 2025. Approximately 1,100 military established posts (including some 600 for officers), which had previously been blocked for management, were only released at the end of November 2024 following intensive negotiations between the Ministry of Defence and the Federal Ministry of Finance. Fortunately, this will at least ensure that **lieutenant appointments** can be made in 2025. Nevertheless, even these positions are not enough to fully cover the existing needs. This must not happen again. The budget legislator must take urgent action and provide a defence budget that covers the Bundeswehr's realignment with a corresponding established posts structure.

The extremely unsatisfactory situation with promotions is not only demotivating and frustrating for the respective servicewomen and men affected – it also causes enormous damage to the image of the Bundeswehr and the recruitment of junior staff.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the promotion backlog is due to a lack of both established posts and organisational measures. On the one hand, this includes the excess planning of posts in the various organisational components. For example, if companies were reorganised or set up new, the existing posts would have to be demarcated and new posts created at the same time. The time overlap regularly increases the amount of excess planning. Various organisational measures within the Bundeswehr would produce constant changes here. On the other hand, assignments of service personnel outside of duty posts in “non-established posts”, also contribute to the promotion backlog. In addition to particularly prolonged unfitness for service, this could, for example, also include leaves of absence to perform functions on staff councils or in associations. In the area of leaves of absence alone, an average of 27 specialist service officers would be deployed outside of the respective posts. Although their posts would be filled because of ongoing tasks, they would not be backed up with an additional established post because of budgetary requirements.

In view of the serious impacts here, these organisational measures must be reviewed.

Civilian initial and follow-on occupational training

The civilian initial and follow-on occupational training for service personnel primarily serves to provide them with technical qualifications for their respective military deployment and thus directly to accomplish their mission. At the same time, this training and its measures increase the Bundeswehr's attractiveness as an employer, as servicewomen and men can use the knowledge they have acquired on the civilian labour market after leaving the service. On the cut-off date of 15 November 2024, a total of 5,363 servicewomen and men had taken part in training measures in the year under review, of which 4,166 had taken part in civilian initial and follow-on occupational training- and 1,197 in its further training.

In the year under review, the Bundeswehr offered a total of 460 of these training measures in 46 different occupational profiles and for qualification for 34 different civilian occupational qualifications. The civilian initial and follow-on occupational training measures are mainly performed by external civilian **training providers**. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management and the Bundeswehr's regional careers centres, however, constantly monitor and support these courses, in order to be able to remove any deficits in performing the training courses or with the test results, with the involvement of local stakeholders. There are nevertheless problems with individual civilian initial and follow-on occupational training measures:

- *For example, several participants in a civilian initial and follow-on occupational training measure on IT system electronics criticised unsuitable lecturers for their technical and teaching capabilities, a bad internet connection, a lack of teaching materials and a lack of test preparation by the training provider. The Ministry of Defence stated that it had already achieved significant improvements with the points criticised on the basis of previous information from the participants. It is also planning to further strengthen the close monitoring of the training provider in question, based on the petitions with future measures, in order to recognise problems early on and to take appropriate remedial action. The responsible careers centre reserves the right not to call up any further civilian initial and follow-on occupational training- measures from the current framework agreement from the training provider, and to examine a transfer to another location in the event of renewed comparable deficits in this training.*

Such precautions for quality assurance are particularly necessary for the technically demanding civilian initial and follow-on occupational training measures in the technical and IT area. **Failure rates** here continue to be above average. With an average failure rate of 5.1 percent in the civilian initial and follow-on occupational training courses, the highest failure rates with 33.3 percent were in the chemical-technical assistant, medical-technical radiology assistant, electronics technician for industrial engineering and operation control equipment assistant training courses. The average failure rate with the civilian initial and follow-on occupational training courses was significantly higher at 22.5 percent. The highest failure rate, for example, was 60 percent for further training to become a mechatronics industry expert. The test results in the further training area are indeed subject to greater fluctuations due to the lower overall number of participants. In view of the continuing demand for skilled workers and the use of resources, both by the Bundeswehr and by the participating service personnel, such high failure rates must be permanently reduced. The results of the organisational study and assessment of staffing requirements of the civilian initial and follow-on occupational training and Bundeswehr School of General Vocational Education support centres, which had already begun in 2022, were finally available in the year under review, but had not yet been evaluated by the Ministry by the end of that year. It is to be hoped that the findings will result in measures that reduce the failure rates.

Security clearance

Security clearances are required when recruiting as a servicewoman or man and in the further course of service for the performance of security-sensitive activities. In view of both the ongoing heightened security situation caused by Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine and the war in the Middle East, as well as the intensified efforts to counter extremism in the Bundeswehr in recent years, security clearances are an essential instrument for ensuring personnel operational readiness. The security clearances ensure that the Bundeswehr as a parliamentary army is based in its entirety on the values of democracy and respect for human dignity, and that its servicewomen and men actively stand up for these values.

At 67,976, the number of applications at the end of the year under review was once again higher than the previous year's very high level (2023: 62,809). The expansion of the scope of the check brings additional work in certain cases. Since 2022, the law has stipulated that service personnel who are or will be deployed in an assignment with particularly high security requirements must undergo a more intensive extended security clearance with security investigations. This provides, among other things, for shortened update and repeat security clearance intervals, as well as mandatory interviews with the people to be screened. In May 2024, the Ministry of Defence issued an ordinance specifying which assignments must be considered especially security-critical. These include assignments as a commando or combat swimmer for special forces missions and for computer network operations as part of cyber defence. By the end of the year, 37 applications had been submitted to run such an intensified and extended security clearance. However, as this expanded form of security clearance has only been applied since

the ordinance came into force in the middle of the year under review, the number is likely to increase significantly in the future.

All of this results in a steadily increasing workload for the **Federal Office of Military Counter-Intelligence (FOMCI)**, which is responsible for security clearances. Nevertheless, the personnel situation in the FOMCI personnel department responsible for security clearance procedures has not changed. As in the previous year, the occupancy rate in the year under review was 74 percent. In the entire FOMCI, the number of posts has increased since the start of 2024 compared to 2023. Nevertheless, a lack of budgetary funds prevents the filling of a lower three-digit number of posts.

With this in mind, it is encouraging that, despite this difficult situation, the FOMCI has on the whole succeeded in significantly increasing the number of security clearances carried out compared to the previous year by approximately 18 percent to 67,894 (2023: 57,375). Also, for the first time in a long time, the number of completed procedures in all types and levels of security clearance procedures (with the exception of protection against sabotage checks) was increased with internal optimisation measures – so much so that order completion almost matched order intake. Nevertheless, the processing times for the individual security clearance procedures, which were already excessive in some cases anyway, were mostly longer. The time for a level 1 security clearance in the area of classified information and sabotage protection has increased again by 13 weeks compared to the previous year, with an average duration of 28 weeks. In 2022, the average processing time here was still seven weeks. Unfortunately, as in the previous year, the time for the pre-employment screening process for soldiers is still seven weeks, and therefore still too long. A missing or incomplete security clearance will result in removal from initial training and participation in weapons training is not possible. This often results in the newly recruited service personnel concerned being unable to perform any duties in their parent unit. Having lost touch with their fellow soldiers in initial training and seeing no prospects, they sometimes immediately leave the Bundeswehr again.

The long **processing times** therefore have a considerable impact on the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr and on the career planning of the servicewomen and men concerned. Lengthy screening processes, particularly in security-relevant areas such as cyber defence, intelligence-collecting reconnaissance or special units, can mean that urgently needed personnel cannot be recruited, trained or transferred in time, thus exacerbating the shortage of personnel. There are also cases in which service personnel are already in a security-sensitive post, but are unable to perform their duties due to a lack of security clearance.

The necessary relief for service personnel in the affected areas is then further delayed, and there may also be delays in deployment planning for international assignments. Excessive waiting times often lead to considerable planning uncertainty for servicewomen and men. They make the extensive private arrangements regularly associated with reassignments, especially abroad, more difficult, including for family members. Promotions and career law disadvantages that only occur later are also sometimes the consequences of incomplete checks. Frustration and loss of motivation are often the result in such cases.

It is of course necessary to adequately check security-relevant findings, particularly in view of the increased demands on military security. The fact alone that the Bundeswehr received 132 applications in the year under review, 40 percent more than in the previous year (2023: 94), due to doubts about its loyalty to the constitution, illustrates this necessity.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, however, repeatedly receives reports of cases that show **inadequate processing** by the FOMCI and thus result in considerable delays. In the year under review, it again received numerous petitions in which service personnel complained about the time taken for their security clearances. The cases described in the petitions clearly illustrate the consequences that failure to complete a security clearance can have:

- *One petitioner complained that the procedure for the extended security clearance, which he absolutely needed for his daily work, had been going on for four years. As a result, he is considerably restricted in the performance of his duties. He is not allowed to move around the facility unaccompanied, for example. He was also unable to complete his training due to insufficient security clearance. It emerged that, in addition to the processing restrictions in the pandemic years 2020 and 2021, the FOMCI repeatedly had periods of up to twelve months in which the security clearance was not processed at all. Some five weeks after receiving the petition, the FOMCI issued the petitioner with a provisional result to allow him to perform a security-sensitive activity.*

- *Another serviceman criticised the fact that, three months before the start of his foreign assignment in 2024, which had been planned for several years, the government certificate required for this had not yet been submitted, although an update of his security clearance (SÜ 2) had already been activated in 2017. The Ministry of Defence conceded that, although security-relevant findings had made an in-depth check necessary, the excessive length of the procedure was due, among other things, to the FOMCI not processing cases for several years, especially in the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. Errors and friction in the cooperation between the agencies involved in the procedure had also caused further delays.*
- *Due to an office oversight, a petitioner's extended security clearance that had already been activated in 2019 was cancelled the following year. The FOMCI was therefore once again commissioned to carry out an extended security clearance in 2022. After its activation, processing was again suspended for almost a year. The FOMCI did not issue the petitioner a provisional result of the security clearance until the beginning of 2024, on the basis of which he can now be trained in line with his post.*

With regard to the long time of the security clearance procedures, the Federal Ministry of Defence regularly refers to the ongoing imbalance between the order situation and available personnel in the FOMCI department responsible for implementation and the effects of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The Ministry is well aware of the problems associated with the long processing times, and in the year under review appointed a special representative to identify measures to speed up the security clearance procedures, who submitted a corresponding report to the Ministry of Defence. Whether and to what extent this will result in a tangible success remains to be seen.

In some cases, however, processing errors in the careers centre also contribute to considerable delays in the procedures, as the following example shows quite starkly:

- *On the day of his successful aptitude assessment procedure, an NCO candidate in the NCO specialist career path in general specialist service had already submitted the security declaration for the pre-employment screening for soldiers (Ü 1) to the careers centre. Two weeks later, after he had agreed to be scheduled, for which an extended security clearance with security investigations (Ü 3) was required, the careers centre sent him the corresponding form. He began his initial training one month later. As the unit had not yet received a security clearance for the petitioner three weeks after the start of initial training, it contacted the careers centre to enquire about the status. It emerged that it had not forwarded the petitioner's first Ü 1 security declaration to the FOMCI and, contrary to the usual procedure, had not reminded the petitioner to submit the Ü 3 security declaration or otherwise processed the case. The unit removed the petitioner from initial training due to insufficient security clearance. The careers centre commissioned the FOMCI to carry out the pre-employment screening for soldiers on the same day, which was also completed within a week. The weapons training, however, had already progressed so far that the petitioner had to repeat the initial training. The start of his planned civilian initial and follow-on occupational training was therefore also postponed by six months. In principle, the responsible disciplinary superior will issue a forecast for all participating service personnel after six months of participation in such a measure. If the result is positive, the promotion to NCO follows. The delay can therefore produce career disadvantages for the petitioner.*

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has long criticised the lengthy processing of security clearances in cases where it is already clear from the application documents that successful completion is ruled out due to procedural obstacles. The Ministry of Defence had assured accordingly that the personnel involved in the application and recruitment process at all **careers centres** had been made aware of this once again. Such cases nevertheless also occurred in the year under review:

- *One petitioner reported that he had already pointed out that his wife was of Ukrainian origin at the interview for his re-employment at the careers centre. He had nevertheless been scheduled for a job for which he needed an extended security clearance. He and his family moved from northern to southern Germany to be able to take up the assignment. After more than a year, during which he had only been able to perform the tasks associated with his post to a very limited extent, the extended security clearance had been cancelled. The reason given for this was that his wife had not yet lived in Germany for five years, as required by the Security Clearance Check Act. He was subsequently relieved of his post. During the review of the facts, the Ministry of Defence established that the application documents had already produced procedural obstacles and therefore the security clearance procedure could not be successfully completed. The staff at the relevant*

careers centre were once again made aware of the issue. There was also no processing in the FOMCI for approximately one year either.

The hope for a significant simplification and associated acceleration of the procedures is also linked with the planned digitalisation of the security clearance. A project that has been running since 2020 provides for digital, media-seamless and, as far as possible, automated processing of the security clearance procedure for all parties involved. According to the Ministry of Defence, the project should be completed and be ready for use by the processors by mid-2025. In addition to adequate staffing, it is also important that the technical framework conditions are appropriate for proper security clearance processing.

Activities for foreign powers

In the recent past, cases have come to light in which non-allied foreign powers or their intermediaries have recruited former Bundeswehr career soldiers and former temporary-career volunteers specifically for the training of their own personnel. These activities harbour the danger that they will pass on specialist military knowledge acquired during their period of service to these foreign countries, which could pose a threat to the security of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Until now, retired career soldiers entitled to a service pension were only required to report activities outside of public service that were related to their official duties in the last five years before leaving military service and which could compromise the service's interests. However, the changed security situation in particular makes it imperative to prevent the outflow of military knowledge and information to foreign powers and their intermediaries.

The fact that the legislators have taken action here is a welcome development. In January 2025, they introduced a mandatory approval for taking up gainful activity or other employment for a foreign power or one of its intermediaries. In future, this will allow the employer to decide whether these infringe on the security interests of the Federal Republic of Germany. The mandatory approval applies for a period of ten years after leaving the Bundeswehr.

At the same time, the German Bundestag introduced a new criminal offence to the Military Criminal Code, according to which a custodial sentence of up to three years or a fine can be imposed for violations.

9. New military service model

A country that can respond to a possible attack with an excellently trained and equipped army is a deterrent to potential aggressors. Fundamental in this respect are data on who can be called upon in the event of a state of tension and defence, how suitable the respective people are and what qualifications they have. However, with the suspension of compulsory conscription for basic military service with the 2011 Act Amending Military Law, the structures for military registration, mustering and conscription for basic military service (in particular the 52 regional recruiting offices) have ceased to exist. There is therefore no longer a comprehensive situation report regarding the respective birth cohorts subject to compulsory military service and their willingness and ability to do military service, although compulsory military service for German men based on **Article 12a of the Basic Law** and the National Service Act continues to exist as a potential obligation.

It is therefore urgently necessary to reactivate the registration requirement stipulated in the National Service Act, irrespective of the state of tension and defence. This was provided for in the draft legislation presented by the Minister of Defence in the year under review, “for the modernisation of regulations governing legislative alternatives to military service and the introduction of a new military service”, which the Bundestag was not able to pass due to the early elections. In addition, following the example of the **Swedish military service model**, there should also be a mandatory survey of men eligible for military service, who were born after 31 December 2006. In particular, this should include the issue of willingness and ability to do military service.

Those not eligible for compulsory military service should at least be given the opportunity to participate voluntarily in the planned survey. This means they should also be contacted, but they should not be obliged to complete the questionnaire. The Ministry of Defence hoped that the survey, in conjunction with comprehensive information about career opportunities and prospects in the armed forces, would result in younger people engaging more intensively with military service and thus also increase the number of voluntary applications. The previous voluntary military service should be replaced here with a new form as “basic military service” with new content

and a modern training programme. This should enable everybody, regardless of gender, to do voluntary military service with a commitment period of 6 to 23 months. This new basic military service should be organised in such a way that it would be attractive and meaningful for young people, in other words, not a service without specific tasks. The armed forces must create sound framework conditions, such as infrastructure, equipment, material and suitable training with a sufficient number of instructors for those on military service, which includes an additional 5,000 service personnel per year in addition to those currently on voluntary military service (approximately 10,000). This is the only way to ensure that those doing voluntary military service enjoy a meaningful time, can be well trained and possibly even retained in the Bundeswehr.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces believes a **compulsory society year** for women and men is a positive long-term addition. This could be done with the Bundeswehr, in the social sector, climate protection, historical monument preservation, civil protection, with disaster relief, in rescue and security organisations or in other areas. In addition to the obligation to commit for one year, there is also the freedom to choose where this commitment would be utilised. Such a model would be good for all concerned, as it would broaden horizons, open up prospects and strengthen responsibility. It would benefit society, boost cohesion and promote togetherness. And for the Bundeswehr, it would awaken interest in the armed forces, promote awareness and appreciation of their important mission, and make it clear that it is the task of society as a whole to defend our peace and our freedom.

The new military service model proposed by the Ministry of Defence would have been a first step in the right direction. The next Bundestag should promptly discuss the topic, the introduction of a new military service and the compulsory society year, and make decisions.

In this context, it is important to talk about the role and tasks of the Bundeswehr and about security policy issues at **schools**, even if it is of course contentious or controversial. The work of the Bundeswehr's youth officers is not about recruiting young people here – it is about civic education. Meetings and mutual exchanges between young people and members of the Bundeswehr are crucial. The federal state of Bavaria is exemplary in this respect:

- *The law passed in the year under review to promote the Bundeswehr in Bavaria stipulates that schools work together with the Bundeswehr's youth officers within the framework of general civic education. The Bundeswehr's career counsellors, as well as authorities and organisations with security tasks, may also provide information about career and employment opportunities in their fields as part of school career orientation events.*

It would also be welcome if all state governments would compile comparable regulations.

10. Women in the armed forces

Women have long served in the Bundeswehr in all career paths, in all assignments and in all rank categories. In discussions, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces often meets servicewomen who, like their male colleagues, can draw on over twenty years of service. These seasoned women of the armed forces have asserted themselves with their expertise and experience, meeting the same criteria and performing their duty in an exemplary manner.

Nevertheless, outside of the medical service at 9.89 percent (2023: 9.68) and 13.62 percent overall, in other words, including the medical service (2023: 13.43), despite all the positive developments in recent years, women are still severely under-represented. The changes compared to previous years are so minimal that the figures are still only very slowly approaching the required share of 20 percent women, which is included as a goal in the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel redrafted in 2023. In the year under review, the share of female service personnel in the medical service was 45.24 percent (2023: 45.58), with an unchanged target ratio of 50 percent. In all other areas, the undiminished under-representation of female service personnel is even more tangible: The Army accounted for a female share of 7.70 percent (2023: 7.58 – 2022: 7.55), the Air Force accounted for 10.24 percent (2023: 9.68 – 2022: 9.49 percent), the Navy accounted for 11.35 percent (2023: 11.17 – 2022: 10.92) and the Cyber and Information Domain Service accounted for 10.56 percent (2023: 10.28 – 2022: 10.12). The Joint Support and Enabling Service recorded a female share of 11.72 percent and the newly formed support command recorded 8.94 percent. A total of 24,675 women served in the Bundeswehr in the year under review, including 1,831 doing voluntary military service (2023: 24,380 including 1,815 doing voluntary military service), which is only slightly more than in the previous year. The share of female career soldiers was 9.35 percent (2023: 8.85 – 2022: 8.28), and 15.43 percent for temporary-career volunteers (2023: 15.32 – 2022: 15.12).

The number of women doing voluntary military service was 17.70 percent (2023: 18.26 – 2022: 19.22). The development of these figures is also unimpressive when compared internationally – especially in view of the visibly increased target of 20 percent overall and 50 percent with the medical service.

Women in command

The significant under-representation of women in the Bundeswehr continues to have an impact on the top command levels. Servicewomen in high-ranking command positions are still so rare that they are known by name. Pioneering women also continue to be celebrated in public – in the year under review, for example, the first female three-star general, the first female battalion commander in the German Army and the first woman to head a combat unit in the Navy. These servicewomen and other female pioneers deserve full recognition for their achievements. The selective public attention, however, should not obscure the fact that these celebrated individual cases are not enough if the Bundeswehr wants to attract qualified women and retain them as leaders and role models for the next generation.

News from the medical service provides a more positive picture, where female medical officers have pushed to the fore as part of the maximum support programme. By April 2025, four servicewomen were assigned as clinic directors (A 16 salary group) at Bundeswehr hospitals. Furthermore, two funding decisions were also made for female senior consultants.

At the end of the year under review, a medical servicewoman was appointed head of department in the Ministry of Defence for the first time, which resulted in a promotion to lieutenant general (MC) and thus to three-star general. Nevertheless, the reality in the top ranks continues to be sobering. This will not change any time soon, as the number of servicewomen in the command levels below this has not visibly increased for years. At best, individual women move up, while others retire.

A total of 14 servicewomen hold ranks in salary from groups B 3 to B 9, with one B 9, one B 7 and one B 6. In addition to ten female doctors, there is now also one female navy captain in the B 3 salary group. There are a total of 40 servicewomen in the A 16 salary group, including five with the rank of colonel (A 16) and another with the rank of navy captain (A 16). Three colonels – pharmacy corps, and one captain – pharmacy corps, as well as five colonels – veterinary corps (A 16), are women. The steady increase in the number of servicewomen in the A 15 salary group is encouraging – 674 in the year under review (in 2023: 638). These now include 31 lieutenant colonels (2023: 25) and 6 commanders (2023: five). In the medical service area, there are 468 lieutenant colonels – MD, and 102 surgeon commanders – navy (2023: 445 and 98) as well as 36 lieutenant colonels – pharmacy corps, seven commanders – pharmacy corps, and 24 lieutenant colonels – veterinary corps (2023: 33, 8, 23). With these figures however, it should be noted that the classification of female doctors is based on their specialist qualification and is therefore independent of senior positions. They therefore do not provide any information about the career prospects of the accordingly classified female doctors.

In the year under review at least, the Bundeswehr still seems a very long way from having a female admiral or general outside of the medical service. The Ministry of Defence continues to attribute this to the **assignment pattern**. According to career path law, a promotion to the A 16 salary group is possible after 23 years of service at the earliest, taking the available posts into account. Since 2022, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management has been extensively examining the progress of female officers in operational service as part of the “Radar” instrument. With an annual report, it will monitor the career development of all female officers in operational service regularly in order to accompany and, if necessary, optimise their personnel development process. In addition to existing instruments, this report will contribute to achieving the objectives and targets of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel. The results of the first monitoring report for 2022, published in July 2023, were already very revealing with regard to the continued existence of the glass ceiling. Accordingly, female officers received a disproportionately high number of A to C overall grades and a development forecast above A 14 in the performance evaluations compared to their male colleagues at the same level. Male officers, however, were more often attested the B 3 or B 6+ development forecasts. The report states that, although participation in the National General/Admiral Staff Officer course (NGASOC) is not a mandatory requirement for such a development forecast, it is apparently used unofficially as a basis for assessing whether the person to be assessed is likely to reach the next level. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces also sees a similar situation in other configurations:

- *Couples in the military with family responsibilities sometimes complained that, in the rush hour of life, the career of a serviceman was promoted rather more than that of a servicewoman.*

Generally speaking, discriminatory intention cannot be proven. In addition, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management did not identify any gender-based discrimination in the Radar report with specific regard to the NGASOC training course. It has, however, rightly scrutinised this aspect more intensively. The fact that a **gender bias** might be a possible cause must also be ruled out. Unfortunately, the report does not address this issue in detail, but this aspect should be afforded close attention in the follow-up study, which has long since been prepared, but not yet released. If such suspicions are confirmed, mandatory training courses for superiors, particularly on gender-equitable performance evaluation, would be a suitable remedy.

More initiatives are required from the Bundeswehr, especially for servicewomen with family responsibilities who are seeking a career in the armed forces, so that they do not automatically favour the supposedly more family-friendly or simply more attractive working conditions in the civilian sector. It would certainly help if personnel discussions were held before a decision is made on whether the interests of the respective servicewoman or military couple could be taken into account in another way, without losing them for the Bundeswehr.

Greater attention should also be paid to the advancement of **female senior NCOs**. There is still no female first sergeant in many units. Of the 4,847 warrant officers I, 155 were female in the year under review, and 27 of the 593 warrant officers were female. With a total of 11,708 warrant officers II, 1,034 were women (of which 916 were female career soldiers), while 188 of the 1,442 senior chief petty officers were women (of which 170 were female career soldiers). The Bundeswehr should therefore also specifically monitor the sergeant and petty officer ranks. More servicewomen as company sergeants and with comparable responsibilities would significantly increase the visibility and role model function of women in the armed forces.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces also repeatedly receives petitions in which female leaders are criticised, sometimes justifiably, sometimes unjustifiably, by male service personnel for their **leadership behaviour**:

- *The petitioners are quick to question the servicewoman's competence as a leader. Successful female officers and pioneers in their field also report such feedback from male superiors or servicemen under their command. Some of them believe they had to do more to get to their position and that they are also subject to higher demands or expectations on their performance as leaders than their male colleagues.*

The existing communication courses for women in leadership positions at the Bundeswehr educational centre and as part of the mentoring programme are therefore to be welcomed, as is the support programme for individual leadership skills for female leaders studying at the Bundeswehr University Hamburg. Servicewomen should also be given access to **contact people** on a voluntary basis during their first platoon leader deployment. These mentors can, for example, provide support in the event of entrenched interpersonal conflicts in or with the units, or in dealing with experienced company sergeants and petty officers, in order to gain security of action or support early on.

Such support is often also about visibility for a favourable assignment pattern. If the course is set too late or a servicewoman's potential is recognised too late, it is often almost impossible to catch up.

- *This was recognised by the equal opportunity officers for the Navy Headquarters and the Flotilla 1, who adapted the Female Leadership Programme of the equal opportunity officers of the Bundeswehr University Hamburg, in place since 2023, to the Navy's needs. The starting point was the observation that navy servicewomen decide at an early stage in favour of or against a command assignment or remaining in the Bundeswehr. The "Be who you are as a servicewoman in leadership" programme was due to be piloted in January 2025 with the support of the Navy Chief of Staff with eight female officers in the ranks A 10 to A 13. Building on this, the deputy equal opportunity officer at Navy Headquarters is developing a coaching and mentoring programme for female junior and senior NCOs from the rank of petty officer upwards. The goal is to increase the number of female officers in specialist military service and operational service, and to open up the rank of warrant officer and positions such as squadron master-at-arms and master-at-arms on board to servicewomen outside of the naval medical service.*

In general, the further development of career support for women in the Bundeswehr and the measures of female empowerment, be it with the Bundeswehr's mentoring programme, the "Referenta" coaching programme and the "Masterclass – Women in Leadership" for maximum support, or the *Chef:innensache* and sustainable promotion

of women initiatives, are to be welcomed. The desire of many servicewomen to set up similar programmes for female senior NCOs and for servicewomen who negotiate with command personnel, such as equal opportunity officers and -equal opportunity women's representatives, must be supported.

At the same time, with the multitude of different measures and concepts, it is important not to lose sight of the overall concept to promote women at all levels. Much as the interest of men in having access to all programmes is understandable, programmes must be offered exclusively for women in order to eliminate the under-representation of female service personnel.

- *The petition of a superior, who would have liked to register a serviceman for a two-week internship offered by the Federal Office of Personnel Management for ten female officers, was therefore unsuccessful. There was no unequal treatment here. The decisive factor was, among other things, that participation neither granted direct access to a job in personnel management and nor was it a requirement for an assignment there. The Federal Office had also promised other work shadowing opportunities for all genders.*

For all this, however, the added value of also offering formats in which servicewomen and men can network with each other, should not be forgotten.

Women-specific recruitment

It is encouraging that the Federal Minister of Defence and the offices in its area of responsibility have resolved to recruit more women for the Bundeswehr and to utilise their potential. Particular importance is afforded here to genuine, women-specific recruitment and a stronger role for women in career counselling and public relations work.

- *This declaration of intent corresponds to concrete measures that, from the Ministry's point of view, have proven their worth. In addition to Girls' Day, this includes special event formats such as women's camps, in particular IT camps, girls' boot camps, "Women for Women" camps and "After-work girls' evenings". With a centralised "casting" for the civilian and military area, the share of all female employees will be increased to 30 percent by the end of 2026. Furthermore, female role models and multipliers are increasingly involved in recruitment alongside female career counsellors.*

Despite all the support for targeted advertising for women, format names such as "Girls Camps" and "Girls' Evenings" are likely to cause irritation. If we want to recruit experienced women and train them as soldiers, we shouldn't be looking for "girls" or "gals".

The increased efforts are not yet reflected in the application figures for the year under review. The share of women who applied to serve in the Bundeswehr was 16 percent in the year under review (2023: 16.7 percent; 2022: 17.8 percent; 2021: 17.7 percent). Eliminating the under-representation of women appears to be more difficult than before. The representative **population survey** published in 2024 by the Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Sciences shows that, in the year under review, at most eight percent of the women surveyed in 2024 could imagine working as a Bundeswehr servicewoman (2023 nine percent; 2022 six percent; 2021 seven percent). Young women's interest in military service consequently continues to stagnate at a low level, while among young men it rose by ten percentage points to 29 percent in the year under review compared to 2023 (2023 19 percent; 2022 19 percent; 2021 23 percent). This impression is reinforced in relation to women by the fact that, in their eyes, the Bundeswehr's appeal as an employer evidently continues to decline – only 36 percent of 16 to 29-year-olds consider it attractive for young people. According to the study author of the research report, this means a decline of 31 percentage points since 2018 and thus almost a halving in the 2018 to 2023 period.

The representation of women must be significantly further increased at all levels and in all committees, from advisory boards to the staff council and other interest groups. The Radar report and other monitoring formats that create **gender-based situation reports**, as well as target agreements that are liable to sanctions, can help to continue the fundamentally positive, albeit very slow, development of recent years. The Ministry's intention to focus more on formats that represent the everyday life of servicewomen realistically and without stereotypes is a positive development. One consequence of this may well be to initially focus more on areas outside of the medical service, which have already been popular with interested women in recent years and therefore offer more female role models. Nevertheless, the highly qualified servicewomen in the technical disciplines, such as the on-board technicians in the technical groups of the fleet squadrons, should not be overlooked as role models.

Attractive framework conditions

Those who would convince women to serve in the Bundeswehr, must not awaken unrealistic expectations. It is beyond annoying when things that are taken as a matter of course, such as suitable personal equipment, are simply not there. Correct and appropriate personal **protective gear** and equipment for exercises and deployments are essential:

- *For some years now, the Bundeswehr has not been able to provide sufficient protective vests in small sizes (such as S and XS). With the new personal equipment and clothing, including the MOBAST protective vest modular ballistic protective and carrying system, the problem will hopefully be solved by the end of 2025 – for the active forces in any case.*

The **clothing** must also be designed so it makes performing tasks easier, and not more difficult:

- *The Ministry of Defence and Bundeswehr Bekleidungsmanagement GmbH responded swiftly to a complaint by a servicewoman with 20 years of service experience that, among other things, there were still no small sizes available apart from size S for parts of the combat equipment. As a result, trousers in particular, whether combat trousers or cold protection, are more than ten centimetres too long. Knee protectors on these trousers are then at shin height and unusable for combat or working. At the same time, having the clothing altered is not permitted. Many smaller servicewomen therefore have no option but to purchase equipment privately, and take the risk of possibly not being insured in the event of a claim. In view of the servicewoman's imminent deployment abroad, Bundeswehr Bekleidungsmanagement GmbH immediately checked with the manufacturer for options to customise or modify the equipment that was complained about, so she could have custom-fit combat trousers and appropriate cold protection in good time.*
- *In the year under review, individual servicewomen also criticised the fit and stability of the bras provided by their employer. Some parts of the uniform were also not designed to fit wider hips or larger bust sizes, uniform trousers cut into the buttocks, rucksack clasps in front of the upper body could not be closed, and MOBAST protective vests were not adjusted to the body shape and were constricting.*

Research by the Bundeswehr Research Institute for Materials, Fuels and Lubricants with the goal of improving the fit of clothing and personal protective equipment for servicewomen using digital measurement and 3D- customisation provides good hope for change.

- *It is at least encouraging that the uniforms for pregnant women are now, for the most part, arriving on time.*

Servicewomen also reported shortages of **equipment** that is more suitable for women:

- *One example is the G36 assault rifle, which is available in short versions that some servicewomen can handle better. These are, however, generally not available for exercises, so servicewomen had to train with equipment that physically demanded more of them than their male counterparts.*

Equality and equal opportunities for servicewomen and men at all levels are also indispensable attractiveness factors and have a direct impact on the Bundeswehr's operational readiness. The new version of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel, which was passed in 2023, and the amendments made to it by the Zeitenwende article law, provide a good legal framework to achieve this goal. This applies in particular to the extension of reimbursement of costs to unavoidable childcare costs, rightly including those incurred at the place of employment, and the overdue amendment of the legal basis for the outdated Ordinance on Domestic Help for Soldiers. The new application rules for the Equal Opportunities Act and a modern version of this ordinance must now be finalised and implemented without further delay.

There is also an urgent need to further equalise the **career milestones** that build on each other, for everyone, because they have a direct impact on equal opportunity. This is also shown by the evaluation of the assignment pattern of officers within the Radar report. The ability to postpone participation in the two-year National General/Admiral Staff Officer course (NGASOC) in Hamburg by three years due to family obligations is a good initial development. This leeway, however, may not be sufficient for servicewomen who have several children in a row, and the NGASOC training course is not an option for many of them at this stage. This would then affect the evaluation of their suitability for favourable assignments. Further programmes are therefore necessary for such servicewomen, such as participation in the NGASOC in mobile or block form. The frequency of the selection

conferences, which is two years for commanders, for example, can also delay servicewomen and men's careers if they miss the deadlines, due to parental leave, for instance. Solutions are also required here.

Part-time work continues to be another career barrier. As the figures in the Federal Government's sixth progress report on the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel show, it is still predominantly performed by women. Part-time employees across all career paths and regardless of gender were also again rated less at the top, whereby this affected servicewomen in particular. This has not yet changed, despite all the training courses and further training on gender-equitable assessment.

This means that the **rush hour of life** has a double negative impact on many servicewomen with family responsibilities. The Ministry of Defence has partially recognised the disadvantages caused by family responsibilities by instructing the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management to record family-related obstacles that have resulted in a change to or cancellation of planned personnel measures. On this basis, locations will also be identified where further childcare measures are required.

In addition to this welcome step, the Ministry should also reconsider the career steps in the assignment pattern for all officers and address the following questions: Which posts really build on each other? What can be dispensed with? Which qualifications can also be acquired at or near the place of work or where the family lives, or can they be proven in some other way? What can possibly be made up for at another time, with an appropriate condition, for example? What content can be outsourced to digital training courses? What can be completed before or after the part of the programme that involves attendance in person? Which courses that involve attendance in person can be provided in blocks of three to six months, for example?

By making **career build-up** in the officer career path more flexible, the Ministry would be meeting its claim to understand equality of opportunities and gender equality as strategic long-term tasks in an exemplary manner. In addition to the consolidation of training and awareness-raising measures, which are also mandatory for prospective leaders, other important steps include the exchange of experiences between servicewomen, mutual solidarity and support, as well as functioning women's networks. Only then can female service personnel become visible for one another and act as role models and orientation within the relevant target group. Female superiors in particular should also look specifically at which servicewomen are high-performing and suitable for leadership roles and recommend them accordingly for further promotion.

Military equal opportunity officer and equal opportunity women's representatives

The new version of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel has strengthened the position and rights of the military equal opportunity officers and the equal opportunity women's representatives. It is particularly encouraging to see that the number of female representatives in the Ministry of Defence and at the division level has already been increased, and that it is now also possible to elect equal opportunity officers in departments below the division level. Despite all the understandable wishes for the office to be opened up to men and non-binary people interested in equal opportunity or for all members of the Bundeswehr to have an active right to vote, the restriction to female service personnel is still justified, given that the share of women is well below 20 percent. As the Ministry rightly pointed out, the logical consequence of an active right to vote for all would be that the majority would ultimately decide, and that majority is currently still made up of almost 80 percent men.

Unfortunately, even after the reform of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel, military equal opportunity officers still do not have the same rights in all respects as their civilian counterparts. This is especially evident with their **rights to information and disclosure**. Experienced equal opportunity officers also criticise the fact that the new regulations have still not reached all heads of departments. The right, which is already limited, to information in military disciplinary and complaints proceedings is still not implemented in many cases. Equal opportunity officers often find it difficult to advise their unit leaders because they are given too little information or are involved too late, despite their right to information in accordance with § 53 of the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel. The reason for this is often a divergent interpretation of the legal requirements. The new version of the application and implementation provisions of this act, which has not yet been adopted, should therefore include a specific list of the information that people are entitled to. This would significantly increase the quality of the advice provided by the military equal opportunity officers and thus also their added value for the unit leaders.

In the year under review, there was still a lack of information with the equal opportunity women's representatives regarding their rights, with equipment and the right to time off, for example. Such uncertainties could be reduced over time with an exchange of experiences in the network of the equal opportunity women's representatives and they could demand their rights more actively. The fact that the Bundeswehr Association has now also set up a project group for equal opportunity officers/equal opportunity women's representatives is therefore encouraging for the further networking of female stakeholders with one another and with members of other interest groups.

The tasks of the military equal opportunity officers and equal opportunity women's representatives are demanding and wide-ranging. They are in direct dialogue with the generals/admiralty or with the commanders of their posts, whom they must advise and convince. Taking on this position is, however, only attractive for suitable female service personnel if, despite legal regulations to the contrary (no favouritism or discrimination and tracking of career development according to reference groups), they do not feel they might suffer career disadvantages as a result.

11. Leadership development and civic education

The tenets of leadership development and civic education are the Bundeswehr's central leadership principle and are the basis for military service in a democratic constitutional state. They unite the values of human dignity, freedom, justice, solidarity and democracy, and require all service personnel to internalise and actively defend these values. As an ethical value system, leadership development and civic education balances the conflicting interests between the civic independence of servicewomen and men and the requirements of military order. The core of the concept is the idea of the citizen in uniform. It ensures that servicewomen and men are seen as bearers of fundamental rights with dignity and the individual right to respect. At the same time, leadership development and civic education emphasises the obligation of military superiors to exercise their command authority in the spirit of the free democratic basic order, and to promote the personal responsibility of service personnel. The requirement for obedience therefore does not end in unlimited submission but rather requires a reflective and responsible attitude.

To provide orientation here and to scale the **moral compass**, regular events are organised within the Bundeswehr to illustrate the principles of leadership development and civic education. One successful example is the Army's "My leadership development and civic education" initiative, which has been organising the "Challenge leadership development and civic education" programme every year for some time now. It is used to record outstanding behaviour or even initiatives of individuals or a group in their day-to-day duty. The best proposals are awarded a prize at the end. Another part of this initiative is the nationwide "*Tag im Zeichen unserer Werte*" (day dedicated to our values), which was launched in 2022 and is celebrated by the Army every year on 23 May – the day the Basic Law was proclaimed. As part of various activities and programmes, servicewomen and men spend a day actively and creatively exploring democratic values and their self-image as members of the Army. The central point of reference here is the moral compass extolled by the Army, which promotes fair and just treatment of all people and which incorporates the attributes of good leadership, such as camaraderie, loyalty, trust, bravery and discipline. German Army Headquarters uses various social- media- services to communicate and reinforce the principles of leadership development and civic education. The Army also uses online platforms to join the dialogue on ethical topics and current issues, thus also providing insights into the daily practice of leadership development and civic education. This presence also enables the Bundeswehr's values to be communicated to the general public.

With the knowledge that operationally ready armed forces require excellently trained, highly motivated, physically robust, well-equipped and resilient personnel in all respects, the **Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre** developed the resilience training for superiors and multipliers in the year under review, because, according to the Centre, individual resilience goes far beyond the concept of pure resilience. In fact, this also includes aspects of personality development, the soldier's self-image and personal contribution to the values and standards of the Basic Law. The training course is designed to help servicewomen and men realise that, by maintaining and strengthening their own resilience, they make a significant contribution to the resilience of the entire Bundeswehr.

Another key aspect of leadership development and civic education is the **error correction and dialogue culture** in day-to-day work. A good error correction culture creates space for openness and trust within the armed forces. Servicewomen and men must have the opportunity to admit errors and learn from them without having a general fear of penalties or personal disadvantages. A culture of openness strengthens cohesion and promotes the personal

and professional further development of each individual. In an open dialogue culture, the exchange between superiors and subordinates takes place on an equal footing. Only an honest and respectful dialogue prevents misunderstandings and builds a close bond among the troops, which also strengthens the trust of subordinates in the actions and decisions of superiors.

In this respect, the Navy has developed an exemplary **peer mediation training programme** designed to teach conflict moderation and resolution skills. Emerging conflicts between servicewomen and men and civilian employees are identified early on here, and amicable solutions are found. The goal is to strengthen cooperation and thus increase operational capability. The first training course took place in November 2023, so the initial positive effects for staff retention, in particular by improving the quality of the working environment, have now been recorded.

Leadership development and civic education also means living military virtues and upholding the integrity and values of the Bundeswehr in an exemplary manner. This includes a strong relationship of trust based on camaraderie. The Bundeswehr rightly does not tolerate violations of the duty of camaraderie, which even manifest themselves in **harassment**, as the following case shows:

- *Late in the evening, four corporals and lance corporals went to a fellow soldier's room to harass him into waking and getting out of bed. When he said he wanted to sleep because he had a cold, they pulled him out of a top bunk, threw him on the floor and flung his bedding in the corridor. After he had collected his things and gone back to bed, they pulled him out again, tied his hands and feet, put a gunny sack over his head and dragged him into the shower, where they left him under running water. They filmed the entire incident.*

This entirely reprehensible and despicable behaviour resulted in the immediate dismissal of those involved. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management rightly recognised as follows in the dismissal orders: "Due to your actions, all that remains of your previous positive achievements is an empty shell that is unable to tip the scales in your favour. Your positive achievements in the service to date, pale completely in the shadow of your actions."

The following case also shows how alarming the self-image of some fellow soldiers to "educate" their comrades is:

- *While the fellow soldier in question was away, a staff sergeant urinated in his shampoo bottle and placed it back in the shower room. He wanted to discipline him not to leave personal items unattended in the communal accommodation. The soldier used the dreadful mixture that afternoon. When he confronted the staff sergeant, he threatened him with consequences if he reported the matter. Disciplinary proceedings were initiated against the staff sergeant and he was transferred to another location at short notice.*

Instructors in particular must internalise the principles of leadership development and civic education. As role models, they play a central role in the Bundeswehr, because they introduce junior personnel to the armed forces and shape them in their role as servicewomen and men. The following behaviour reflects the opposite:

- *When joining his unit, a petitioner's platoon leader asked the recruits: "Am I a dolphin or why do I have to play with disabled people here?"*

Such unacceptable comments, as well as inappropriate language, shouting and swearing, ultimately demonstrate the inability of instructors to lead people, to instil the understanding required for mission accomplishment and to inspire recruits to serve in the armed forces. This is demonstrated by the following statements made by the petitioner in his petition:

- *"On the whole, my first impression of the Bundeswehr is rather disappointing, and I am glad the initial training will be over at the end of June. I have since abandoned the original idea of possibly extending my service as a temporary-career volunteer. Under normal, dignified conditions in my future parent unit, I may return to this plan again."*

Instead of **insulting and belittling** those they are responsible for, instructors should always question their own performance and check whether the behaviour of the recruits they criticise may be due to a lack of training or education and intervene accordingly.

In this context the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre programmes, "With the armed forces – first impressions count" (for the superiors of the initial and basic training units) and "Highlighting key features in initial training units" (for the training personnel deployed on the ground), must be emphasised here. In the courses,

participants learn methods for how they can apply modern leadership in the initial and basic training programmes. It is also about showing the servicewomen and men the special value of leadership behaviour and their importance as the first contact partners for the recruits. The courses make it clear to them that they are both representatives of the Bundeswehr for recruiting and retaining young people and multipliers for the training personnel. It is not uncommon for misleading statements or behaviour that is not aligned with the personal and social characteristics of today's generation to contribute to recruits leaving the Bundeswehr early. This training course is particularly welcome in the interests of young people in initial training, who have not yet had any contact with the Bundeswehr at all and are experiencing what it means to be a servicewoman or man for the first time.

Violation of the free democratic basic order

The free democratic basic order describes the values and principles on which the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany is based. It is enshrined in the Basic Law and comprises the essential constitutional principles that form the core of the democratic system and the rule of law. Servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr are particularly committed to these values and principles. This is established in their oath or solemn pledge, in which they swear or vow to courageously defend the rights and freedom of the German people. Service personnel must therefore actively combat any form of **extremism** that threatens the free democratic basic order. This includes both resistance against external enemies and combating extremist tendencies within the armed forces themselves. In recent years, the Bundeswehr has taken increased measures to identify and remove extremism from its ranks.

It is unacceptable for servicewomen and men to express political views, or to support or sympathise with aspirations or organisations that question, reject or attempt to remove the fundamental values and indispensable rules of the constitution:

- *For example, a captain in the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support had spied for a Russian intelligence service. In May 2024, the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court finally sentenced him to three years and six months in prison for secret service agent activities, among other offences. As a result, he lost his legal status as a soldier by operation of law and left the Bundeswehr.*
- *In April 2024, a naval officer was found to have allegedly taken part in a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the “heroic deeds of the Schutzstaffel (SS)” as part of a memorial march organised by the Hungarian branch of the far-right “Blood and Honour”- network in Hungary in 2018. In July 2024, the Bundeswehr initiated judicial disciplinary proceedings against the serviceman. At the same time, it temporarily suspended him from service and banned him from wearing the uniform. The investigations here were still ongoing at the end of the year under review.*
- *In February 2018, the Bundeswehr initiated judicial disciplinary proceedings against a former officer who actively supported the German Identitarian Movement as a member. In August 2018, the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney charged him before the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court, which imposed a disciplinary measure in April 2023 by withdrawing his pension. The Federal Administrative Court dismissed the appeal against this in April 2024 and confirmed the judgement of the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court.*

In its judgement, the Federal Administrative Court once again emphasised that the **duty of loyalty to the constitution** under the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act requires more than just a formally correct, otherwise uninterested, unemotional, inwardly distanced attitude towards the state and the constitution. More importantly, it requires that service personnel be willing to identify with the idea of the state they must serve, in other words, with the free democratic basic order. This does not exclude the right to criticise state phenomena and to advocate for changes to existing conditions, within the framework of the constitution and with the means provided for under constitutional law, as long as this does not call this very state and its constitutional basis into question. Service personnel must therefore clearly distance themselves from groups and aspirations such as the German Identitarian Movement. In its guiding principle, the Federal Administrative Court states that activities in favour of this movement constitute a breach of the duty of loyalty to the constitution.

In another case, the Federal Administrative Court also made a clear statement in the year under review on the duty of loyalty to the constitution by service personnel:

- *In June 2021, the Federal Office for the Military Counterintelligence Service informed the disciplinary superior of a senior NCO that the man had been classified as a suspected person with knowledge of failing loyalty to the constitution. He is said to have denied the Holocaust, among other things. Judicial disciplinary proceedings were initiated against the serviceman in July 2021. In June 2023, the charge was brought before the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court, which ruled in September 2023 that the man should be removed from service. The Federal Administrative Court dismissed the appeal lodged against this decision.*

In its judgement, the highest German Administrative Court reiterated that a soldier who denies the Holocaust and therefore trivialises the National Socialist regime, violates their duty of loyalty to the constitution and must be removed from service if the denial corresponds to their actual National Socialist convictions. Offences against the free democratic basic order rightly have serious consequences for servicewomen and men, provided they can be determined with the certainty required for punishment and proven as required by law. This also includes disciplinary and criminal measures. Corresponding offences can also result in dismissal from the Bundeswehr in accordance with the provisions of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act.

In 2023, the German Bundestag reformed the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act to be able to discharge service personnel from the Bundeswehr more quickly, particularly those who are pursuing or have pursued serious aspirations that are directed against the free democratic basic order. The recently introduced Paragraph 2a of Section 46 of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, which applies directly to career soldiers, also applies via corresponding references to both other active service personnel and to those on reserve duty (temporary-career volunteers, reservists and trainees as well as those doing voluntary military service).

The intention of this newly created **dismissal offence** is to be able to expedite the discharge of temporary-career volunteers in particular, even after their first four years of service, as well as career soldiers by an administrative act if they hold or support anti-constitutional aspirations in a serious manner, or if they have done so in the past. This eliminates the often lengthy judicial disciplinary proceedings with the goal of removal from the employment relationship. The Bundeswehr rightly does not tolerate or continue to pay service personnel in the armed forces who demonstrably have extremist aspirations.

In 2024, the Bundeswehr dismissed a total of four service personnel without notice due to extremist behaviour on the basis of the newly created **Section 46 (2a) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act**, of which two dismissals have not yet taken legal effect or been finalised. In 49 cases, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management rejected a dismissal or stopped the dismissal procedure. Since, in accordance with the principles of the rule of law, those affected do of course have the opportunity to have the dismissal decision reviewed by the courts as part of an appeals process, it remains to be seen whether the hoped-for acceleration will actually materialise. The coming years will show whether there will be a shift from judicial disciplinary proceedings before the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts towards legal proceedings before the administrative courts, which may take longer.

Irrespective of the recently created possibility of dismissing service personnel in accordance with Section 46 (2a) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, there are still other grounds for dismissal in order to adequately penalise extremist behaviour in individual cases. **Section 55 (5) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act** is one of these. According to this provision, temporary-career volunteers can be dismissed without notice in their first four years of service, if they have culpably violated their official duties and in particular also their duty of loyalty to the constitution and their continued service would seriously jeopardise military order or the reputation of the Bundeswehr. Altogether, the Bundeswehr dismissed 68 service personnel without notice due to extremist behaviour in the year under review, of which twelve dismissals have not yet taken legal effect or been finalised.

It should be noted that the Bundeswehr has been consistently combating extremism of all kinds for some years now with a range of effective measures. The Internal and Social Situation (Ger. abb.: ISoLa) department, which was set up at the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre in 2013 with the goal of establishing an early warning system, plays a special role here. Servicewomen and men are obliged accordingly to report relevant events via the central reporting system through official channels as a **reportable event**. This obligation and the Ministry of Defence's zero tolerance strategy, which has been pursued vigorously for several years now, have produced a consistent reporting behaviour among the troops. The reports are strictly followed up on, and where allegations prove to be true, they are penalised accordingly. Specific prosecution and punishment have a deterrent effect and strengthen the sense of duty of those who behave in accordance with the law. How these cases are dealt with among fellow soldiers has changed accordingly. The incidents are discussed more often, and facts and

behaviour are evaluated critically. Servicewomen and men point out misconduct to each other and distance themselves from it, as well as from the accused.

In 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces recorded a total of 275 reportable events (2019 to 2023: 197, 229, 252, 203 and 204) with references to extremism, which were submitted by the Ministry of Defence. In the “Extremist behaviour, incitement to enmity and hatred and violation of the free democratic basic order” reporting category, this was a total of 252 cases (2023: 177). In the 2019 to 2022 years under review, there were 178, 211, 226 and 185 cases respectively in this category. On the other hand, there were a further 23 reportable events (2019 to 2023: 19, 18, 26, 18 and 27), which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces assessed as having links to extremism, but which were reported by the troops, in the “discrimination” or “impermissible political activity” categories, for example.

The reportable events here are not exclusively cases related to the phenomenon of **right-wing extremism**, but most of them indeed are. Very often, this is about verbal gaffes and right-wing extremist expressions of interest, on and off duty, in messenger services such as WhatsApp and Telegram and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, X and Snapchat, playlists and songs, items of clothing or tattoos, previous or current membership in anti-constitutional associations and organisations, and other expressions of sympathy with anti-constitutional aspirations and groupings:

- *A military service volunteer was repeatedly observed giving the Hitler salute in uniform in the corridor of the accommodation building outside of duty hours and making derogatory, loud racist and anti-Semitic remarks in the presence of several service personnel. The man received a severe disciplinary fine and was dismissed from the Bundeswehr without notice.*
- *For some time now, the words of the song “L’amour toujours” have been changed and the slogan, “Germany for Germans, foreigners out”, has been sung to the tune. Videos of it are shared frequently on social media. This phenomenon attracted particular attention in 2024 with the slurs of customers in a bar on the island of Sylt, some of whom sang racist slogans accompanied by the Hitler salute and filmed themselves doing so. Such slurs have also been heard from Bundeswehr servicewomen and men, at both work-related and external events. Various incidents of this kind were reported in the year under review. The respective disciplinary offences were punished accordingly when the allegations were proven to be true. The measures taken ranged from simple disciplinary measures such as the imposition of severe disciplinary fines to final and absolute dismissal in accordance with Section 55 (5) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act.*
- *According to several witnesses, a student at a Bundeswehr university repeatedly insulted servicewomen and men and queer people, made derogatory remarks about people from South Africa and gave the Hitler salute while shouting “Sieg Heil”. He is also said to have made disparaging remarks about members of the Federal Government. The serviceman denies the allegations. Judicial disciplinary proceedings were initiated against him in October 2024. The investigations were still ongoing at the end of the year under review.*
- *A participant on a reserve officer cadet training course had brought stickers from organisations classified as right-wing extremist, namely the Identitarian Movement, the Junge Alternative and the Danubia fraternity, into the barracks. During the subsequent investigations, further information came to light, which indicated that the serviceman was not loyal to the constitution. A severe disciplinary fine was ultimately imposed on him and he was dismissed from the Bundeswehr.*
- *Thanks to an attentive civilian employee, two enlisted soldiers who had made statements such as “I’m going to buy a car with an interior carburettor for gassing, it’s about time, we need something like that again” or “Jewish piss” and “that fits like a Jew in a concentration camp” were caught. Both men were banned from wearing their uniforms- and performing their duties immediately after their questioning. They left the Bundeswehr shortly afterwards at the end of their service.*
- *In a conversation about the war in Israel and Gaza, a soldier of Turkish descent is said to have remarked to fellow soldiers that Adolf Hitler had unfortunately not gassed or killed all Jews. He was banned from wearing the uniform and performing his duties, and his dismissal was requested. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management had not made a decision on the dismissal request by the end of the year under review.*
- *In the presence of other service personnel, a Muslim lance corporal is said to have stated that he would prefer a caliphate to the current Federal Government, that he would be sick if it was against Hamas, but he would be in favour of it if it was against Israel and that he wished for “Adolf’s” return “so the stupid Israelis would*

shut up”. He was also banned from wearing the uniform and performing his duties, and his dismissal was requested. Here too the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management had not made a decision on the request for dismissal by the end of the year under review.

The reasons often given by the accused in their questioning or in their submissions for such behaviour that is relevant under disciplinary and criminal law are wide-ranging. Some try to justify their misconduct by saying they didn't mean it, that it was just a joke or that they were simply misunderstood. It is generally found that such incidents are often based on a certain group dynamic stemming from social media or local gatherings. The need for acceptance and recognition often encourages corresponding misconduct. Alcohol also plays a major role, as on the one hand it removes inhibitions, and on the other hand it results in many of those accused no longer remembering specific events afterwards. In their questioning and under the threat of disciplinary punishment, service personnel often distance themselves from any extremist (right-wing) views and deny having internalised such attitudes. They say they did not think about the effect of the “jokes” and the slogans and images used, and interpreted the content differently or did not think it was unconstitutional. Such excuses, however, routinely fail and, as a result of the investigations, are rightly regarded by the competent authorities as mere **defensive lies**.

The Ministry of Defence promotes counter-extremism by continuing to focus on prevention measures, particularly in the area of training and further training. This is to be welcomed, as it raises awareness of the issue and ensures that the values of the free democratic basic order are further consolidated within the Bundeswehr, which in turn helps to prevent the emergence of extremist thinking and ideas.

Superiors are required to guide those servicewomen and men who are at risk of slipping into the extremist milieu with exemplary leadership and close **command supervision**. It is also essential to raise superiors' awareness about punishing extreme (right-wing) misconduct immediately:

- *A soldier in initial training had drawn a swastika on the fatigue cap of a fellow soldier. He confessed. However, the process was not finalised by the initially responsible disciplinary superior. Only after the soldier was reassigned did the new disciplinary superior submit a report. After consulting with the responsible Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney, he filed a complaint with the public prosecutor's office and applied to the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management for the soldier to be discharged from service at the end of his probationary period rather than serving his full term due to a lack of suitability. The Federal Office granted this request, so the soldier had to leave the Bundeswehr again.*

Regular training courses, civic and personal education events and legal lessons can help to raise awareness of the issue.

On this basis, it is therefore to be welcomed that the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences has conducted the “Army in Democracy” **study** and a pilot study on the evaluation of civic education in the Bundeswehr over several years. The Ministry of Defence is still evaluating the results of these research projects with the participation of various committees before the results are published. A date for this had not yet been set at the end of the year under review. Although it is understandable that the conscientious and careful completion of such a study project takes time, it is nevertheless surprising that the project had still not been completed in 2024. Back in 2021, the Ministry informed the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces that the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences had been commissioned to conduct corresponding studies. It would therefore be very welcome if the results of these research projects were finally published in a timely manner.

After several years of preparatory work, a draft regulation on **personal development** was also submitted to the participation committees in January 2024, which is intended to bundle the various dimensions of ethical, intercultural, civic and historical education. The regulation has not been published yet. Whether or not it will be sufficiently comprehensible and workable in view of the complexity and scope of the various dimensions it aims to bundle will be determined. It therefore remains to be seen whether the regulation will actually contribute to an improvement in civic and personal education.

In view of the paramount importance of such education for servicewomen and men, it is of course encouraging that the “Ethical Education” general regulation was published at the beginning of 2024. The regulation defines the tasks, areas and goals of ethical education in the Bundeswehr and sets guidelines for its implementation. It is based here on a holistic and self-motivating understanding of education, which is oriented on the ideal of the free, self-determined personality and sees education as the result of individual effort and acquisition. Character guidance is already a well-established practice in this context. It has proven to be a good idea in every respect for

military chaplains and counsellors to give these lessons, as they are outside of the military hierarchy and yet frequently are no strangers to the servicewomen and men. The independence of teaching staff in particular should make it easier for young military personnel to refine their own moral compass.

In addition to disciplinary superiors, the **Federal Office of Military Counter-Intelligence (FOMCI)** has a central role to play in combating extremism in the Bundeswehr. For the purposes of counter-extremism, the office collects and evaluates information and intelligence within the scope of its statutory remit to identify extremists in the Bundeswehr early on, monitor such individuals and prevent their aspirations.

In the year under review, the Federal Administrative Court further emphasised the importance of the Military Counterintelligence Service for consistent action against extremism within the Bundeswehr. It found that the documents provided by a servicewoman or man during questioning by the Military Counterintelligence Service after being instructed about the voluntary nature of the information can generally be used as evidence in judicial disciplinary proceedings. In particular, there was no need for further instruction that they may also be used for disciplinary purposes. It is therefore surprising that a decision was made by the south Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court after the judgement by the Federal Administrative Court. The adjudicating chamber came to the conclusion here that the statements made by the soldier to the employees of the Military Counterintelligence Service could not be used in the judicial disciplinary proceedings, as no instruction had been given in accordance with the Military Disciplinary Code nor had reference been made to possible disciplinary consequences. This judgement is legally binding.

In 2024, the FOMCI conducted a total of 305 (2023: 307) active counter-intelligence operations. The relevant cases were distributed across the different phenomena areas as follows: Right-wing extremism 219 (2023: 178), Reichsbürger (Reich citizens) and Selbstverwalter (sovereign citizens) 5 (2023: 20), Islamic extremism 33 (2023: 32), left-wing extremism 11 (2023: 15), foreign-related extremism or extremism by foreigners 31 (2023: 47), Scientology organisation 1 (2023: 1) and constitutionally relevant delegitimation of the state 5 (2023: 14). Additionally, the joint working group of reservists, founded in August 2017 on the initiative of the FOMCI with the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, recorded and discussed a total of 1,028 new extremism-related cases at twelve meetings in the year under review (2023: ten meetings and 1,193 cases).

In the context of **counter-extremism**, however, there is always the risk of possible instrumentalisation and misuse, as the following case shows:

- *A serviceman's unit received a written notification from the Military Counterintelligence Service that there was evidence against him based on video footage. He is said to have raised his right arm in the Hitler salute at an unknown time and in an unknown place in front of a First or Second World War memorial while wearing a Bundeswehr uniform. However, in the course of the disciplinary investigations that followed, the accused soldier could not be identified in the footage. In his questioning as a serviceman, on the other hand, he was able to credibly explain that a person from his private environment may have denigrated him due to a private conflict. As a result, the responsible disciplinary superior therefore logically refrained from imposing disciplinary measures, as he had not been able to establish a disciplinary offence.*

With the reporting of data and information by the Military Counterintelligence Service to disciplinary superiors, in view of such incidents, it should always be borne in mind that, if findings are communicated too early, disciplinary superiors are unnecessarily forced into disciplinary investigations, and this can have considerable consequences for the servicewomen and men concerned in terms of career and status law. Ultimately, the accused will not be promoted during disciplinary or criminal investigations and proceedings. This in particular means that they cannot be promoted to a higher office and, under certain circumstances, may not take part in training or deployments abroad either.

The **time it takes the FOMCI to process suspected cases** is often criticised. The processing time had a particularly negative impact in the following case:

- *In July 2021, a senior NCO took up the post of chairman of a branch of Junge Alternative für Deutschland (young alternative for Germany), which has since been categorised as right-wing extremist. The FOMCI did not inform the man's disciplinary superior of this until October 2022. At the same time, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management was also informed of the facts of the case as a result of this notification. In November 2022, it immediately initiated proceedings to dismiss the soldier without notice in accordance with Section 55 (5) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, to be able to dismiss him before the expiry of the four-year period on 31 December 2022. However, due to further delays, the dismissal order was not*

handed over before this period expired. In the meantime, the soldier has left the Bundeswehr for another reason.

Investigations into the reasons for the late notification of the superior revealed that the Military Counterintelligence Service had given higher priority to other measures as part of processing suspected intelligence cases. The unsatisfactory personnel situation here also resulted in the soldier's dismissal failing.

If a suspected case takes too long to process, this may also constitute an unreasonable delay in individual cases as set out in Section 101 (2) Sentence 1 of the Military Disciplinary Code, as decided by the south Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court in October 2024. Pursuant to Section 101(1) of the Military Disciplinary Code, a servicewoman or man may apply to the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court for a decision if they have not been served with the bill of accusation in judicial disciplinary proceedings within six months of being served with the initiating order. If the court establishes an unreasonable delay in response to this application, it will set a time limit within which either the bill of accusation is to be submitted or the proceedings are to be discontinued. According to the decision given, the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney is deemed to be in default even if the reasons for the obstruction of proceedings are within the sphere that the employer can influence and for which the employer is responsible. In the court's opinion, this also includes the FOMCI.

The Military Counterintelligence Service sometimes uses the help of the **military police** to conduct interviews as part of intelligence operations. In 2022, allegations arose in this context that the military police had exceeded their authority by physically patting down suspects. Unlike the federal and state police forces, military police forces do not yet have an expressly standardised right to conduct physical searches. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces had called for existing regulatory gaps in the performance of military police duties with regard to searching service personnel and for authorisation for traffic control in the military traffic service to be swiftly closed. This will give the military police more certainty of action in performing their duties. In the year under review, the Ministry of Defence announced that it had identified further solutions currently being implemented as part of the ongoing investigation. However, the creation of an independent special military police law is especially complex. The Zeitenwende article law contains a legal basis for processing personal data in the military police system as an immediate measure. The responsible Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport is also examining the specification of the lack of authority to give directions to civilian road users by amending the road traffic regulations. The creation of an authorisation rule for low-threshold powers, such as the identification of suspects, even without the establishment of military security areas, will also continue to be pursued as a solution. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces welcomes these efforts and hopes for a prompt solution in the interests of the military police forces.

The Bundeswehr is an institution that fully defends Germany's democratic values without restriction. It must be clear to all members of the Bundeswehr that extremism of any kind has no place in the armed forces, and will be pursued and punished with every means available under the rule of law. Combating extremism within its own ranks remains a constant challenge for the Bundeswehr. Nevertheless, the measures taken so far are proving successful, so it is encouraging to note that, as in previous years, extremism in the Bundeswehr only affected a small minority of servicewomen and men in 2024. The vast majority of members of the Bundeswehr stand firmly behind the Basic Law and the free democratic basic order.

Offences against sexual self-determination

A non-discriminatory environment and a climate of mutual respect and trust should be a matter of course. Superiors and instructors are continuously required to ensure this. Gender-based stereotypes, inappropriate or even sexist remarks or sexual assaults, including and especially in a persistently male-dominated environment, must remain taboo. The training courses and awareness-raising sessions offered at the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre and at the Bundeswehr Educational Centre for leaders and other personnel to teach and multiply gender and equality skills are an important building block for this. The fact that work is still required was demonstrated by petitions and reports from servicewomen who complained about sexist behaviour. The following case is an example:

- *One servicewoman stated that she had been sexually discriminated against and verbally sexually harassed at a training centre. Her instructor had confronted her several times with degrading, insulting and vulgar remarks in front of other course participants during two training courses. Several witnesses confirmed her report, so the command authority saw evidence of behaviour in breach of duty. The accused serviceman was*

relieved of his duties as an instructor and lecture hall manager until the conclusion of the judicial disciplinary proceedings and the command personnel were made aware.

Altogether, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces received 48 petitions on sexual misconduct in the year under review (2023: 49 – 2022: 34 – 2021: 23). She also monitored investigations into 376 reportable events concerning suspicion of criminal offences against sexual self-determination (2023: 385 – 2022: 357 – 2021: 303). A significant number of the incidents here occurred under the influence of alcohol. The number of cases in the year under review was therefore almost at the same level as the previous year. Each of these cases is one too many, and yet the high number of reports could also be an indication that, unlike in the past, offences against sexual self-determination are increasingly being reported and are thus becoming the focus of attention. It is also argued again and again that the **number of unreported cases** in the Bundeswehr could at most be low due to the reporting requirement, according to which members of the Bundeswehr are generally required to report possible indications of a reportable event to their superiors without delay, as long as doing so does not mean self-incrimination. Incidents that were not reported by those affected thus also become known in retrospect. On the other hand, the experiences of the military equal opportunity officers and equal opportunity women's representatives, as well as research and investigations by journalists, suggest that the number of unreported cases could be high despite the obligation to report them.

- *Some petitions also indicate that not all incidents are reported. Navy equal opportunity officers report that the, “What happens on board, stays on board!” principle, is often still applied on boats and ships – also in order to keep the “best men” on board and protect their families.*

The incident, however, is certainly not over for those affected when they disembark. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces therefore welcomes the Minister of Defence's decision to commission the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences with a scientific **unreported cases investigation** into the causes, extent and consequences of sexual misconduct in the Bundeswehr. At the same time, she encourages all affected service personnel to report incidents or to contact the “Discrimination and violence in the Bundeswehr” point of contact (also anonymously). If possible misconduct does not come to light, the Bundeswehr cannot perform its duty of care and meet its obligation to investigate suspected cases and punish offences appropriately. And then nothing changes for those affected or their fellow soldiers; the effects on the inner structure remain hidden. There is no discussion of the negative consequences for mutual trust, camaraderie and commitment. It is therefore all the more important and urgently necessary that the Ministry of Defence now also intends to use the unreported cases study to look at how the confidence of those affected in the reporting system can be strengthened and sexual misconduct effectively prevented.

It is also encouraging that the Bundeswehr finally has an adequate **guideline** for correct and appropriate investigations with the “Dealing with sexuality and sexual misconduct” service regulation, which came into force in September 2023. In most cases, the allegations result in thorough investigations. Many statements from the posts make it clear that the units are dealing with such accusations more seriously and with more certainty of action. On the whole, the quality of the statements has increased visibly.

This was particularly evident with immediate, protective and welfare measures for those affected, with the issue of physical separation from the accused, for example. Most superiors now take these aspects into account from the outset and take greater care to ensure that such measures do not unilaterally affect those making the report. However, the implementation of a physical separation, in a university environment or in the units or battalions, for example, was sometimes limited:

- *Proceedings were pending before the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court against an instructor for sexual misconduct towards several young female recruits during initial training. The accused served in the same unit, but at a different location. Nevertheless, one of the servicewomen met him both at a unit event and during a joint exercise, which was an immense psychological strain for her. The instructor was consequently excluded from further unit events and redeployed away from the training area. He felt humiliated and prejudged by the redeployment. Even if extensive precautions had been taken in advance with the exercise to avoid a meeting between the servicewoman and the instructor, it would have been more expedient for both parties if the serviceman had not participated in the exercise. To prevent it happening again, the instructor was assigned to another unit until the servicewoman was close to the end of her service.*

The significantly earlier integration of **legal advice** under the new regulation reduces errors in many cases and, on the whole, creates more certainty of action and comparability, but apparently it is not always done:

- *Based on petitions and reportable events, it is evident that legal advice is not always sought, at least in cases of verbal sexual harassment. Opinions also appear to differ widely as to what behaviour is considered worthy of punishment by disciplinary superiors and Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorneys, what is referred to the public prosecutor's office, what requirements are placed on the nature and scope of investigations, and how evidence is assessed.*

The following case shows a different understanding within the same unit:

- *According to a report by the equal opportunity women's representative, a sergeant is said to have asked a servicewoman about her sexual preferences when they were working together on duty, presented her with a sex toy and a condom and said she could have it if she wanted it. The battalion commander took over the investigation, as the battery commander had also been accused after he found the allegations to be less than credible and had not filed a report. From the battalion commander's point of view, it was not possible to prove a disciplinary offence beyond doubt. Nevertheless, he urged the serviceman to adapt his behaviour as a superior in order to avoid "misunderstandings in official dealings". The servicewoman subsequently asked to be reassigned at her own request. After the incident had already been reported as closed, the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney suspended the preliminary investigations. The division commander, however, had stated during these investigations that the serviceman had indeed committed a disciplinary offence. He classified the accuser's statement as credible and emphasised the psychological consequences of the superior's behaviour towards her. In view of the serviceman's other merits and the "only" verbal misconduct in one single case, a simple disciplinary measure was deemed still appropriate but could no longer be imposed due to the statute of limitations. The division commander strongly disapproved of the offence and also urged the serviceman to behave properly when not on duty as well.*

On the whole, it is clear that the number of reports of verbal sexual harassment is steadily increasing – or that verbal misconduct is now also being reported. This is only logical. The new regulation clearly expresses the principle of **zero-tolerance**. Every inappropriate remark and every sexually charged joke can result in a servicewoman or man feeling discriminated against or degraded, losing trust in the unit or superiors, and in camaraderie suffering. Sexist remarks are therefore not a trivial offence, but rather directly jeopardise the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr, and accordingly superiors must closely examine if inappropriate language or sexist topics of conversation are glossed over or played down as "men's talk". It is the responsibility of disciplinary superiors to unequivocally ensure a non-violent and non-discriminatory climate.

It is therefore to be welcomed that the "Dealing with sexuality and sexual misconduct" general regulation was a **compulsory subject** for training courses in the year under review. These helped to raise awareness of the issue:

- *At the Eckernförde naval base, servicewomen and men from Flotilla 1 came together as focus groups on the topic of "Gender equality and male allyship". They dealt separately with the situation of women, everyday sexism and sexual assault in the Navy, among other things. While the servicewomen without exception had experience of sexual harassment and/or assault in the Bundeswehr and many reported experiences of discrimination, the servicemen were hardly aware of such circumstances. The two groups also assessed the reporting system differently but independently argued in favour of a critical review of the current reporting and complaints system, in cases of sexual assault among others. In particular, the focus was on practical relevance, independence, effectiveness and trustworthiness. They also called for an increase in the number of spokespeople and mediators who are trained and as independent as possible, and who can support and mediate in cases of gender-based violence or discrimination. The external speakers concluded that the frequency of gender-specific devaluation, exclusion and sexual assault, as well as a lack of sensitivity in the Bundeswehr appeared to be high, and that a large number of unreported cases could be assumed. They recommended training and networking programmes, among other measures. Further editions of this format will follow at the Navy damage control operational training centre, Naval Air Command, Navy Headquarters and Flotilla 2.*
- *At the Military Police and Staff Duty School in Hanover, servicewomen and men dedicated two days to the training topics of the year and, in particular, the "Dealing with sexuality and sexual misconduct in the Bundeswehr" general regulation. External science and practice speakers explained interesting facts and answered questions from the service personnel in a series of seminars over several days. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces informed herself of the topic's seriousness in conversations with the military police.*

Discussions during troop visits and conferences suggested that not all units dealt intensively with the regulations governing sexual misconduct in the year under review. While some of these provided appealing formats, others do not appear to have offered any civic education events or the training courses were restricted to a small group of people. To be effective, however, they must reach all servicewomen and men and must be compulsory. It is also important to make it clear where the red lines are and which manners and behaviour are unacceptable. This can also include instruction on alcohol consumption on Bundeswehr premises. It is not without good reason that one section of the general regulation and part of its appendix are dedicated to the **prevention of sexual misconduct**. Right at the beginning, the regulation urges all members of the Bundeswehr to treat each other with respect and to protect the rights of all. The following case stood out positively in this context:

- *A course participant received a severe disciplinary fine due to several sexist remarks, one of which was made in class. According to the disciplinary superior, he also explained to him the consequences of his misconduct and worked towards avoiding it in the future. The course participants were informed about the obligation to report such incidents immediately and were made aware of how to deal with sexual misconduct. This raising of awareness is now regularly refreshed in the classroom, and command supervision was also increased.*

It is even better when servicewomen and men act courageously against sexual misconduct:

- *A 19-year-old serviceman saw a man assaulting two young female civilian students during a bus journey. To prevent him from harassing them, he joined them and averted the man's subsequent attack. He stayed at the scene until the police arrived and was available as a witness in the criminal proceedings.*

Time and again, superiors do not report sexual misconduct or only make a report far too late, after they have already conducted interviews or other investigations. This kind of behaviour has no basis in the applicable regulations, according to which a report must be submitted immediately on becoming aware of the incident and before beginning investigations. Whether or not the superior believes the accusation is justified is absolutely irrelevant. Exertion of pressure that prevents a report or causes it to be withdrawn is a violation of the reporting regulations. Training on the reporting system should also include the fact that the timing of a report should not influence how seriously the person concerned will be taken. On the contrary, with sexual violence victims frequently only report what they have suffered after they have come to terms with the events, out of shame, fear of negative consequences or the end of their career, repression or for other reasons. Taking this as an indication of a lack of plausibility or even credibility is counter-productive and can contribute to the victimisation or re-traumatisation of those affected and to a loss of trust in the person doing the questioning. Victimisation means those affected are forced into a victim role by their social environment. The Bundeswehr offices contacted for support should discuss the fact that late reporting can make it more difficult to clarify the allegation with the affected people.

It is particularly serious when allegations of sexual misconduct against instructors are confirmed:

- *An instructor on an officer training course was banned from promotion for 36 months and had his pay reduced for twelve months by decision of the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court because, as a superior and instructor, he had made several deliberately sexually motivated comments and thereby violated the dignity of a servicewoman. In further cases, he had made crude remarks during gunnery training and on night firing exercises over the interphone system. The court found that it had been a “spiral of comments” and that the superiors had not shown the instructor any limits.*

Superiors must give very specific information in such cases and must put a stop to this behaviour immediately.

As a matter of course, well-trained, experienced personnel should **question** people compassionately, sensitively and discreetly. Without support, however, superiors are not always able to act in an objective and unbiased way. It is therefore a good idea to involve the psychosocial network at an early stage, in particular troop psychology and social services, the military equal opportunity officers, military chaplaincy or the “Discrimination and violence in the Bundeswehr” point of contact. If those affected and the accused belong to the same unit, superiors should also seek external advice for the investigations. As support, the military equal opportunity officers suggest, for example, involving the military police, which is indeed a good suggestion. This, however, requires that the military police are continuously trained in the specifics of investigations into sexual misconduct, in particular in dealing appropriately with possible victims, questioning techniques and how to give evidence. Research shows that it is particularly important with investigations to avoid re-victimisation and re-traumatisation of the victim,

to challenge clichés and stereotypes, to question without bias and to treat victims with the necessary sensitivity. Those asking questions are under pressure not to make the experience even worse for the victims. Inappropriate treatment of victims can have further serious consequences – such as illness, unfitness for service, or a permanent loss of trust in superiors or colleagues. How the incident is handled immediately after it becomes known can be decisive in determining whether victims can be kept in the unit.

Victim protection is a command and control task, as is clearly stipulated in the “Dealing with sexuality and sexual misconduct” general regulation. Presumed victims must be specially protected from avoidable further consequences of the incident and the subsequent criminal and disciplinary proceedings, and informed in accordance with the guidelines. This is also important because, unlike civil criminal law, victim protection is still barely regulated in disciplinary law.

It is important that proven offences be promptly followed by penalties. In the year under review, there were **dismissals** in some cases because of sexual misconduct:

- *For example, in the case of a military service volunteer the Bundeswehr swiftly dismissed him during his probationary period for several breaches of duty. The reason was comments with sexual or derogatory content, physical touching and implied touching of four female colleagues over two weeks. Like other witnesses, they had perceived his behaviour as sexually harassing, disturbing or unpleasant. The serviceman also received a disciplinary fine. The investigations into sexual harassment were passed on to the responsible public prosecutor's office. The serviceman spent his final weeks on duty physically separated from the victims. The servicewomen were offered the appropriate support services.*

Even if a simple disciplinary measure can no longer be imposed, for example due to the statute of limitations, and judicial disciplinary proceedings do not appear appropriate or are not possible, superiors should make it clear to the service personnel involved that their behaviour was inappropriate and, if necessary, continue to monitor them with administrative supervision.

Sexual misconduct cannot be proven in all cases. **Providing evidence** in cases of sexual violence is especially difficult when it is a case of one person's word against another's. The disciplinary superiors and, if necessary, the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney, must then examine the credibility of the statements of the victims and the accused. In such cases, it can be crucial to take a closer look at the previous and subsequent behaviour and motives of the parties involved. This can provide valuable clues for assessing a statement's credibility. If several witnesses confirm the inappropriate behaviour of the accused based on the reason given, it is surprising if the investigating office would refer to “one person's word against another's” without further justification. If the accusation cannot be punished with disciplinary action, but the questioning reveals that the accused has exhibited borderline behaviour, superiors should at least raise awareness accordingly.

Time and again, evidence fails due to the lack of objective proof of an assault, because with sexual assault in particular traces are fleeting. For this reason alone, it must be possible to secure traces of sexual violence anonymously. This is also required by the **Istanbul Convention**, which the Federal Republic of Germany has ratified. This provides for the obligation to create non-discriminatory access to acute care and medical treatment, among other things. The legislator already took this into account in 2020 by amending Volume V of the German Social Insurance Code.

- *To date, there have been problems with the acceptance of costs for the anonymised securing of evidence for members of the Bundeswehr affected by sexual violence. For the payment for acute care and medical treatment to be settled via the free medical care provided by the military health service, the servicewoman or man must disclose that they are the recipient of the service.*

There is now some good news, for the time being at least: According to the Ministry, the acceptance of costs cannot yet be standardised, but simplified payment methods are being examined. To meet the requirements of the Istanbul Convention and Volume V of the German Social Insurance Code, it should be possible as an interim solution for the providers of confidential forensic evidence (doctors, clinics, forensics and forensic medicine, for example) to settle accounts directly with the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management's medical care insurance billing clearinghouse without providing the victim's name. This is a good way for members of the Bundeswehr to start, especially if they have not yet decided whether they want to report what has happened.

There are **Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorneys**, who automatically stop proceedings after a public prosecutor's investigation is closed due to a lack of sufficient suspicion, and others who, as they should, perform their own assessment of evidence on the basis of the regulations for disciplinary proceedings and examine the probability

of a conviction before the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court. The latter is also permissible without further steps, as the respective assessment of the prosecuting authority is limited to criminal law and does not cover aspects of employment law. In contrast to a final and binding judgement, there is no binding effect on the actual findings in public prosecutor investigations, even according to case law, so that the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney must decide according to their own investigation status whether there is an initial suspicion or even sufficient suspicion of a disciplinary offence. All Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorneys should proceed accordingly.

Reports can also harbour risks:

- *Reporting servicewomen and men continue to be exposed to immediate negative consequences in places, ranging from investigations against them for false suspicion or official reports to temporary additional duty or reassignment, through to dismissal.*

However, it must be clearly emphasised that such investigations should only be initiated once the original allegation of sexual misconduct has been investigated and it has been established that there is real evidence of an intentional false testimony or defamation.

- *If investigations by the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney or the public prosecutor's office have not yet been completed, questions arise if disciplinary superiors infract the reporting person in parallel as part of simple disciplinary proceedings on the grounds of false accusations or false official reports.*

Even after the initial investigation has been completed, investigations into false reasons for suspicion can only be considered if it is proven that the accused person did not commit the offence. If the accusation of sexual misconduct is not proven, as is often the case in situations where it is "one person's word against another's", it may be difficult to prove a false reason for suspicion in individual cases. It is therefore important that disciplinary superiors are made aware of this in training courses and awareness raising sessions organised by the legal affairs division, so they do not automatically react to a complaint by the accused by investigating the reporting person.

Military personnel representation

The Military Personnel Representation Act regulates the consultation and participation rights of servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr. It aims to integrate them into decision-making processes and ensures they have a say in matters affecting their service and their living conditions within the hierarchical structure of the military. Military personnel representation is therefore at the essential core of leadership development and civic education. It promotes a positive working environment and strengthens the trust relationship between servicewomen and men and their superiors. In so doing, it contributes to a constructive work atmosphere and therefore to the troops' satisfaction and motivation. This requires up-to-date and well-founded legal knowledge on the part of both superiors and spokespeople, and personnel representatives. In times of far-reaching changes to the security architecture in particular, it is also essential that superiors at all levels, and in particular the Ministry of Defence, inform the participation committees about pending changes in a timely, comprehensive and trustworthy manner. The participation committees must also be afforded the opportunity to assert their rights. It must also be ensured that their arguments are taken into account in the decision-making process. Participation in the reorganisation of the Bundeswehr and the work of the Personnel Task Force during the year under review was exemplary, which is due not least of all to the immense commitment of the General Spokespersons' Committee and all participation committees, as well as the excellent interaction at all levels. This was certainly also a reason for the swift implementation of the new structure and the individual measures of the Personnel Task Force.

Lifesaving acts and acts to help others

One of the tasks and duties of servicewomen and men, among others, is to react flexibly to the unexpected. Training in the Bundeswehr therefore also includes confident and goal-orientated presence and action in emergency situations. The decision-making competence of members of the armed forces is therefore particularly pronounced in situations of great pressure and at times when their own lives are endangered. Service personnel are also superbly trained in emergency relief measures. They often use these skills to intervene with commitment and courage in all kinds of emergency situations and to provide help.

In the year under review, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was informed via the **internal and social situation reporting system (ISoLa)** about 259 cases of outstanding achievements in which members of the Bundeswehr helped others with their decisive action. The facts here are varied and wide-ranging. On and off duty, both at home and abroad, citizens in uniform showed civil courage and saved the lives of other people in at least 57 cases known to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

Quite often, society does not even know that courageous servicewomen and men quietly provided help in the background when terrible headlines broke across Germany. This was the case in the year under review:

- *A private was at the Festival of Diversity in Solingen when the horrific attack there killed three people and injured eight. With the support of the Malteser Hilfsdienst first responders, he performed resuscitation procedures immediately after the attack.*
- *Shortly after the terrace of a beach club on Majorca collapsed, a corporal who was right next to the incident when it happened went into the collapsed club twice with other helpers, risking his own life, even before the local emergency services arrived, and rescued a trapped person.*

The servicewomen and men who support, protect or even save their fellow humans, have earned our utmost thanks and respect, especially because so many people take their actions for granted:

- *A servicewoman who had witnessed a serious skiing accident saved the injured person's life by immediately administering first aid. She categorically told the family she needed no thanks. For this servicewoman, her performance was simply what everyone must do.*

The members of the Bundeswehr at a careers centre acted commendably. Following the assessment procedures, they also look after applicants' welfare, and they saved a life in the year under review as a result:

- *During his aptitude assessment procedure, one applicant complained of feeling unwell, so the doctor in charge ordered the assessment to be cancelled. The staff at the careers centre then offered him the opportunity to stay the night to recover. They visited him in his room every hour to check on him. The fourth time they checked, they called the emergency doctor due to his very poor general condition, and an emergency operation was performed at the hospital. If the applicant had gone home instead of being visited in the room every hour, he would not have survived, according to the medical specialists.*

The majority of reported incidents in the year under review were assistance with **traffic accidents**, of which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was informed 167 times. The service personnel who witnessed a traffic accident or were the first to arrive on the scene of an accident always exhibited exemplary behaviour:

- *Mostly before the civilian emergency services arrived, they coordinated the overall situation by making traffic safe, made the emergency call, instructed passers-by and other first responders on specific tasks, triaged those injured and provided the necessary primary medical care.*

The respective servicewomen and men often provided psychological support for traumatised witnesses or relatives at the scene of the accident. The integration of the psychosocial network into individual cases following the accident or the notification of the troop psychology service by the reporting unit is important for the service personnel providing assistance in such cases and should become the norm.

Service personnel also courageously intervene for their fellow human beings in everyday life – 67 times in the year under review. These include, for example, specific intervention in fights involving third parties, sometimes at the risk of being injured, rescuing drowning people, preventing shoplifting, and administering first aid in neighbourhoods and on train journeys. Their actions are particularly outstanding when servicewomen and men put their own lives in real danger to save others. The following example is representative of the numerous similar cases of which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was informed in the year under review:

- *An NCO noticed a fire in a neighbouring four-storey building and immediately rushed to alert and evacuate those living in it. Flames and smoke blocked the escape route when a man with restricted mobility tried to escape from the top floor via the stairwell. The soldier brought himself and the rescued man to safety on a balcony until the fire brigade arrived. Risking his own life, he played a key role in ensuring that a total of nine people could leave the building in time.*

The proper **appreciation** is appropriate in such cases, as, for example, formal recognition on return to the unit, granting special leave or, in special cases, awarding the cross of honour in gold or silver with a red border for acts

of rescue and first aid in Germany. The Bundeswehr's decorations are democracy's way of thanking our citizens in uniform who have gone above and beyond the call of duty with their special service and actions. It is therefore correct and important that the Bundeswehr awarded crosses of honour in a total of 45 cases in the year under review, as an expression of leadership development and civic education in practice.

12. Culture of remembrance and fostering tradition

The culture of remembrance and fostering tradition in the Bundeswehr are important components of the German armed forces' military identity and self-image. They serve to convey values, create shared awareness and maintain the Bundeswehr's historical heritage. How the armed forces deal with their own history and Germany's history is an essential element of the culture of remembrance. The Bundeswehr has developed its own identity on the basis of its now almost seventy-year history.

Fostering tradition includes the passing on and maintenance of customs, values and historical references that are seen as identity-creating for the armed forces. Traditions help create a sense of solidarity and constancy. The then Minister of Defence correspondingly signed the new, revised Bundeswehr's **Directive on Tradition** in 2018. As fostering tradition and historical education are leadership tasks, the goal of the Directive on Tradition is to afford all leaders and all military and civilian members of the Bundeswehr greater confidence in dealing with tradition in the Bundeswehr.

The issue of fostering tradition in the Bundeswehr has, nevertheless, also had its controversies since then, with respect to commitment to values. The 2018 Directive on Tradition emphasises that the Wehrmacht served the National Socialist regime of injustice and was culpably involved in its crimes, which are unique in history in their scale, horror and level of state organisation. It also recognises that the Wehrmacht became an instrument of racial ideological warfare during the Second World War, and therefore logically concludes that the criminal National Socialist state can never be considered a tradition, and for the armed forces of a democratic constitutional state, the Wehrmacht as an institution and its troop units and organisations, the military administration and the armaments sector are in no way worthy of tradition. At the same time, the Directive also emphasises that the inclusion of individual members of the Wehrmacht in the traditional property of the Bundeswehr is possible in principle. The prerequisite for this is always a detailed, case-by-case examination and careful consideration. This evaluation must take the question of personal guilt into account and make a service rendered a condition that has an exemplary or meaningful effect in the present, such as participation in the military resistance against the National Socialist regime or special merits in the development of the Bundeswehr.

On this basis, in July 2024, the Ministry issued supplementary information on the guidelines on the Bundeswehr's understanding of tradition and its fostering. It cited clarification of the interpretation of the Directive on Tradition as an explanatory statement. The decisive question is how the standard of values stated in the Directive is to be interpreted, as well as the scope for tradition-creating examples of military excellence, including outside of the Bundeswehr's own history. The additional information was met with considerable criticism from the public and in the petitions to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. One month later, the Federal Ministry of Defence rescinded the additional information to dispel any doubts that had arisen about the commitment to values of the Bundeswehr's understanding of tradition, and to underscore a clear commitment to the key points of reference of the understanding of tradition, the stipulations on behaviour worthy of tradition and the Bundeswehr's obligation to the liberal and democratic objectives of the Federal Republic of Germany.

A successful example of a lived **understanding of tradition** is illustrated at the Mürwik Naval School, which has redesigned the historic auditorium and its anteroom with particular commitment:

- *The controversial bust of Admiral Rolf Johannesson is exhibited and contextualised here. Johannesson is considered a founding father of the German Navy, but is criticised for a death sentence imposed on five servicemen in the final phase of the Second World War, which he confirmed as the convening authority. With its back to the entrance, the bust is set on a pedestal with drawers that provides information on his biography, with gaps however, and about his transformation after the Second World War.*

It should be noted that the culture of remembrance and fostering tradition are important for the Bundeswehr's servicewomen and men in their daily duty. Commemorative events such as the annual Day of National Mourning, for example, are an integral part of military life and contribute to the formation of a collective identity. Places of remembrance are especially important in this respect, such as the Bundeswehr Memorial on the grounds of the Ministry of Defence in Berlin, the memorial stela with an electronic memorial book in front of the Defence

Committee meeting room in the German Bundestag or the Forest of Remembrance in Schwielowsee, whose tenth anniversary was celebrated last year with a ceremony attended by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

The Bundeswehr's museum landscape is practically unique on an international level. Last year, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was able to see for herself just how ambitious its exhibitions are when she visited the "*Prinzip Held*. Von Heroisierungen und Heroismen*" (the hero principle – heroisation and heroism) special exhibition at the Museum of Military History in Berlin-Gatow, which was very well received, and rightly so.

Many associations and organisations are also busy increasing the visibility of the Bundeswehr, its history and its soldiers in the public eye. In 2024, the annual **March of Remembrance** organised by the Reservists' Association with the support of the Bundeswehr and the Bundeswehr Association took place for the seventh time already. A very high turn out of servicewomen and men and reservists marched 117 kilometres through Brandenburg and Berlin to commemorate 117 fallen comrades, who have lost their lives outside NATO- territory since the first deployment abroad. It was also extended by a further 3,400 metres in memory of the service personnel and civilian employees who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The march, which is very intentionally held in public and in which participants each wear a ribbon with the name of the deceased on their chest, affords those who have died in the service of society a fitting place in public remembrance.

The aptly-named **14k3 March** in spring 2024 also commemorated fallen soldiers. It is held in memory of the three comrades who lost their lives in action during the Good Friday Battle on 2 April 2010 in Afghanistan. The idea for the march originally came from a private initiative by former soldiers on the battle's tenth anniversary and is still organised by former soldiers today. According to the organisers, over 16,000 participants at more than 100 locations throughout Germany commemorated the fallen comrades of the Good Friday Battle.

The respective military pilgrimages, church services, farewell bands, the German War Graves Commission and, last but not least, the performances of the Bundeswehr Concert Band must also be mentioned here. From the grand tattoo, to charity concerts and open-air concerts, to national and international music festivals – the ten regional bands and the four bands with special tasks, including the Bundeswehr Big Band, always deliver an outstanding performance. The Bundeswehr Ceremonial Band alone is called upon almost 300 times a year.

The fact that more **solemn pledges** are taking place in public again is also very encouraging:

- *The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces attended various pledge ceremonies in the year under review, with the Reconnaissance Battalion 13 in Eisenach and the 325 Artillery Training Support Battalion and the 93 Tank Demonstration Battalion, both in Munster, among others. She also attended the pledge ceremony to mark the Bundeswehr's 69th anniversary on 12 November 2024, which was held for the first time outside the German capital in Hanover, and in the future will be held on a rotating basis in the state capitals. On the 80th anniversary of the failed Hitler assassination attempt on 20 July 2024, she accepted the 91 Light Infantry Battalion's invitation to Rotenburg an der Wümme, where recruits from the unit gave their pledges at a ceremonial roll call together with the 141 Combat Service Support Battalion from Munster and the 4 Medical Regiment from Rheine.*

Lecture and discussion events are a further building block of the Bundeswehr's culture of remembrance and communication of tradition in the public sphere. The **Stauffenberg memorial year** in particular offered numerous opportunities in this respect in 2024:

- *To commemorate the 80th anniversary of 20 July 1944, the Army Officer School in Dresden held four public panel discussions. In addition to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, other experts from the worlds of science, politics, and the Advisory Council on Leadership Development and Civic Education discussed key issues on role models, traditions, the culture of remembrance and the concept of resistance, as well as remembrance work today with each other, but in particular with the servicewomen and men and the general public.*

Excellent exhibitions contribute to a critical and educationally valuable examination of German history and the Bundeswehr's traditions. In addition to the must-see permanent exhibition, last year, the German Resistance Memorial Centre in Berlin presented the highly acclaimed "Women in the resistance against National Socialism" special exhibition. Along with the Bundeswehr's own large-scale military history museums in Dresden or the German Air Force Museum in Berlin-Gatow, the well over 100 **military history collections** and regional exhibitions of the Bundeswehr's museum and collection network in the branches of service convey the history of

the armed forces to the public at one location and in the best way possible. The Bundeswehr rightly attaches immense importance to the collection system. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited these collections and exhibitions at many locations during her visits to the troops in the year under review, in Bischofswiesen, Hammelburg, Wildflecken and Stadtallendorf, for example. Numerous collections, however, suffer far too often from a shortage of personnel and limited budgetary resources.

In addition to the often outstanding commitment of the collection managers, the department heads are also key to the success of the military history collections. Unfortunately, the close coordination required for this is not always a given:

- *One collection manager approached the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and reported considerable grievances in the cooperation between herself and her department head. Among other things, errors in the selection of material and a breach of the duty to exercise supervision were at issue. The trust relationship had been damaged and the collection work suffered.*

Contact with the **Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Sciences** and the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History proved helpful in this case. The latter offers subject-specific further training and further support for individual collections, primarily for museum and exhibition-related matters. The museum and collection network also works in an uncomplicated and pragmatic way. In cases such as the example above, heads of department must answer to their next-higher office, which also includes the higher-level collection officer.

The Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences offers its reliable expertise in the **contextualisation** of historical exhibits at Bundeswehr sites. Oranienstein Castle in Diez provides a superb example in this respect:

- *Since 1997, a plaque at the headquarters of the Regional Medical Service Support Command has commemorated the former pupils of the National Political Education Centre who died in the Second World War. The plaque's context was not immediately clear for those less familiar with this area of history. At the suggestion of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, an explanatory plaque written by the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences now provides information in plain language about the location of the National Political Educational Institution in the castle and the background to the commemorative plaque's installation.*

In contrast to pictures, commemorative plaques, historical architectural decoration or busts, however, **barracks names** cannot be contextualised. Their primary function is instead to strengthen cohesion and a sense of identity. Since 2018, the Directive on Tradition has regulated the criteria according to which names must be assigned. The Bundeswehr has since parted company with numerous namesakes of its properties, as also happened in the year under review:

- *The site of the Bremerhaven Naval School is now called "Admiral Brommy Kaserne" – after the Commander of the 1849 Reichsflotte, the first all-German navy.*

Naming is particularly successful when the new name of the property draws on the Bundeswehr's own almost 70-year tradition:

- *The building of the Air Force training and education centre at the former Husum-Schwesing airfield is named after a former Chief of Staff of the Federal Air Force, Lieutenant General Mende. Mende's achievements included the process of integrating the Nationale Volksarmee into the Bundeswehr.*

Whether the name Hindenburg meets the high standards required by the Directive on Tradition is a question that the Bundeswehr is rightly asking itself in Munster:

- *The Army's biggest barracks is called the Hindenburg Barracks. The cautious renaming process instructed by the Army Chief of Staff and initiated on site in the year under review is correct. The respective servicewomen and men are responsible for the search for a new barracks name. Accompanied by the expertise of the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences, those based at the site are also involved.*

A Berlin district mayor provided a good suggestion that should be supported. Its implementation would result in greater representation of women in naming barracks:

- *She would like to add Annedore Leber's name to that of the Julius Leber barracks in the Berlin-Mitte district. Annedore was the wife of Julius Leber and was also dedicated to the resistance to National Socialist injustice.*

Fostering tradition in the Bundeswehr continues to face the challenge of finding a balance between preserving traditions and critically examining its own past. The Bundeswehr has the task of continuously analysing its history and ensuring that the values and traditions it conveys are compatible with Germany's democratic principles. The issue remains a complex and sensitive one, characterised by the need to assume historical responsibility while simultaneously promoting a positive, future-oriented military identity.

13. Administration of justice and legal offences

The administration of justice in the Bundeswehr includes the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts, the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney, legal advice in all service-related legal matters, military law in particular, and jurisprudence in the armed forces. Military disciplinary law is intended solely to help maintain orderly service operations. The Bundeswehr can achieve this, both with praise and recognition, and with reprimands or disciplinary measures with offences. In this respect, disciplinary law differs in its objective from general criminal law. While punishment as a result of an offence against the general legal order above all penalises a wrong that has been committed, disciplinary action serves to safeguard or restore the integrity, reputation and military order of the Bundeswehr. If the retention of servicewomen and men is no longer acceptable for orderly service operations, they may be removed from their employment relationship in judicial disciplinary proceedings in order to protect military order.

Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts and Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney

At the end of the year under review, 19 of the 20 chambers of the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts and 78.5 percent of the posts in the court registries were filled. With regard to the case law of the Federal Labour Court, the Ministry of Defence did not pursue its originally planned approach of filling the chambers of the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts with judges from the state judiciary via secondment. Building on the case law of the Federal Constitutional Court, at the end of 2023, the court ruled that the secondment of a judge to preside over a chamber without stating a reason for the secondment resulted in an incorrect appointment of the panel and thus in a violation of the right to a statutory judge. The importance of judicial independence means courts must always be staffed with full-time and permanent judges. Exceptions to this are possible with overriding reasons. The heavy workload on a court is not a sufficiently overriding reason.

The positive trend with the **number of cases concluded**, which was already evident at the end of 2023, also continued in the year under review. The statistics show that the average duration of judicial disciplinary proceedings for decisions by disciplinary court order was 18 months (2023: 23), and 29 months for decisions by judgement (2023: 31). The continuing long average duration of proceedings is in particular due to old proceedings, which in one case, for example, lasted 13 years. As the divisions are now almost fully staffed, it is hoped they will now swiftly conclude the old proceedings,

because the longer the **proceedings last**, the more difficult it is to explain the relevant facts:

- *A soldier who was accused of playing the "SS marschiert ins Feindesland" (SS marches into enemy territory) song to two fellow soldiers in May 2018 was acquitted after none of the witnesses at the main hearing in June 2024 remembered which song was played on whose mobile phone and who switched off the music at the end.*

Any delay in the investigation can make it more difficult to establish the truth, because witnesses will begin to forget. In order to ensure an effective educational effect under disciplinary law, the actual disciplinary penalty must also be imposed as soon as possible after the offence, because the more time has passed since the offence, the less likely it is that disciplinary action will be taken. Furthermore, any unnecessary delay can be detrimental to military order and discipline. And the duration of the proceedings can also be stressful for the respective servicewoman or serviceman. This in particular applies when it impacts on current or future assignments, for example with removal from the present assignment or when promotion is denied during ongoing disciplinary investigations. In this respect, the expedited handling of disciplinary matters is also an expression of the care ensured by disciplinary superiors. Finally, the **requirement to expedite** proceedings applies to all parties involved in disciplinary proceedings, in other words the disciplinary superiors, the civil servants of the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney and the judges of the military courts.

- *What is worrying, however, is the announcement by a chamber of the north Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court in December 2024, according to which it will no longer be possible to schedule a trial in 2025, which has been pending since October 2023.*

At 90 percent, the staffing level in the **administration of justice** in the Bundeswehr can be considered very positive in the year under review, especially as 22 new posts were created in the second half of 2024 with the establishment of the Bundeswehr's German Joint Force Command at the A 15 salary group and above. However, it is worth criticising if the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorneys do not exhaust all the possibilities of the Military Disciplinary Code in criminal proceedings that are running in parallel:

- *For example, an Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney did not initiate judicial disciplinary proceedings against a serviceman who has been in custody since January 2022 for extortionate kidnapping, attempted manslaughter and grievous bodily harm. They assumed that the man would be discharged by law anyway as a result of the expected sentence imposed by the criminal court judgement. However, this means that, for two years, they missed the opportunity under Section 126 of the Military Disciplinary Code to withhold 50 percent of his pay.*

It was only after repeated enquiries and reference to this provision by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces that the Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney initiated the disciplinary proceedings in May 2024 and ordered that the man's pay be reduced accordingly. However, this meant that a reduction was only possible for five months before his employment ended in September 2024 due to the final conviction for a prison sentence of more than five years. The Federal Ministry of Defence also stated on this matter that an initiation and thus the reduction in pay could and should have happened considerably earlier.

The following case, by contrast, shows that it is possible and logical to prioritise proceedings correctly:

- *In March 2024, an Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney was informed of a possible crime committed by a lance corporal. Just two weeks later, the disciplinary attorney in charge informed the soldier that authorisation to visit the company commander in the detention centre had been obtained so that he could be served with the initiation order connected with the order to reduce his pay in accordance with Section 126 of the Military Disciplinary Code. The judicial proceedings could then be initiated as early as May 2024 with delivery of the notification of proceedings.*

It would be logical here to raise of awareness among all Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorneys accordingly.

The Bundeswehr's refocusing on national and alliance defence means that the administration of justice must also be prepared for new legal issues arising from this. This includes, for example, specialist knowledge and certainty in dealing with **operational leadership**, which can emerge in national and alliance defence scenarios. The Ministry has therefore developed a modular qualification concept, the "Qualification Measures in Operational Law" (QMOL). This will enable those involved in the administration of justice, in particular civilian and military legal advisers, to provide expert advice to the military leadership at all levels in planning and executing military operations. This also includes support with evaluation, training and exercises. In future, all those involved in the administration of justice will complete these modules. This year, existing training courses in the administration of justice already included content from the QMOL modules. From 2025, these will start as pilot training courses provided by the central training facility for the administration of justice.

As part of the training mission for the Ukrainian servicewomen and men (EUMAM UA) who come to Germany for military training, the legal instructors at the service schools in particular give two- to four-hour basic lessons in international humanitarian law. In the year under review, this totalled 336 hours, in which a total of 40 administration of justice personnel were involved.

Interpersonal conflicts

Servicewomen and men reported that they had been subjected to moral harassment in 45 petitions in the year under review. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces also examined 32 reportable events that involved an allegation of moral harassment. Quite a few of the petitions and reports received on this topic in the year under review once again related to the Medical Service area. As in previous years, there was no evidence of systematic moral harassment.

The reason for this is the high factual requirements of case law for the existence of **moral harassment**: The behaviour must be continuous, build up or overlap. It must generate hostility, harassment or discrimination and be directed against individual servicewomen and men in order to achieve objectives that are not covered by the legal system and which, at any rate in their entirety, violate the general right of personality. It is also often difficult to investigate the individual events presented. Relevant incidents often occurred a long time ago and can no longer be proven with the necessary certainty – for example because witnesses can no longer be reached, can no longer remember the incidents described, the specific choice of words or the people involved, or are unable to categorise and evaluate the events differently. This was true in the following case:

- *A letter from members of a sub-unit and the subsequent reportable event drawn up and taken up by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces resulted in over 60 enquiries. In the end, neither the accused nor the victims could be identified with sufficient certainty. The findings of the extensive investigations, including a dysfunctional internal structure, group formation and different loyalties, personal differences, misunderstandings and a lack of cooperation in the leadership, resulted in reorganisation and personnel measures in the unit concerned.*

Such petitions and reports almost always indicate that the work climate is not right. This often overlaps with petitions about poor leadership and inappropriate behaviour by superiors:

- *In both cases, with moral harassment and poor leadership and inappropriate behaviour by superiors, the causes can be interpersonal conflicts or differing perceptions. Investigations often reveal communication problems on one or more sides, weak leadership or a different understanding of leadership, disappointed expectations or personal insults, experiences of exclusion, a lack of trust, or disruptions (sometimes massive) to the unit's internal structure.*

Unfortunately, in the course of the often lengthy investigations, it occasionally emerges that action could or should have been taken much earlier. In some cases, for example, prompt physical separation could have significantly reduced the distress of one or more of those involved.

- *A female senior NCO had contacted the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces about her treatment by her superior and fellow soldiers, which she perceived as moral harassment and discrimination because of her age and gender. Some of the reported incidents were confirmed. However, at the end of the investigation, which took over a year, the Ministry of Defence reached the conclusion that, despite the soldier's feelings to the contrary, no systematic discrimination or harassment could be proven. The discord was due instead to interpersonal problems in a high-performance environment. However, the results of the investigation delivered the conclusion that the petitioner, "had to perceive the sum of these facts as a specific disadvantage and did not receive any support in the [...] specific situations". According to the Ministry, an early separation of the conflicting parties could have minimised the servicewoman's psychological strain. The petition resulted in discussions between the commander and the senior staff on how to deal with conflicts and personnel measures, as well as raising awareness of comradely behaviour among those involved. A conflict seminar was imposed on the accused soldiers, which was also as a signal to the battalion.*

It is not uncommon for investigations to uncover firmly established positions that ultimately have to be countered with personnel measures or restructurings. The overdue clarification then results in temporary additional duty, reassignments, disciplinary or dismissal proceedings, and lengthy work under increased command supervision in order to restore the unit's internal structure. It is especially regrettable if it emerges that the conflict has been known to superiors or higher-level offices for a long time or that the superiors themselves have played a part in the undesirable developments. It also raises questions when, in such situations, petitions, or counter-petitions, are made by service personnel who are superiors. Ultimately, one of their tasks is to shape the structure in a positive way for the benefit of all and to tackle, or at least address, any improper practices in the unit in good time.

Superiors are therefore well advised to make early use of the wide range of **support services offered** by the Bundeswehr. In addition to the psychosocial network with social services, the military health service and troop psychology, the equal opportunity women's representative and the military chaplaincy, coaching, mediation, moderated discussions and group training, via the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre, for example, can help to positively turn the situation around at an early stage. Leaders can also contact the "Discrimination and violence in the Bundeswehr" point of contact anonymously if necessary. Contrary to what the name might suggest, it also provides personal and unbureaucratic advice on moral harassment outside of the official channels.

Particularly in cases of **bossing**, accusations of moral harassment often put disciplinary superiors and unit leaders in difficult situations due to their proximity to the people involved. This is about systematic or repeated harassment, humiliation, intimidation, discouragement, injury, exclusion, hostility, watching, discrimination or overburdening of individual colleagues with workloads by superiors with the aim of demotivating or getting rid of them.

- *In the year under review, petitioners again criticised, often rightly so, investigations within their own unit and in particular the actual or alleged involvement of superiors or fellow soldiers in the investigations. In individual cases, they reported that (co-)accused superiors had selected certain servicewomen and men to conduct the questioning on their behalf or with a list of questions they had drafted. For example, the Ministry of Defence had taken precautions in two petitions submitted for review and had instructed in advance that the investigations may not be conducted by certain people.*

This is to be welcomed, because if such a claim were confirmed, the **objectivity** of the investigations would certainly be called into question. However, even mere suspicion can have a massive impact on the investigations, especially if witnesses fear negative consequences if they comment on the issue in the petitioner's favour. It is therefore important that doubts about objectivity do not arise in the first place. The responsible superiors themselves also have an important role to play here – they can often counteract concerns about bias with self-critical scrutiny.

It would certainly be helpful if leaders had a guideline of the same quality as the “Dealing with sexuality and sexual misconduct” general regulation at hand in the event of allegations of moral harassment and criticism of superior and leader behaviour, particularly with regard to immediate measures. Disciplinary superiors can, however, seek support from the legal advisers in deciding whether they should hand over the investigations, declare themselves biased or seek support from third parties, such as the military police, in clarifying the facts of the case. Legal advice or superior posts can also help when it comes to the appropriate scope of investigations or deciding which witnesses should be questioned. Disciplinary superiors or leaders who hand over investigations to superiors with a greater distance to the events deserve respect for their sense of proportion and their confident action. In doing so, they send an important signal to the unit and to the servicewomen and men concerned that they take the allegations seriously and that the investigations are not, as some petitioners suspect, controlled. Last but not least, superiors also protect themselves and their good reputation from being called into question. Far more doubt is cast on the objectivity of investigations when superiors have to be subsequently stripped of their responsibility or questioning must be repeated as part of follow-up investigations.

Alcohol and drugs

The consumption of alcoholic beverages is widespread and accepted in society. Special standards do, however, apply to the armed forces. In the military environment, where discipline, reliability and full operational readiness are paramount, it is essential that misconduct caused by uninhibited alcohol consumption be prevented.

Unfortunately, excessive alcohol consumption, whether at work-related social events or after work, is still trivialised far too often. It is the superiors' duty to intervene as part of their **command supervision** and to ensure in advance that cases such as the following are not repeated:

- *After consuming a considerable amount of alcohol, at the closing ceremony of an exercise, a sergeant and a corporal decided to knock over a portaloo in the car park in front of the accommodation building, with two people in it, from behind onto the front door. Both people were covered with faeces and chemicals all over their bodies and faces and were only able to leave the portaloo when it was upright again. The responsible public prosecutor's office has brought charges against the servicemen for grievous bodily harm. The Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney has initiated disciplinary proceedings against both defendants.*

Alcohol-related misconduct is also serious when superiors who **act as role models** overstep their boundaries when consuming alcohol:

- *During a farewell party at a Bundeswehr base and after considerable alcohol consumption, a warrant officer II suddenly hit a lance corporal in the face with his fist because he had been “annoying” him all evening. The Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney has reported the incident to the Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints court. No judgement had been made by the end of the year under review. In the criminal proceedings, the court imposed a fine for mistreating a subordinate.*

On the other hand here, it is positive when superiors take decisive action in the aftermath of alcohol-related misconduct:

- *At a company handover followed by a sparkling wine reception, an officer grabbed a subordinate by the uniform and pushed him away after drinking too much alcohol. In addition to imposing a high four-figure disciplinary fine, the superior generally prohibited the organisation of social events and clearly expressed his displeasure by not presenting the silver cross of honour that had already been awarded.*
- *Because he had already consumed alcohol, an officer disobeyed an order from his superior several times during an official event. As nearby service personnel had seen this, and in order to make them aware, the disciplinary superior issued the officer a stern reprimand.*

A leadership culture that does not tolerate the misuse of alcohol can make a significant contribution to prevention. Superiors should also establish firm framework conditions for joint celebrations or other social occasions that strictly regulate or completely prohibit alcohol consumption. A balance between a sense of community and the need for disciplined behaviour to prevent negative effects on the welfare of the troops and the reputation of the Bundeswehr must be maintained.

One topic that attracted a lot of attention in the year under review was the entry into force of the law governing the use of cannabis. The law legalises private cultivation for personal use, the possession of cannabis for personal consumption and the communal, non-commercial personal cultivation of **cannabis** in growing associations for personal consumption.

However, stricter regulations continue to apply for service personnel, and rightly so. These are due to their duty, standardised in the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, to ensure operational readiness at all times, which, according to recent rulings by the Federal Administrative Court, can be jeopardised by the consumption of cannabis. However, applicants who have previously consumed cannabis are in no way precluded from serving in the Bundeswehr, because the relevant provisions of the Act and thus also the other service regulations prohibiting cannabis consumption, only come into force on the date of appointment as a servicewoman or man.

Despite the extensive legalisation of cannabis in the civilian sector, the unchanged continued ban on its use by service personnel does not raise any legal concerns on this basis but has resulted in a lack of information and uncertainty among some of the troops regarding the continued ban on its use. The fact that the Bundeswehr clearly informed service personnel in a guideline in August 2024 that no changes had been made to the existing regulations is also a positive development. However, it would have been even better if information had been provided more quickly after the law came into force. With a view to possible relaxations, the specialist medical units in the Ministry of Defence are continuously monitoring research into the effects of cannabis on the human body. According to their assessment, it is currently not possible to reliably predict the duration and depth of a state of intoxication.

In the year under review, a total of 151 initial reports were recorded in the "Criminal offences and administrative offences under the Act to Regulate the Traffic in Narcotics and discovery of narcotics" category in the Bundeswehr's internal and social situation reporting system. Compared to 2023 (161 initial reports), there was another decline in the number of official reports. The Ministry continues to take these incidents very seriously. In the year under review, the Bundeswehr discharged 16 servicewomen and men prematurely for handling cannabis products. In addition to penalties under disciplinary law, the Ministry also counters violations with preventive and supportive measures, which are now set out in the "Dealing with dependency and addiction in the Bundeswehr" central regulation. The regulation refers to all substances that can cause addiction, such as alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, cannabis, illegal substances and pharmaceuticals. Using the example of alcohol dependence, it illustrates how psychological dependence can manifest itself in the inability to control the amount of consumption or the need to use it to relieve stressful situations. Superiors in particular will be qualified to recognise early signs of developing dependencies and, if necessary, will recommend appropriate counselling by the Bundeswehr Social Services. The new regulation serves as a guideline here for prevention and dealing with people within the Federal Ministry of Defence's area of responsibility who are at risk of addiction or are addicted.

Ammunition and weapons losses

Weapons and ammunition were once again lost by the Bundeswehr in the year under review. Every missing cartridge and every lost weapon part is one too many in view of the considerable potential danger they pose. The

following cases illustrate how important it is to comply with the service regulations on handling firearms and to maintain strict **command supervision** at all times. The different handling of weapons or ammunition losses is striking:

- *At the end of a full day of weapons training, which took place consecutively at different training locations, it was found that one of eight pistols and two magazines were missing. Later that day, the company commander had the entire training day re-enacted with all the participants to determine at which point in the training the weapon and ammunition could have gone missing. This was, however, no longer possible because there was no weapons case completeness check in the morning. Because of the different training locations, a complete check of the weapons case would have had to be carried out each time the locations were changed.*

Such incidents could be avoided by issuing a weapons card, so that every soldier would have complete personal control over their weapon at all times. This would also prevent the undocumented transfer of a weapon to fellow soldiers. A **completeness check** should also be carried out before each time weapons are transported in weapons cases. The resulting additional work cannot be an argument in favour of omitting measures that can prevent the loss or theft of weapons and ammunition.

In the above case, however, the company commander acted in an exemplary way with the support of her commanding officer:

- *When the loss of the pistol was discovered, she took all possible immediate measures without violating the basic rights of the service personnel. End of duty was postponed until all involved had been questioned; the barracks gate was closed so that people- and vehicles could be checked; and the entire barracks was searched with the help of the military police. With the consent of the personnel involved, an inspection of the accommodation rooms, the lockers and the vehicles was made. The commander then extended the search to all companies and had a drone search the barracks roofs.*

The fact that the pistol and the magazines were ultimately not found despite these extensive measures is extremely worrying. Nevertheless, the measures taken, including the imposition of a high four-figure disciplinary fine on an instructor for failing to carry out a completeness check on the morning of the exercise, send the right signal that much more care must be taken when handling weapons and that negligence will not be tolerated.

The following case is the opposite of this exemplary behaviour:

- *After the discovery of a three-digit amount of black powder ammunition in a battalion, it was not the disciplinary superior who conducted the questioning, but merely the accused officer himself. The battalion did not issue a report until three weeks after the incident (instead of immediately after it became known). In the meantime, the company command set up a box for several days to collect ammunition from black powder stocks, which was then actually found in accommodation rooms or other similar places. Due to the failure to take appropriate immediate measures right after the stocks were found, it was no longer possible to determine where the ammunition had come from. Disciplinary proceedings were initiated against the service personnel responsible for bringing the black powder ammunition to the military training area for firing and subsequently attempting to conceal the origin of this ammunition.*

It is incomprehensible why the battalion command did not immediately request the support of legal advice or the military police. In such cases, it is important not to wait and see what the investigations will reveal, but rather the suspected presence of **black powder ammunition** must be reported as soon as it is known, so that the relevant authorities can intervene to provide support.

- *Three months after the stockpile of black powder ammunition was discovered in the case described above, a junior rank soldier in the same battalion found a rubbish bag containing blank ammunition in the cellar of another company and reported this to his superior. Prior to this, the subordinate area had been made aware of the topic of “Handling weapons and ammunition”, which had been done in the entire battalion due to the first incident described above. Despite investigations, the ammunition could not be attributed to anyone. As a result, the superiors have now increased command supervision.*

Given these considerable irregularities, however, it would have been logical to at least take an inventory of the ammunition stocks in the entire battalion.

Crimes against the Bundeswehr

In the year under review, the Bundeswehr was the target of 185 attacks or criminal offences (2023: 122). In 13 cases, these concerned members of the Bundeswehr (2023: six), when wearing the uniform in public, for example. In 172 cases, the offences were directed against the property of the Bundeswehr (2023: 116). These included three arson attacks and four acts of sabotage.

The problem is that the implementation of measures to prevent attacks on Bundeswehr facilities or to better investigate violent offences committed, such as the installation of surveillance systems, sometimes takes far too long, as the following example shows:

- *In May 2022, the Bundeswehr reported that significant damage to property had been committed at a careers centre in spring 2022. The glass façades and walls at the main entrance to the office building were damaged by several paint bombs, stones and graffiti. The offender or offenders could not be identified. The authorisation and commissioning of the entrance area's video surveillance was issued swiftly in summer 2022. However, the planned three cameras were not installed until August 2024, and one of them was already not working. Due to the lack of a data protection concept, the other two could not be conclusively put into operation. The general representatives of disabled persons at the Ministry of Defence had not yet been consulted either, and the co-determination procedure in accordance with the Federal Staff Representation Act had not yet been carried out.*

Securing the numerous Bundeswehr properties and barracks is generally a major challenge.

- *In the year under review, there was suspicion of sabotage on the drinking water supply at the Cologne-Wahn air force barracks, which subsequently proved to be unfounded.*

As it is not possible to seamlessly monitor the perimeter fences of all military installations, all members of the Bundeswehr and civilian society are called upon to keep a watchful eye and report any suspicious incidents. The Bundeswehr should also upgrade inadequate fencing around military properties and keep sufficient military guard personnel on standby for specific cases.

14. Voluntary military service and home defence

Since the suspension of compulsory military service, voluntary military service has been an important instrument in the further recruitment of Bundeswehr personnel. During this service period, which is between 7 and 23 months, young people have the opportunity to gain an insight into the Bundeswehr, and to familiarise themselves with various career opportunities with the armed forces. The goal is also to recruit temporary-career volunteers from among those doing voluntary military service. Fortunately, the Bundeswehr succeeded in doing this in 2,859 cases in the year under review (2023: 2,164).

At the end of the year, a total of 10,119 women and men were doing voluntary service in the Bundeswehr (2023: 9,642 – 2022: 9,163). Of these, 9,156 began their service in the year under review (2023: 8,801 – 2022: 8,618). During the six-month probationary period, 2,195 servicewomen and men ended their service in the armed forces prematurely, 1,968 left at their own request for personal reasons and 227 were dismissed by the Bundeswehr, mainly due to a lack of physical or character suitability. This is a drop-out rate of approximately 24 percent.

The one-month **period of notice** to the middle or end of the month in the first five months of the six-month probationary period, introduced in 2023 to prevent heat of the moment resignations, was criticised by just one petitioner in the year under review:

- *He claimed that he had not been made aware of the changed termination options in his planning meeting and requested his immediate discharge. The Bundeswehr explained that it had verbally informed the petitioner of the change in the revocation periods, however no formal written notification had been issued. The petition was taken as an opportunity to add a reference to the applicable deadline regulations to the information materials to create legal certainty and certainty of action for all parties involved.*

The introduction of the longer period of notice is still to be welcomed. The fact that only one serviceman objected to this deadline in the year under review may indicate that this new regulation did not cause any significant difficulties in practice. The new notice period also resulted in a slight decrease in terminations in the first three months of service.

However, the lack of an option to terminate voluntary military service prematurely after the six-month **probationary period** to begin training or studies, was criticised several times. The Bundeswehr explained that the existing regulations do not provide for a shortening of the commitment period. Early discharge is only possible if remaining in the Bundeswehr would mean particular hardship due to personal, especially domestic, professional or economic reasons. In principle, it did not see any need to deviate from this. The Bundeswehr has, however, rightly made early termination of voluntary military service possible in exceptional cases:

- *A volunteer doing military service criticised the fact that, after his application to become a temporary-career volunteer was rejected, his subsequent application to shorten his period of service, which he had then submitted because he was starting civilian training, was also rejected. He did not understand why the Bundeswehr did not want to keep him on, but did not want to let him go earlier either. The review revealed that he was rejected as a temporary-career volunteer because, according to a military medical assessment, he was not fit for service due to a hearing impairment. However, he was able to start his civilian training, albeit with a delay of one month, after applying again for a reduction in his period of service and submitting his training contract.*

However, the Bundeswehr had rejected an application to **shorten the period of service** due to the intention to begin a study course, partly in view of the remaining period of service of approximately one year. This is both correct and understandable, as the Bundeswehr requires a certain degree of planning security to reliably perform its mission. Those affected must realise when they sign up that they will only be able to shape their future civilian career after their military service commitment period.

Home defence includes the tasks to be performed by the Bundeswehr as part of the overall national security provision for the protection of Germany and its citizens on German territory outside of a state of tension and defence. Introduced in 2021 to complement voluntary military service, voluntary military service in **home defence** is aimed at women and men who want to get involved in the Bundeswehr close to home, but do not want to be deployed abroad. During or after their voluntary military service in home defence, they have the opportunity to apply for a different service status, as a temporary-career volunteer or for a different career path, for example. The service consists of seven months of military training in the armed forces and a six-year reserve assignment for retiring service personnel in the Territorial Reserve. As part of this reserve assignment, reservists are expected to serve for a further five months, in a home defence company or a home defence regiment, for example.

At the end of the year under review, 223 volunteers were serving in home defence (2023: 300 – 2022: 287). A total of 634 volunteers (2023: 786 – 2022: 986) actually began their service in the year under review, of which 156 extended their period of service in traditional voluntary military service. A total of 173 servicewomen and men (2023: 206 – 2022: 214) left the Bundeswehr at their own request within the six-month probationary period. The Bundeswehr terminated the service status of eight service personnel. This is a drop-out rate of approximately 28.5 percent. The respondents mostly gave personal reasons as their motive for leaving the Bundeswehr before the end of their regular service. The figures show that the expectations of this model, including an effective reserve increase in home defence, were not met. At the end of the year under review, only 223 servicewomen and men were on the seven-month military training course. When this service was introduced, the Bundeswehr had expected to recruit around 1,120 people per year. In view of the fact that, on the whole, voluntary military service in home defence falls short of expectations, the question arises as to how logical it is to continue with this model. The Bundeswehr should find an answer to this quickly.

15. Reserves

An operational reserve service is a cornerstone of defence-ready armed forces. Germany's national and alliance defence requires a motivated, continuously trained reserve that is integrated into the troops to enable the armed forces to grow quickly and in line with requirements in an emergency. In normal service operations, reservists have long ensured operational readiness and resilience in numerous units – across the entire spectrum of tasks performed by the Bundeswehr. The conceptual basis for the reserves is the Reserve Strategy, which the Ministry of Defence developed as an interpretative document in 2019 and has been updating since then.

In recent years, between 16,000 and 19,000 citizens have swapped their civilian clothes for the uniform for a shorter or longer period of time. A total of 49,244 (2023: 43,065 – 2022: 37,041) reservists were designated for assignment in the year under review. Of these, 4,170 were women (2023: 3,246 – 2022: 2,481). During this period, 20,074 (2023: 19,084 – 2022: 18,679) reservists, designated and not designated for assignment, supported the

active troops in 47,264 (2023: 45,194 – 2022: 46,904) posts, the duration of which ranged from one day to twelve months. This included 1,682 women (2023: 1,436 – 2022: 1,335).

Nevertheless, the number of reservists designated for assignment is currently still too low. According to the Bundeswehr's capability profile, which is regularly updated, approximately 90,000 reservists are required to also ensure operational readiness in the future. On the one hand, this includes 60,000 personnel in the reinforcement reserve, in other words additional posts among the active troops, which are required for an increase in the event of a state of tension and defence. On the other hand, there are 30,000 personnel in the reserve pool, where reservists deputise for active servicewomen and men at what are known as “mirror duty stations” during absence and deployment periods.

With the **Reserve Strategy**, the Bundeswehr is proceeding strategically to meet this requirement. The 60,000 posts in the reinforcement reserve will be filled by 2027, with, among other things, the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel, which is an essential core element of the strategy. Since October 2021, all career soldiers, temporary-career volunteers and those doing voluntary military service who have not yet reached the age of 57 and are eligible for military service, will be scheduled in the reserves for six years in accordance with their qualifications and skills.

Since its introduction, the process of the **reserve assignment for retiring service personnel** has fortunately developed positively after a slow start: At the end of the year, 49,222 of the 63,866 servicewomen and men who had left the service since October 2021 were women and men who were basically suitable for a reserve assignment for retiring service personnel. A total of 19,381 reserve assignments for retiring service personnel were filled, which is a share of approximately 39 percent. For a further 16,000 or so people, the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel process was initiated but not yet fully completed. According to the Bundeswehr, the reasons for this are complex, ranging from medical examination results that were not yet available or other documents that were still missing, to grounds for exclusion as part of the examination of availability under military law by the responsible Bundeswehr careers centre, to availability of the reserve assignment itself, which is still outstanding. The temporary officer for reserve assignment for retiring service personnel appointed in March 2023, who provides support with on-site advice and evaluation, is also likely to have contributed to the good overall result. Regrettably, approximately 14,000 people can no longer be used for the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel. According to the Ministry of Defence, these are the people who could not have been scheduled during the process, which was not yet fully mapped in the personnel management system at the beginning of the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel, as no suitable assignment post had been identified by the releasing units. Since October 2023, anyone who is not shown a reserve assignment possibility by the armed forces is officially assigned by the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management.

The Bundeswehr conceded that only 8,500 to 9,000 of the targeted 10,000 reserve assignments for retiring service personnel per year were realistic. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that people who terminate their military service prematurely or are discharged prematurely are not included in the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel, and on the other hand, approximately 20 percent of discharged or retired service personnel are not given this reserve assignment because they have not had a **discharge examination**. This examination is, however, compulsory, which is why the units must consistently ensure it is performed.

The Ministry of Defence is still examining whether reservists' reserve assignment for retiring service personnel should end automatically at the end of the six-year assignment period or should continue until they reach the age of 65. Three years after the introduction of the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel, reservists can expect a prompt response.

However, the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel alone does not create an operational reserve service. This requires regular exercises. Since 2012, corresponding to the suspension of compulsory military service, **reserve exercises** have depended on the principle of voluntary service. In this context, the Ministry of Defence has established that there is initially little interest in further involvement in the armed forces among reservists who have received a reserve assignment for retiring service personnel after leaving active service. Those affected set other priorities, such as their future civilian careers, which is evidenced by the decline in the used “reserve posts” from 96 percent in 2021 to 84 percent in 2023. The Bundeswehr refers to posts covered by the budget as reserve posts for reservists. One such post corresponds to 365 service days, which can be distributed to several people and services. The Bundeswehr therefore only requested 5,500 of these posts in the year under review, instead of the 6,000 originally planned. Of these, approximately 4,828 posts were used in routine operations, for the reserve assignment for retiring service personnel and for voluntary military service in home defence, which is approximately 88 percent. The planned increase in the number of posts to 7,500 in 2027 and

2028 is unlikely to be compatible with the principle of volunteering. Unfortunately, for many employers, giving their employees time off for military service is also still not simply a matter of course. It is therefore understandable that there is a debate about more responsibility, or even obligation. The public sector has a special responsibility and role model function to provide its contribution to a strong reserve service.

It is clear that the Bundeswehr must now seriously intensify its efforts to cover the requirement for 90,000 reservists identified in its current capability profile. The requirement for an additional 200,000 reservists was already discussed in view of the security policy situation. The resulting need for action will have to be formulated as part of the appropriate adjustment of the Reserve Strategy.

The Bundeswehr Reservist Association makes an indispensable contribution to Germany's security and defence capabilities. It strengthens reservists' operational readiness, promotes their integration into society and the Bundeswehr, and actively supports the armed forces. Initiated by an inspection by the Federal Audit Office, further funding for the **Reservist Association** is currently being critically examined. Future financial support for the association should meet the Bundeswehr's need to strengthen the reserves, particularly as a result of the "turning point".

Strengthening the reserves

Formations consisting mainly of reservists, the home defence forces, for example, have the task of setting up and regenerating ready-for-operation organisational elements and units. They need enlisted personnel in particular for this. On this basis, the **training of non-prior service military personnel** launched as a project in 2018 by the Bundeswehr in cooperation with the Reservist Association is becoming increasingly important for recruiting promising young people. This training course enables entry into the armed forces' reserves junior ranks career path in the Bundeswehr Support Unit, formerly the Joint Support and Enabling Service. As part of the modular initial training programme, interested individuals receive military training in weekend events or block courses, which teach them how to handle weapons, life in the field, guard and security tasks, military law and civic education, among other things. In addition to the opportunities already available, such as serving as an officer in the reserves, women and men can complete military service in this less time-consuming way, to then go on and serve with the reserves. They merely have to be eligible under military law and pass a security clearance.

The training of non-prior service military personnel is becoming increasingly more popular. Since its introduction, a total of 1,247 women and men have completed this training programme. It is very encouraging that, due to the increasing number of interested people (3,648 at the end of the year under review – actual applications are included in the 987 applications in the year under review for voluntary military service in home defence), all regional territorial commands have been offering this training since 2024. While 493 training courses were planned in these commands in 2023, the figure had already risen to 895 in the year under review. Nevertheless, in view of the significant increase in interest, the creation of further training capacities would of course be welcome. The almost zero percent drop-out rate shows that the effort involved pays off for the Bundeswehr. In addition to the regionality, the high motivation of the reservists seems to be the decisive factor here. The project also illustrates that the Bundeswehr can reach people better with low-threshold programmes. This experience should be taken into account in the further development of the Reserve Strategy. It would also be a good idea to continue this successful recruitment tool after the transfer of the home defence forces from the operations command to the Army in April 2025. The home defence forces will then be combined in the new division set up for military home defence.

Experienced reservists in very good health still sometimes wish to serve beyond the age of 65. This is currently contrary to the provisions of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, according to which the maximum age without exception for all status groups is 65. The Bundeswehr intends to continue with this for the time being. In the Reserve Strategy, the focus is on the reinforcement reserve, which requires a majority of younger people. However, in view of the target personnel strength for the reserves, every reservist is of course needed. Legislators should therefore make the outdated inflexible **age limit** of 65 more flexible. A look at other nations shows that this is possible. In Sweden, for example, compulsory military service applies until the age of 70.

Reserve service is generally designed for short periods of time. The military service regulated in the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act for the temporary improvement of personnel operational readiness serves as a substitute for activities of servicewomen and men who will be absent for a foreseeable period of time or to cope with peak workloads that cannot otherwise be dealt with in a timely manner. It is not permissible here to use a person for a period of more than ten months. Additionally, there are also short exercises that serve to refresh or maintain

existing knowledge in the context of a short-term call-up. The two types of military service cannot be combined. A supposed change in this **call-up practice** led to criticism and lack of comprehension among reservists:

- *One reservist complained that it was no longer possible to do reserve exercises all year round, but rather only 300 days per calendar year were possible.*

There is no cause for complaint here. In the past, the constant alternating between the two call-up options had apparently resulted in inadmissible permanent reserve service being performed, so the Ministry of Defence had already issued a directive in 2023 stipulating that it was not possible to combine both types of reserve service at the same command post within a calendar year. Reservists who are seeking permanent (year-round) employment with the Bundeswehr must therefore look to be recruited or re-enrolled in the armed forces.

The changes to the **reserve assignment of civilian personnel** in the Bundeswehr were also the subject of numerous petitions in the year under review:

- *Civilian employees of the Bundeswehr, who were previously also active with the reserves criticised the fact that they were no longer being called up, and some existing reserve assignments were being cancelled. According to the Ministry of Defence, these were reserve assignments of people whose civilian duties would also demonstrably have to be performed in a state of tension or defence. In all other cases, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management currently refrains from cancelling reserve assignments until further notice. The Ministry also stated that it would examine the general issue and, if necessary, it would in future refrain from the more generous reserve assignment of civilian personnel provided for since 2015.*

This is understandable. On the one hand, in the event of tension or defence, the reserves must enable a reliable increase in the armed forces, especially in numbers. On the other hand, civilian personnel are absolutely essential for the Bundeswehr's operational readiness, defence scenarios included.

The fact that the legislator does not eliminate existing disadvantages with the **promotion** of reservists reduces the attractiveness of this service:

- *In connection with reserve officer training in military service, in 2022, reserve cadets (SaZ 3) already criticised that, contrary to previous commitments, they were not promoted to senior officer cadet after 30 months in 2021 as a result of the new version of the Military Career Regulation.*

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces had accepted the criticism and urged the removal of this unequal treatment with active servicewomen and men. The Ministry of Defence intended to remedy this, first as part of the amendment to the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act in 2023, and then again in the draft of the Zeitenwende article law. However, the corresponding proposed amendment was deleted from the respective draft bill on both occasions. The Bundeswehr should nevertheless pursue the possibility of promoting the people in question to senior officer cadet. It would thus contribute to equal treatment of reserve cadets and line officer candidates. The visibility of the reserves' potential leaders in the armed forces would be increased and a professionalisation of the reserves would be achieved.

As part of the draft of the Zeitenwende article law, the Bundeswehr attempted, ultimately without success, to eliminate another grievance criticised by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in connection with **pre-service periods**:

- *Since 2021, those interested in the "Reserve Officer" training programme for military service have been complaining about the legal requirement that all pre-service periods must be credited. As the training of reserve officers in military service takes place in the status as temporary-career volunteer and must be completed within three years, but the minimum term of enlistment as a temporary-career volunteer is already two years, applicants may only have a maximum of a one-year pre-service period.*

The amendment proposed by the Ministry of Defence was also removed from the draft bill. Here too, the Bundeswehr should continue to pursue its goal of being able to admit interested people with longer pre-service periods.

Assurance of livelihood and other benefits

Reservists performing military service can apply for reimbursement of proven loss of earnings or benefits for self-employed people or the minimum benefit (per diem flat-rate). These payments are tax-free. The application

deadline is six months after the end of the corresponding exercise. It would appear people do not always know this. It is advisable that all applications be submitted to the assurance of livelihood authority at the start of the reserves exercise, either using a form or the “*Unterhaltssicherung (USG)-Online*” (assurance of livelihood online) app, which was introduced in 2021 and enjoys increasing popularity.

The law amending the Soldiers’ Compensation Act and the Law Governing Military Pensions is to be welcomed. The changes made to the Benefit Payment and Dependents Maintenance Act improve the financial benefits for pension recipients performing reserve service because the receipt of a child-related portion of the **family allowance** no longer has a reducing effect on the amount of benefits.

However, it is unsatisfactory that the unequal treatment of reservists compared to active servicewomen and men with regard to the **reimbursement of travel expenses** for journeys home still exists:

- *Until now, those performing reserve service have been obliged to live in communal accommodation. An exemption is possible, particularly with a close-to-home assignment. However, active servicewomen and men are only entitled to reimbursement of travel costs for the daily journey home if it can be proven that no communal accommodation is available.*

By the end of the year under review, the Bundeswehr was not in a position to decide on the suggestion made to it several times by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to create a formal option in these cases between accommodation at the place of service or reimbursement of travel costs for the journey home. This should now be done as quickly as possible.

Personnel issues

Operational reserves need well-trained personnel, which requires appropriate training capacities, however these are not guaranteed on a regular basis. For example, the proportionate allocation of places for reservists on occupational speciality and deployment training courses is not sufficient. There is just one place for small training courses of up to 25 people and two places for courses of 25 people or more. Reservists must therefore be firmly integrated into the Bundeswehr’s training organisation, and training capacities must be increased.

Reservists sometimes receive training course **cancellations** at very short notice, because of training support, for example. The Ministry does not see any systematic discrimination against those doing reserve service. Nevertheless, this situation is unsatisfactory. Immediate communication would at least be necessary in these cases. The “*Deutschlandtour Reserve*” information event organised by the Bundeswehr from 2023 to 2024 and also planned for 2025, is therefore a good idea. Among other things, more than 600 action officers responsible for reserve service matters at 14 locations have so far been informed here of the need for good communication.

Problems with training course allocation also arise if the **health record** is not provided. In accordance with the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, this is sent to the Bundeswehr Institute of Preventive Medicine for archiving and provision of information for each servicewoman and man after they leave active service. If required, in the run-up to an upcoming reserve service or training course, for example, the health record can be requested from it. There were repeated problems in this respect in the year under review:

- *Reservists described how they had been relieved of their duties one day after the start of a training course in Hammelburg due to missing health records. The investigations revealed that the records had only been requested from the Bundeswehr Institute for Preventive Medicine approximately three weeks before the start of the course due to the lack of results from the security clearances. Experience shows, however, that the processing time here is five to six weeks, so the responsible employees could have already known at the time of requesting the records that they would not be available in time for the start of the course. If they had been informed accordingly, those affected would have been spared the journey to Hammelburg – in one case the distance travelled there and back was 1,200 km.*

In the meantime, the Bundeswehr has taken internal measures to optimise work processes. At the same time, it also worked with the offices involved to find solutions to ensure that the health records were available in good time.

- *In another case, a prospective reserve cadet criticised the fact that his reserve assignment process had not been completed after nine months because his health record had still not been provided. The Bundeswehr conceded that inadequate communication and cooperation between the responsible careers centre and the*

relevant offices in the assessment centre for Bundeswehr leaders had resulted in processing delays. Those involved had been instructed and the responsible units in the assessment centre for Bundeswehr leaders had changed their work processes as a result of the petition so that similar cases could be ruled out in future.

This is to be welcomed, because such a long delay, which affected the start of the reserve officer training, is entirely unacceptable.

It should be noted that the entire process of requesting, preparing and sending health records to and from the Bundeswehr Institute of Preventive Medicine takes too much time and is prone to errors. The digitalisation of health records, which has long been called for, could accelerate this process immensely. The fact that digitalisation is not progressing as required is all the more surprising, because even before the suspension of compulsory military service, all processes relating to those eligible for military service were processed digitally in the former Regional Recruiting Offices, including the documentation of medical assessments and statistical evaluation.

As a rule, active reservists must do a **medical examination** every 36 months. Assessments are made here on general fitness for service (military) and suitability for deployment. This is appropriate and important, because ultimately these medical checks also serve to protect the health of all reservists. The examinations generally take place in the eight medical assessments of the careers centres. An examination by civilian doctors is not sufficient, because they do not have the required military medical qualifications. Reservists must therefore sometimes travel very long distances and often wait weeks or months for an appointment, because there is also a shortage of personnel at the military medical assessment centre and active service personnel are given priority when it comes to examination appointments. This situation is unsatisfactory and understandably leads to frustration and a lack of understanding among those affected. The Bundeswehr must urgently remedy this situation, by commissioning registered contract doctors, for example.

As is the case with active servicewomen and men, reservists have also criticised matters regarding **security clearances**:

- *Reservists not designated for assignment criticised the fact that they could not (or could no longer) be trained or retrained in the Bundeswehr's new marksmanship training concept due to the lack of a security clearance, which is only initiated as part of a reserve assignment or call-up.*

This is true. Since 2021, a compulsory simple security clearance has been performed when reservists are called up to ensure that only those reservists who have no security-relevant results are given access to weapons and ammunition. However, maintaining the ability to shoot weapons or participating in training courses for marksmanship training concepts, which have already been completed, can also be performed during official events and is therefore still possible for reservists who have not received a reserve assignment.

The time it takes to process the security clearance is also frequently criticised:

- *Processing times of several months to over a year were not uncommon in some cases. Reserve services consequently had to be postponed or cancelled altogether.*

Bundeswehr offices entrusted with the processing, in particular the Federal Office for the Military Counterintelligence Service, are not always responsible for this. The long duration was at times also due to an omission on the part of the responsible security officer or incomplete information provided by the reservists, which resulted in time-consuming follow-up requests. If security-relevant information about a person is obtained during a procedure, it requires further clearance steps, which can also take a certain amount of time. This should be communicated accordingly.

The positive experience, on the other hand, gained with the “My Reserve” **smartphone app**, which is still in development, as part of the Quadriga 2024 exercise series, was very encouraging:

- *The Bundeswehr used this app as a prototype for the National Guardian exercise component. A total of 30 volunteer reservists were digitally activated as trial participants using real data for an exercise period lasting several days for a reservist service and used for administrative purposes. The recommendation rate for the app was 100 percent.*

The app gives female and male reservists the opportunity to carry out all steps digitally, from searching for available service opportunities (similar to a job exchange), to submitting an expression of interest and uploading documents, through to being called up as reservists.

The good news is that, despite delays, the app is expected to be available as a usable product in the standard app stores from October 2025. The Ministry was able to clear up the financing discrepancies given as the reason for the delays. The plan to link this app with the “USG-Online” app, probably in the second half of 2026, is very positive, which is why the latter should also be swiftly further developed.

16. Veterans

The veteran culture in Germany received a major boost from the Invictus Games in Düsseldorf in September 2023. To the enormous delight of the veterans’ community and many others, the German Bundestag decided in April of the year under review, on the initiative of the SPD, CDU/CSU, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and FDP parliamentary groups, to celebrate an annual national **Veterans Day** on 15 June from 2025 onwards. A veteran is a person who is currently serving in the Bundeswehr or has retired honourably from the Bundeswehr. Veterans guarantee peace, freedom and democracy in Germany, and in emergencies they give the absolute most that a person can give – their physical integrity and their own lives. They deserve the appropriate recognition, respect and appreciation for this. Veterans Day is our way of expressing this, and it makes veterans visible and helps to anchor the Bundeswehr firmly in the centre of society.

- *In this context, servicewomen and men expressed their fears to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces that Veterans Day could become mere symbolic politics. Nor should it be a second “Armed Forces Day”.*

The fact that the Federal Government has developed an appropriate and modern concept for organising Veterans Day is also to be welcomed. It integrates all relevant stakeholders, such as the German Bundestag, social and welfare organisations and, above all, veterans associations. Many and varied activities and campaigns in the public eye are required to achieve the goals connected with Veterans Day – in Berlin, in front of the Reichstag building, and above all in the federal states and municipalities.

Another highlight in the veterans work was the opening of the **veterans office** as the first central point of contact for veterans in Berlin in January of the year under review. The servicewomen and men working here offer easily accessible advice and information by telephone or on site. They also help directly or refer veterans to offices where they will find support, such as the Help Network. Many interested parties already made use of these services in the year under review and gave positive feedback. As a further improvement, the Ministry should therefore continue this pilot project after the planned evaluation in 2026 and also extend it even further.

Following the 2023 Invictus Games in Düsseldorf with more than 500 competitors from twenty-one countries, **Invictus Germany** was also held in Düsseldorf for the first time in the year under review. A total of 110 athletes from eight nations competed for medals here. Members of disaster relief organisations were also represented among the German participants. It was wonderful to see how this festival of sports carries on the spirit and vision of the Invictus Games. It again sent a strong signal of awareness and appreciation for those, including their families, who risked their mental and physical health during their years of service, and once again demonstrated how sport can have a positive effect on the body and soul, and the power that sport unfurls as part of a holistic rehabilitation concept. The fact that Invictus Germany will now be held annually in Düsseldorf is extremely good news.

A further highlight at the beginning of 2025 was the Invictus Games in Vancouver, Canada.

17. Diversity

As citizens in uniform, members of the Bundeswehr represent the diversity of society. Different backgrounds, beliefs, gender identities and sexual orientations come together in the Bundeswehr, which is a considerable benefit for the troops, as the Ministry of Defence has also recognised in its **Diversity in the Bundeswehr agenda**. The ability to deal with this diversity in everyday life is essential for operational and effective armed forces and the Bundeswehr as a modern employer. The majority of servicewomen and men are already doing this in an exemplary and natural way:

- *In conversations and petitions, members of the Bundeswehr repeatedly emphasise that their origin, identity or special challenge do not play a role in their service – task performance and camaraderie are also front and centre for them.*

The commitment to diversity includes the Bundeswehr's obligation to actively oppose any form of discrimination and unjustified disadvantage, and to punish offences swiftly, consistently and with the necessary severity. There are only a few petitions in this respect, as those affected often do not submit any because it makes them visible and vulnerable and/or they expect little from it, so it may be assumed that there a number of unreported cases.

The Bundeswehr has proven in recent years, with the rehabilitation of homosexual soldiers, for example, that it takes the commitment to diversity very seriously. Nevertheless, the changes that the Bundeswehr has made in the 21st century are not yet easy for all servicewomen and men. Part of everyday life therefore also involves training service personnel, especially superiors and instructors, and repeatedly raising their awareness of value-based, companionable interaction with one another. If the other person is not aware of the potential for injury, casual remarks or supposed jokes, even unintentionally, can easily lead to experiences of discrimination. The Bundeswehr will only be ready for operation if every servicewoman and man can rely unreservedly on truly lived camaraderie.

In recent years, superiors have generally investigated and penalised discrimination with the required severity.

- *Nevertheless, members of the Bundeswehr continue to contact the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to report discriminatory behaviour or to complain about how their units have handled their allegations. Some of these made in the year under review also involved discrimination because of sexual orientation, gender or gender identity.*

If the allegation is confirmed and the disciplinary superior's response shows that discrimination and exclusion will not be tolerated, it sends a signal to the entire unit.

- *Two senior NCOs received a severe disciplinary penalty for making insensitive, discriminatory and derogatory remarks on several occasions towards a fellow transgender soldier who was transitioning at the time. In addition to the fact that the remarks were made in front of other servicewomen and men, the disciplinary superior had also correctly emphasised the sexualised background of the statements.*

If they experience discrimination, service personnel can contact the relevant advocacy organisations, the military chaplaincy, the Bundeswehr Psychosocial Network or the **representative for transgender issues**. The "Discrimination and violence in the Bundeswehr" point of contact is also available, where in the event of discrimination, moral harassment and violent experiences, they will be advised respectfully and anonymously or after leaving the armed forces. Chats with its dedicated employees or with service personnel in general show that, despite all efforts, unfortunately only far too few members of the Bundeswehr and civilian employees are actually aware of the contact point. This should change.

On the other hand, the announced strategic further development of diversity management in the Ministry of Defence initially appeared to have stalled. Despite the clear mandate of the "*Bunt in der Bundeswehr*?" (Colourful in the Bundeswehr?) study in 2020, the Diversity in the Bundeswehr agenda published in February 2024 as a performance record was still largely limited to taking stock and unfortunately lacked ambitious visions for the future, contrary to its original objective. Nevertheless: The Ministry of Defence reaffirmed its commitment to actively combating prejudice and discrimination, emphasised the value of diversity for personnel recruitment, as well as in training and further training, and declared that increasing the share of women and the amount of women in leadership positions is essential. Some of the training and further training measures listed in the agenda were driven forward in the year under review, which includes the fact that the training documents and the basic module for raising awareness of the topic of diversity among existing personnel are now available as part of implementing the "Diversity in training" directive. According to the Ministry, the topic is now also part of the standard training in the organisational components. An adaptation of the web-based training module for superior and command personnel training is still being developed.

It is also encouraging to note that strategic development picked up speed again with the publication of the **Diversity Strategy** at the end of the year under review. Based on the understanding of diversity management as a cross-sectional task, it sets out guiding principles and measures for four strategic fields of action that are to be designed in a diversity-conscious way in the Ministry of Defence's area of competence: Organisational and leadership culture, personnel management, equality of opportunities, and working conditions. The development towards a modern diversity concept that recognises the similarities and differences of all members of the Bundeswehr is noteworthy.

The new edition of the Bundeswehr's **Diversity Conference** in October 2024 under the motto "*Gemeinsam.Zukunft.Gestalten*" (shaping the future together) with the participation of high-ranking

representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the downstream federal agencies as well as the branches of the Bundeswehr was also dominated by the presentation of the strategy. As the Federal Minister of Defence and the responsible state secretary emphatically emphasised, it is important that the values to be defended externally are also practised within the respective area of competence. It was clearly illustrated here that diversity and defence capability in no way contradict one another. In the subsequent workshops, advocacy groups and speakers from the participating offices explained what it means to actively promote diversity – and not least of all for leaders. They made it clear that the homogeneity of the visions and goals, values and standards of the Bundeswehr was not called into question by the heterogeneity of the personalities and perspectives, experiences and perceptions of the members of the Bundeswehr themselves. The consistent official mission of defending German society and the free democratic basic order remains the Bundeswehr's brand essence – whether in routine operations or in times of national and alliance defence. The focus is on dealing constructively with the diversity that already exists anyway, which is both the cause and effect of change processes in which the understanding of values changed, but the values themselves didn't necessarily change. Precise communication and a clear explanation of the diversity concept were therefore required to prevent generally negative reactions. Experiences have shown that clear definitions, binding and honestly communicated boundaries, and certainty of action are important. The task of leaders in the change process is to assume the role of moderator and to also accept emotions while doing so. Attitudes can only be changed permanently at the understanding level, and not via orders. This depends to a large extent on the motivation and willingness to change of the members of the Bundeswehr themselves.

It is therefore now up to the subordinate area to fill the diversity strategy with life and to show that diversity management in the Bundeswehr, in the words of the Minister, is not a side issue and certainly not a flash in the pan. And so, it is also to be hoped that the leadership level of the Bundeswehr's branches and the federal agencies have taken away impetus from the conference to implement the strategy in their own areas. Network meetings with the responsible offices of the subordinate area are initially planned for 2025.

External appearance

Servicewomen and men have the need to express their individuality and identity through externally recognisable features within the framework of the necessary restrictions imposed by the service and the applicable regulations. Applicants want to know what they are getting into when it comes to jewellery, hair length, beard, tattoos or permanent make-up. The Federal Administrative Court had already called for a corresponding ordinance in January 2019. Despite numerous announcements, neither this ordinance nor the parallel revised service regulation have yet been published. This incomprehensible delay does not contribute to the Bundeswehr's attractiveness. Six years after the decision, servicewomen and men have little sympathy for the fact that they are still expected to comply with obviously outdated rules. Meanwhile, little has changed with regard to the objective of the new version. What is required is a modern, manageable, pragmatic regulation that is equally understandable for servicewomen and men and their leaders.

There are further limits to service personnel's individual expression when wearing a **head covering** for religious reasons:

- *One servicewoman re-enrolled in initial training for the Medical Service. She asked to be allowed to wear her hijab (a form of headscarf) while on duty. The Ministry of Defence rejected her request. The exercise of individual freedom of religion and belief must remain within the framework of statutory and service law requirements. According to European Court of Justice case law, a ban on headscarves in the workplace may be permissible if the employer prohibits all employees from wearing visible signs of religious affiliation in the same way within the framework of operational neutrality or if there is a risk of in-house social conflict. The Bundeswehr's uniform regulations stipulate that civilian clothing, with the exception of protective clothing, may not be worn with the uniform. The rejection of her request to wear her hijab does not constitute a direct restriction or unequal treatment in the workplace, as the wearing of religious symbols is prohibited in principle. When she rejoined the Bundeswehr, the servicewoman was aware that her request might meet with difficulties. She herself had stated that she was able to pray regularly on duty without any restrictions. Furthermore, according to the unit commander, she has access to catering in line with her beliefs.*

Transidentity

There was good news in the area of transidentity. It is particularly encouraging to see the significant decrease in the petitions concerning the medical part of the transition process. The structural measures taken in the previous year to shorten processing times and improve communication, as well as the newly assigned tasks and areas of responsibility in the medical services area, appear to be paying off here. As reported by the Federal Ministry of Defence, the duration of **approval procedures** was significantly reduced in 2024, so the average processing time was four days in the first quarter of 2024 and seven days in the second quarter. The maximum time in the fourth quarter of 2023 and first quarter of 2024 was 174 days, and 33 days in the second and third quarters of 2024 (instead of 609 days previously).

With the longer procedures, in the vast majority of cases the delays identified were due to circumstances beyond the control of the authorising body. This means that, after years of stagnation, there has been a significant improvement for members of the Bundeswehr in the transition process, within just a few months. This shows how quickly pragmatic structural reforms can be successful following a strict analysis of deficiencies. This willingness to make swift changes should become a matter of course in the Bundeswehr.

However, according to reports from the transgender affairs officer at the Bundeswehr Medical Service Command, there appears to still be a need to accelerate the application process for **transition services**. Particularly in the case of recurring services, such as measures for beard growth, the regular submission of a specialist's report, which often means a waiting period of several months or an examination in a Bundeswehr hospital, seems superfluous. One possibility would be to at least extend the arrangement periods with certain measures.

Another important step towards eliminating structural discrimination was the revision of the “Military Medical Assessment” service regulation and the health figures. Finally, a transition no longer prevents a re-enlistment or change of status. Unfortunately, the revision of the “Guide for the military medical service – gender reassignment measures with transsexualism” has still not been completed. Nevertheless, the Ministry has already announced that the topic of transsexualism will be included in the training of military personnel. This is the right step to ensure transgender service personnel are treated sensitively from the very first contact with a military doctor. The further development of the “Guideline for dealing with transgender people” noted in the Diversity in the Bundeswehr agenda can also help to ensure that transgender service personnel are treated respectfully and without offence. The Commissioner for Transgender Issues at the Bundeswehr Medical Service Command makes a major contribution here, on a part-time basis, but now far beyond the Medical Service area, with a high level of personal commitment. They issue statements, give lessons in units and advise those affected and superiors from all branches of the armed forces in individual cases. With the introduction of the German Self-Determination Act, this secondary assignment has long since become a full-time job, as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was able to find out for herself in face-to-face chats. The immense requirement for communication and information, particularly among unit commanders and in initial training, shows that this office should be made permanent and publicised – as a full-time job with responsibility for the entire Bundeswehr. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces therefore supports the proposal to create such a post and to locate it in a visible place, at the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre, for example. Appropriate regulations should ensure that the Commissioner for Transgender Issues is also involved in all relevant processes, as are the military equal opportunities officers, for example.

German Self-Determination Act

The German Self-Determination Act, which came into force in November 2024, is designed to make it easier for transgender, intersexual and non-binary people to have their gender entry changed. The law has triggered considerable activity in the Bundeswehr to prepare for this, including a questionnaire covering all potentially affected areas, from sport to clothing and accommodation for Bundeswehr members. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces welcomes the fact that this supports the unit commanders in finding appropriate solutions for all those involved in individual cases. It is still the Bundeswehr's task to integrate people of all backgrounds and identities in the spirit of camaraderie as part of initial training. Superiors should also openly seek dialogue with those affected to find amicable or at least joint solutions together with the service personnel involved.

18. Compatibility of family and duty

Even in routine operations, it is a major challenge for servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr to find the correct compatibility of family and duty. The military profession is unlike any other. The demands on the armed forces are enormous and continue to grow. On her visits to the troops, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learns how much servicewomen and men are challenged and how high their **workload** is. A considerable degree of mobility, flexibility and commitment is required of them.

- *For example, the spokespeople and the military chaplaincy at one location agreed that a lead time of less than a week sometimes, for a course lasting several months at the other end of the country, was not uncommon. Planning for long courses abroad is also at times done at extremely short notice. The lack of an ability to plan has an enormous impact on service operations and results in family upheavals, such as separations and divorce, as well as uncertainty and worry. The respective fears make intensive pastoral and troop psychological support necessary, which was not available at the location to this extent.*

Many members of the Bundeswehr also report decisions by their superiors and personnel management that make it difficult to find the correct compatibility of family and duty:

- *Service personnel with pastoral and care responsibilities in particular criticise the lack of an ability to plan as a major obstacle to the compatibility of family and duty. The complaints range from training courses, exercises and holiday closures over public holidays, and difficult holiday planning, through to command assignments over the turn of the year, which presented them with major challenges. Many members of the Bundeswehr also have the impression that measures for the compatibility of family and duty are restricted with reference to national and alliance defence.*

Compatibility of family and duty with operational readiness is not a contradiction – on the contrary, they go hand in hand, as the Minister and the Chief of Defence rightly emphasised at the conference of military equal opportunity officers in the year under review. They can and must be harmonised with each other. Flexible working time models, well-equipped childcare facilities and unbureaucratic assistance in cases of crisis and hardship are prerequisites for ensuring that servicewomen and men have their heads free to perform their duties well. The task for the coming years will therefore be to further develop the existing structures with a view to national and alliance defence.

Flexible working time models

Part-time, telework and mobile working for all age groups have been part of the Bundeswehr's repertoire of flexible working models for many years now. Frequently these alone enable service personnel to perform their duty despite pastoral and care responsibilities. Telework or mobile working also enable some members of the Bundeswehr to work more hours per week and can reduce the burden of commuting between their place of work and home. It is therefore all the more important to enable servicewomen and men to work flexibly, despite all the demands of establishing operational readiness, taking into account the different phases of their lives and helping them to harmonise their official duties with their private responsibilities. Otherwise, there is a risk that the Bundeswehr will lose service personnel with all their qualifications and experience, either because they do not extend their period of service due to a lack of compatibility of family and duty, or because they decide against becoming a career soldier.

Of course, flexible working is subject to certain conditions and is therefore not equally possible in all areas. There are limits, in the area of part-time work, for example, for which with ten petitions, comparatively few were received in the year under review (2023: eleven). In some cases, a job simply cannot be performed part-time or not to the extent required. It is still quite remarkable that it is predominantly servicewomen who do part-time work. As described in the Federal Government's sixth progress report on the Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel of the Bundeswehr and reported by servicewomen, the "part-time is female" principle still applies in the Bundeswehr, as it does in society as a whole. This is not the only reason why it appears problematic when superiors automatically refer only servicewomen for the possibility of working part-time to perform care-giving duties.

It would also be important for superiors to support **men and fathers** as well in taking on caring responsibilities and working flexibly. Time and again, comments are made during visits to troops and at equality conferences that

parental leave is not accepted or requested to the same extent by servicemen. Men should openly communicate that they also want to and are able to perform their share of family duties:

- *The importance of a call shared on social networks for male role models who perform family duties, as initiated by the Navy Chief of Staff, should therefore not be underestimated when it comes to a culture change.*

There was good news in the year under review with applications for **telework and mobile working**. The procedures appear to be working smoothly. Errors and delays with the technical requirements, as well as with the formal processing of applications, were rarely found in petitions to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. The new version of the "Telework and mobile working" general regulation will further develop these models, which were also tried and tested during the pandemic.

- *The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is increasingly aware that superiors are generally sceptical about telework or mobile working in their units.*

It must be emphasised that applications for telework or applications for extensions can only be rejected, even in routine operations, if there are reasons for this arising from the specific individual case. However, a general reference to national and alliance defence without stating specific official reasons in individual cases is not sufficient for a refusal. The benefits of telework in the Bundeswehr are assessed differently on the basis of national and alliance defence:

- *Several service personnel, most of whom work from home or have been mostly doing training digitally for years now, criticised the comments made by an officer in a daily newspaper: "Anyone that sits in the home office is not important [...]." The responsible command authority considered the criticism to be justified, although the officer had stated that his comments were limited to a specific area. The officer received an order to refrain from carrying out his duties, stating that he had committed a disciplinary offence. He was also instructed during a management meeting on the "mobile working" topic and on the required restraint when making public statements and personal assessments.*

Open resistance from superiors with regard to flexible working models was not uncommon in the year under review, as the following case illustrates:

- *A Navy operational unit rejected the application for telework of a recently transferred servicewoman returning from parental leave, which she combined with the intention of being able to work full-time again as soon as possible. Telework is not a common practice in the unit. Together with the military equal opportunity officer, the parties involved negotiated a trial period for telework. Shortly before the end of the trial, the superior declared it a failure. The equal opportunity officer determined that the servicewoman's tasks in the S4 area (service support) were perfectly suitable for telework. Apparently, however, those responsible in the unit have a generally negative attitude towards this working method, which was also confirmed by the comparative figures for other units in the brigade-size formation. Its commander supported the request, saying it was in the interests of operational readiness and the advancement of women if a servicewoman with family responsibilities applied for telework in order to move closer to full-time employment. He would have liked to see greater appreciation and more active guidance and support for her. He said telework and part-time employment still do not have the desired acceptance in the unit and called for changes to this effect. Navy Headquarters shared this view and called on the unit to abandon its partially prejudiced attitude towards telework. Fortunately, the petitioner is now working full-time as requested and has been authorised to work from home for an initial period of three years.*

Servicewomen and men also reported behaviour they considered not very caring with regard to the application for telework:

- *One servicewoman criticised the fact that her superior had repeatedly rejected her application over several months, citing alleged formal deficiencies. Among other things, she attributed the superior's refusal to the fact that he did not tolerate telework in his area. The offices involved initially believed the responsibility was with the servicewoman, having failed to meet her obligation to cooperate. When asked by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the responsible command authority conceded that her superiors and specialist personnel had not supported the servicewoman actively enough, although it was known that the application form frequently could not be filled out correctly without help. The soldier's new office has since approved the application.*

As part of their duty of care, superiors should always be open to telework and support service personnel who want to make use of it wherever possible. As the application form is apparently difficult to complete, the Bundeswehr should also adjust it to make it more user-friendly.

Family-friendly assignment planning

It is not always possible to accommodate the wishes of service personnel to be stationed close to their centre of life for family responsibilities or other private reasons. As a rule, the interests of the armed forces take precedence, at least where these cannot be reconciled with private interests. All members of the Bundeswehr know this when they sign their declaration of commitment at the latest.

Commuting between home and base, with all the associated stresses and strains, is therefore still part of the experience of many servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr. This is often a major challenge for military families. Nevertheless, it is still possible, for **serious personal reasons**, for example, to apply for a reassignment close to home or to remain at the present location. In exceptional family situations, it is clear that personnel management generally takes the concerns of the service personnel in question into account within the scope of what is possible for the performance of official duties. An internal work instruction supports them here. However, it is clear that not all personnel management offices make full use of their freedom of assessment. Military couples in particular criticise the fact that their personal situation is not always given sufficient consideration, as the following extreme example illustrates:

- *One serviceman reported to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces during a troop visit that the joint personnel manager had transferred him and his partner from the North Sea to the Baltic Sea and vice versa every three to five years. The next change is already scheduled for 2025. This was one of the reasons why they decided not to have children, and to set up their shared centre of life between the two locations.*

In this context, it should generally be pointed out that the Federal Administrative Court strengthened the rights of **military couples** in 2023, if they put forward personal reasons relating to an overall family situation, such as caring for children living in the home. Accordingly, the consequences of a transfer decision for both partners must be considered holistically and included in the overall balancing of official and private matters. In such cases, the employer's overall care responsibility extends to both partners – the reassignment of one of them cannot mean that the other is automatically required to give up their training or employment, leave shift work or reduce their working hours.

The **processing time** of some complaints in the Ministry of Defence of one to one and a half years, which were made by service personnel in a challenging family situation, was less than encouraging. During this time, no remedial action could be taken, even after repeated enquiries by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces or the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management.

In particular with reassignments close to home due to serious personal reasons and where families are at risk of being torn apart, such complaints should be processed as quickly as possible.

Childcare

Servicewomen and men must have the certainty that their children are well cared for. Only then can they concentrate on their diverse tasks and the associated high demands, which are characterised by time and location flexibility, as well as frequent absences due to training courses, exercises and deployments. Ensuring childcare that meets the needs and takes into account the special requirements of the military profession is therefore one of the most urgent concerns of service personnel with parental duties. Even if there is only a legal entitlement to a childcare place vis-à-vis the respective towns and municipalities, the Bundeswehr should endeavour to further expand the services offered in the interests of its attractiveness as an employer and in particular with regard to the Bundeswehr's operational readiness.

Fortunately, there has been steady progress in this area. At the end of the year under review, the Bundeswehr maintained a total of 1,152 childcare places nationwide. These included 594 rights to places (of these 67 places at 13 locations for the children of those on training -courses), 105 places in normal and large day care centres and 453 places in day care centres close to Bundeswehr sites.

Unfortunately, there is a considerable lack of information and awareness in some areas regarding the existing options and procedures for childcare in the Bundeswehr:

- *One result of the "Childcare in the Navy" conference was that, in places, there was no access to all the information for those affected due to a lack of IT- equipment. Also, some of those responsible are not sufficiently aware of the importance of childcare.*

Further efforts are required here to address the deficits. The follow-up event already planned is therefore to be welcomed.

The Kümmersbruck site has seen an encouraging development:

- *A day care centre that was open here until 2020, but was closed due to economic inefficiency, was able to reopen in the year under review. At the suggestion of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces following a visit to the troops in 2023, a contract was finally signed with a provider. The site now has ten childcare places, with opening hours tailored to the childcare needs of members of the Bundeswehr.*

There are however limits to the Bundeswehr's involvement if the parents' special wishes and ideas differ significantly from the options available locally:

- *One servicewoman criticised what she saw as an inadequate educational concept and the professionalism of the childcare staff at a large day care centre at a Bundeswehr training facility. She also complained that the Bundeswehr had not given her sufficient support in her search for a childcare facility. The review revealed that her superiors and the responsible department in the Ministry had supported her attentively in the placement of her child. The teaching facility had also been generous in setting daily working hours to ensure afternoon supervision. The educational concept and the childcare offering also passed the review, as they met the requirements of the responsible youth welfare office.*

The Bundeswehr should continue to make every necessary and proportionate effort to work with the towns and municipalities concerned to provide reliable and educationally sound childcare at the respective location. The goal must be to reconcile the demands of the job with family care responsibilities as much as possible. This always requires the commitment and willingness of both sides.

It is not uncommon for negotiations on **rights to places** with the local authorities to be very tough, at the Calw and Stetten am kalten Markt locations, for example, where the recognised need for care is not or not yet guaranteed. In Munster, there is also a need for up to 40 childcare places, which has remained unchanged for years and is recognised by the Commissioner for the Compatibility of Family and Duty/Service in the Bundeswehr:

- *Only ten rights to places in a day care centre in Munster are available here. A further 16 to 20 places will be offered by two large day care centres in the future, however they are not expected to open until mid to late 2026 at the earliest. As part of the discussions on rights to places with the Munster authorities, it also emerged that a nearby military church congregation is planning to renovate its day care centre building in two years' time with the possibility of expanding its premises and has signalled its willingness to cooperate with the Bundeswehr. However, the city of Munster would have to approve the acquisition of the rights to places, as these are publicly subsidised childcare places.*

The negotiations will continue to drag on here, so the recognised need for care at the largest Bundeswehr base will not be guaranteed in the foreseeable future.

- *The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is also informed that servicewomen and men are concerned about the childcare offering available for their children in the event of an emergency.*

As part of the "Action plan to strengthen operational readiness and support members of the Bundeswehr with family care responsibilities", the Ministry of Defence is working on creating structures that are sustainable for members of the Bundeswehr and their families, including in emergencies. In the year under review, the focus was on cooperation with the municipalities in particular:

- *Accordingly, together with the three municipal umbrella organisations, the Association of German Counties, German Association of Cities and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, the Ministry adopted the "Joint declaration of intent to support members of the Bundeswehr with childcare with regard to national and alliance defence". The declaration is intended to provide the impetus for preparations and the*

development of specific measure packages to ensure that the children of those serving in the Bundeswehr can be cared for in an emergency.

In view of the long lead time for the expansion of childcare places in particular, this initiative is very welcome.

In addition to a satisfactory supply of day care places, there is also a sufficient supply of holiday care for school-age children, which includes the summer holidays in particular, when day care centres are usually closed. Successful pilot projects that relieve the burden on military families already exist:

- *For the third year in a row, the Protestant and Catholic Association for the Welfare of Military Personnel has organised and implemented childcare for school-age children during the summer holidays at ten locations. According to the community commanders, this support contributes to personnel operational readiness, as absences due to caring duties have been reduced and have had a positive effect on duty scheduling.*

The responsible department in the Ministry of Defence intends to expand the **holiday childcare** programme to 20 locations and make it permanent in 2025. This is very welcome. Whether or not there is a need for holiday childcare at a location depends on the results of a survey to be carried out by the community commander. It is therefore surprising that Munster, one of the largest Bundeswehr locations, does not offer holiday childcare. The demand analyses at the locations should therefore be reviewed, and the respective equal opportunity officers, social services or similar stakeholders could provide support here.

It is to be welcomed that a solution for the school attendance of children of those doing training courses at the respective course location was provided in the year under review. In future, the children's usual place of residence, where there is a legal entitlement to attend school, should also be the location of the training course, regardless of the registration address. The family and duty officer at the Ministry conducted promising negotiations with the individual ministries of education to achieve the goal of having children taught at the schools at the training course location as soon as possible.

Family support and support offices

The day-to-day challenges for the troops did not diminish in the year under review. They affect servicewomen and men in different ways, with regular commuting between barracks and home, absences of several weeks due to exercises, sea voyages or deployments, or with uncertainties due to a foreseeable medium-term transfer to Lithuania, for example. However, they are not alone here. Due to their service, their partners, children and parents must also endure great hardship in some cases, which in turn can mean additional psychological stress for the servicewomen and men affected. It is therefore appropriate and right that the Bundeswehr should also look after their relatives, because only with this certainty can they concentrate fully on their job.

Family support is particularly important for longer absences due to deployments, missions, training trips abroad or exercises lasting more than 30 days. Relatives can then make use of the active childcare service offered by the 32 full-time **family support centres** and up to 50 part-time, temporary family support centres. These provide advice, supervision, information and assistance in a variety of ways.

The opening of the Wilhelmshaven family support centre, which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited during the final construction phase, was particularly encouraging in the year under review:

- *The rented, barrier-free building features impressive bright and spacious rooms and provides space for events with up to 130 people. It is easy for families to reach, thanks to its central location near to the city and outside the naval base, without having to pass through a Bundeswehr guard post.*

It was also a positive and important signal that the wife of the Federal President assumed personal patronage of the Bundeswehr's family support organisation in July 2024. Its goal is to draw public attention to military families to raise awareness in society of the difficulties they face.

There was clarity in the year under review for the numerous **volunteers** who put their heart and soul into the family support organisation.

- *The issuing of rules of procedure for this area in August 2022 was actually seen as progress. When it came into force, however, the support allowance of EUR 18 per day and person for volunteer personnel was*

discontinued, although the events organised by the family support service would hardly be possible without these dedicated volunteers. The Ministry of Defence rectified this glaring deficiency in spring 2024.

This long overdue correction is a welcome sign of appreciation.

The structural reorganisation of the Bundeswehr, which was completed in October 2024 and also affected the family support organisation, caused uncertainty. Until now, the family support centres have been subordinate to the respective regional territorial commands. With the **structural reform**, responsibility was then transferred to the Armed Forces Office. A lack of information and inadequate communication resulted in understandable displeasure in the run-up period:

- *The long-standing manager of a family support centre described this by saying that those affected did not feel, "brought on board", especially with this far-reaching matter. According to a statement from the Ministry of Defence, the basis for the transfer of authority was a ministerial organisational directive from August 2024. In response, the Armed Forces Office sent a letter in September 2024 informing those affected about the impending effects, the challenges ahead and the next steps. Additionally, it also held a workshop in the same month, in which 29 of the 32 family support centres took part.*

It is incomprehensible that the directive was issued at such short notice before the transfer of responsibilities. It is therefore all the more positive to emphasise that, with the workshop, the Armed Forces Office reacted very quickly and initiated a direct exchange with those affected.

Lived camaraderie is an indispensable building block of military togetherness. This applies on deployments, during missions or on exercises, and especially during routine operations at the home base. With respect to a commuter and professional army, it is important to counteract individualisation phenomena among the troops and to promote close interaction between them. The 184 **support offices**, which are located at Bundeswehr sites throughout Germany, provide the space for such meetings. The decision in 2021 to expand the group of people addressed was far-sighted. The target groups for support and welfare since then have been active and former members of the Bundeswehr, veterans, reservists, their relatives, surviving dependants and others closely associated with active or former servicewomen and men. The support offices therefore have an important mediating role to play, because they bridge the gap to civilian society and, for example, offer family members the opportunity to quickly and easily make connections in a new post.

In the year under review, a measure taken by the responsible **supervisory authority** caused a lack of understanding:

- *Several service personnel complained that their support offices were no longer allowed to issue various support materials, such as bouncy castles for children, bobby cars, stand-up paddle boards, barbecues, beer tent sets, fog machines and similar party equipment for private events due to a technical instruction from the Armed Forces Office. Reservations that had already been confirmed were sometimes cancelled at very short notice. Following criticism from the Federal Audit Office, the Ministry of Defence said it had issued the directive in question to ensure a clear distinction between admissible and inadmissible use. Borrowing for purely private events was already not permitted before but was common practice. The situation is different in an official context. The use of support equipment for a social evening at home, for example, is permitted.*

The measures taken by the Ministry are valid and comprehensible. It is to be welcomed that those responsible are working in parallel on the further development of support and welfare, which they intend to align more closely with the requirements of the "turning point". It would also be a step in the right direction if the troops both associated support with access to material that can be borrowed free of charge and also understood support in the sense of good camaraderie and close cooperation, and behaved accordingly.

Financial benefits

Service personnel can still only claim allowances for support services of up to EUR 50 per day on the basis of the **Ordinance on Domestic Help for Soldiers**. With a maximum hourly rate of EUR 10, it is not possible to finance domestic help from this, especially as the allowances are below the statutory minimum wage. The goal of relieving the burden on military families in the event of extraordinary support costs in the context of special deployments abroad, standby commitments, standing operational tasks or preparation for a special deployment abroad cannot be achieved in this way.

- *During visits to the troops and in petitions, the misleading name of the regulation and the far too low level of cost reimbursement in particular remain ongoing issues.*

At any rate, the Zeitenwende article law has now at least laid the foundation for a revision of the Ordinance on Domestic Help for Soldiers. Servicewomen and men with family or caring responsibilities should be able to be reimbursed for the costs of family and domestic help that are incurred additionally as a result of deployment abroad and are essential if reimbursement is not possible according to other legal bases. It is to be hoped that a modern and flexible regulation will be compiled on this legal basis in the near future, which can also take account of future developments without lengthy adjustment procedures.

The reimbursement of **health and long-term care insurance contributions** for servicewomen and men during parental leave, on the other hand, is still not regulated. This discrimination against members of the armed forces should finally be remedied with the standardised military service maternity and parental leave ordinance, but this is still a long way off. The ordinance will contain further important and necessary adjustments to the Maternity Protection Act and the Civilian Maternity Protection and Parental Leave Ordinance, including protection against dismissal during parental leave. It is hoped that the plan will be implemented swiftly in the next legislative period, so that servicewomen and men are no longer denied the benefits of civilian regulations.

19. Health

Medical Service personnel situation

The personnel situation in the Medical Service continues to be extremely strained. This can be seen, for example, in the career categories of officers and NCOs, where approximately 21.9 percent of the available military posts were unfilled at the end of the year under review. In 2022, the Ministry of Defence made the appropriate decision to create some 2,000 additional posts in the Medical Service to ensure its mission is achieved and in particular to provide medical services support for Division 2025. By the end of 2024, almost all of these posts, 1,963 to be precise, had been organisationally established, including 270 for officers, 1,689 for NCOs and enlisted personnel, and four posts for civilian personnel.

The mere creation of additional posts, however, still does not produce an actual deployment of staff. Unfortunately, the Bundeswehr only managed to fill a fraction of these newly created posts by the end of 2024, or to incorporate them with assignments: 97 of the 270 posts for officers and 419 of the 1,689 posts for NCOs and enlisted personnel. This is equal to an overall share of posts filled of just 26.3 percent of the newly created posts, which is unsatisfactory, particularly in view of the support for **Division 2025**. The main reasons for this are an insufficient number of established posts and the absence of staffing potential. According to the Ministry, many of the posts created in this process are not even available yet for filling.

The Ministry is working to counter the extremely poor staffing levels in the biggest deficiency areas of the Bundeswehr's Medical Service – internal medicine, in particular gastroenterology and ophthalmology, thoracic surgery and microbiology. Due to the small number of posts and the low level of regeneration in these areas, it can only cover personnel vacancies that arise at short notice (due to parental leave or termination, for example) by recruiting personnel externally. The Ministry is therefore focussing more intensively on attracting people interested in the Medical Service and also keeping them as part of its personnel retention programme. External job adverts, re-enlistments and the granting of recruitment and retention bonuses in particular are the means of choice here. The Ministry of Defence concedes, however, that their effect is limited. On the one hand, these deficiency areas in medicine were also among the deficiency areas in the civilian healthcare system. On the other hand, the Bundeswehr's overall stressed staffing situation has exacerbated these fundamental problems.

A lack of **established posts** means the Bundeswehr is unable to recruit urgently required personnel. Nor can it implement service period extensions or the mutually agreed postponement of retirement, despite an existing shortage of personnel. This was illustrated, for example, in the following cases:

- *One petitioner, a general practitioner, criticised the rejection of her application for re-enlistment beyond the special age limit. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management initially justified the decision by stating that the general medicine field was not a deficiency area due to the very good regeneration situation. A re-enlistment would also have tied up an established post of the A 15 salary group. However, in view of the*

few established posts available, this is required for personnel retention measures in special assignments where there is a pronounced shortage.

- *Another petitioner criticised the fact that period of service extensions for temporary-career volunteers in the area of Medical Service and pharmacist senior officers was being rejected due to limited budget funds, even though there was a requirement. The Ministry stated that, due to a lack of established posts for the officer career paths, the options for recruiting and retaining personnel from the A 9 salary group and above were limited and focussed on covering particularly critical personnel requirements, which would otherwise result in considerable restrictions in operational readiness or loss of capability. It is the task of personnel management to ensure the Bundeswehr's Medical Service accomplishes its personnel mission by taking a holistic view.*

On the other hand, it is encouraging to note that the speciality series and assignment categories of officers for medicine in the fields of gynaecology, physiology, forensic medicine, plastic/aesthetic surgery, and internal medicine, angio and pneumo, have a 100 percent occupancy rate. The applicant situation for the career path of Medical Service officers with a degree in medicine remains good. In the year under review, there were 1,000 applications here for 250 study places.

The Ministry of Defence also rates the staffing status of the Medical Officer-Care Management career path, which was still being developed in the year under review, as basically positive. Although this currently has a staffing level of only 52 percent, the Ministry expects to increase this figure in the coming years, as the training of the relevant medical officers will then be completed.

The personnel situation is somewhat different in the medical assistant professions. The Ministry expects a long-term deterioration in staffing levels in the area of specialist care, especially with anaesthesia and intensive care medicine, because the Bundeswehr is facing much tougher competition in the labour and skilled labour/specialists market. In contrast to general healthcare and nursing, this has a particular impact on specialised nurses due to their higher qualifications. The Bundeswehr is trying to counter this, among other things with measures for internal training- and further training, intensified and regional recruitment, the creation of low-threshold recruitment opportunities and flexible service entry dates. Falling below certain values in the assessment in particular should not automatically result in applicants being excluded from the recruitment process, but rather they should be given the opportunity to prove their suitability after recruitment as part of the required standard training course. It remains to be seen if this will be effective.

Medical service support

In April of the year under review, the Minister of Defence announced that the Joint Medical Service would be dissolved as an independent division as part of the Bundeswehr's **restructuring**. From April 2025, the Medical Service will be subordinate to the Bundeswehr Support Command, which was set up in October 2024. The commander's second in command at the Support Command will also be the commander of the Joint Medical Service and will retain their three-star rank. In this function, they are also the highest technical superior of all members of the Medical Service.

The civilian healthcare associations and organisations criticised the changes unusually harshly. Among other things, they feared a reduction in civilian-military cooperation in the health sector, both in the management of national crises and in the training and further training of military and civilian personnel. In the view of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, it is appropriate that the Medical Service remain a closed system that guarantees an uninterrupted chain of responsibility and technical supervision. It is, however, important that the commander of the Medical Service, in their role as medical adviser to the Ministry's management, is listened to at all times – as the chief of service has been to date.

Medical care at the highest level is an indispensable prerequisite for the armed forces' operational readiness. The certainty of being medically protected by the constant presence of the Medical Service in an emergency is one of the basic needs of servicewomen and men. A functioning Medical Service is essential, as the deployment of service personnel cannot be justified without sufficient medical capacities. In times of difficult recruitment, free medical care insurance can also be a significant attractiveness factor.

Unfortunately, the inadequate performance of several **medical centres** was criticised in the year under review. This was confirmed in most cases:

- *Complaints about the Husum medical centre included treatment and assessment capacity bottlenecks due to a lack of or absent unit -physicians. The statement from the Medical Service Command confirmed the criticised personnel situation. A steadily growing supply strength and a high workload for the units at the site with the corresponding necessary assessments and vaccinations meant that the medical centre's capacity utilisation was particularly high. At the same time, its own personnel also had to meet deployment obligations. The filling of a unit physician post in mid-2025 should improve the situation. The Medical Service Command will also once again review the Husum site as part of the further development of regional medical services.*
- *The criticism of another medical centre referred to the availability by phone and long waiting times for appointments, especially for necessary medical assessments. The reason for this was a greater need for care due to the high proportion of older patients and a medical staffing ratio that was no longer up to date. Above all, there were deficits in the organisational procedures. According to an initial evaluation, the measures taken by the local management at the time did not result in the removal of any deficiencies but rather caused a significant deterioration in the procedures with unit physician consultation hours. However, the support provided by the staff of another medical centre helped to ensure availability by phone, digitally and in person. A further improvement in the situation is also hoped for with the refilling of the management post and the reassignment of two more unit physicians to the centre in January 2025.*
- *There were significant complaints regarding the Koblenz medical centre, including long waiting times and problems with accessibility, making appointments and organisational procedures. In addition to the need to optimise practical organisation, the review also revealed that the number of non-academic assistants was too low, particularly in the central area of patient registration, documentation, M-record and medical care insurance. Staffing levels have not yet taken into account the workload of larger locations with a high level of care or the composition of the patient population. Experience shows that there is a higher proportion of older and chronically ill patients with many of the staff and specialist posts to be cared for. The approach of treating the central areas of all medical centres the same with regard to the posts to be mustered out and ignoring the reality of on-site work must therefore be reconsidered.*
- *The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces found an almost identical situation in December 2024 during a troop visit to the Bonn medical centre, which cares for approximately 6,000 service personnel.*

It is not surprising that the procedures described can quickly cause a work overload and justified complaints. The Ministry of Defence's announcement that divergent age structures and their additional or reduced burdens for the respective medical facility will be included in the considerations for the amendment of the "patient-unit physician ratio" is therefore to be welcomed. Even if just a reconsideration does not promise a quick remedy, it is to be hoped that it will produce necessary personnel adjustments in the medium term – and not just at the Bonn and Koblenz medical centres.

There was good news from the Navy area:

- *Several servicewomen and men from Flotilla 1 in Kiel complained about the lack of assessment appointments for the extension of the certificate of fitness for on-board duty at the Eckernförde medical centre over a longer period of time. According to the Ministry of Defence's statement, ensuring that an assessment office that is considered essential is continuously staffed and the permanent establishment of a "Treatment and assessment manager" post, have significantly improved the situation.*

In view of the often strained personnel situations, **registered contract doctors** are extremely important in regional medical care, particularly with regard to the desirable continuity of medical care for older and chronically ill servicewomen and men.

- *The Medical Service has not been able to sign any new registered contract doctors for several years now. Due to a decision by the Federal Social Court in 2019, these are subject to social security contributions and, since then, agreement between the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community as to who should pay the social security contributions has not been reached. The Federal Office of Administration, which is part of the Ministry of the Interior's area of responsibility, requested two posts for this from the Ministry of Defence. A total of 45 contractual relationships have therefore expired since 2020, affecting 104 of a total of 129 medical centres due to multiple contracts.*

It is difficult to comprehend that the already strained personnel situation in the regional Medical Service was further exacerbated for some years because two federal ministries could not agree on the relocation of two posts.

The Ministry of Defence's announcement in the second half of 2024 that the Federal Office of Administration would assume the task was cause for hope. Implementation was, however, still pending at the end of the year under review. The ministries involved must now urgently find a conclusive solution.

Rehabilitation is also especially important with regard to the Bundeswehr's new focus on national and alliance defence. Currently, only the Bundeswehr's Centre for Sports Medicine and five rehabilitation centres with pilot status exist for this in the Medical Service. To be able to meet the challenges that arise, it appears necessary to consolidate the rehabilitation centres and expand them across the country, and to also ensure the reliable support of civilian facilities.

In the vast majority of cases, **gynaecological care** for servicewomen is provided by referral to civilian doctors with accreditation as a panel doctor. This applies to both preventive and outpatient care. In addition to annual cancer screening, preventive care also includes the six-monthly examination for the prescription of birth control items.

- *One servicewoman reported that civilian gynaecological practices had reservations or even refused to treat servicewomen due to alleged existing invoicing problems with the Bundeswehr. Even though, according to the results of the investigation, the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management was not aware of any such problems, the Ministry of Defence planned to hold talks with the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians following the review to clarify any discrepancies. In the past, the association had already repeatedly issued circulars with updated invoicing instructions to its registered contract doctors, which had contributed to an improvement in the care of servicewomen. The Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management will also produce a leaflet on invoicing modalities that service personnel can refer to with corresponding problems in civilian medical practices.*

It is hardly surprising that the medical care insurance clearing office is not aware of these cases, as many servicewomen may not report such problems, but instead avoid the invoicing difficulties by choosing another doctor. The measures taken here are therefore very welcome.

Even if the gynaecological care for servicewomen is usually provided in the civilian sector, it would seem logical for the unit physicians in the regional medical facilities to have at least basic knowledge in this area, as well as more specialised knowledge, on endometriosis, for example. It is therefore encouraging that their training will now focus more on medically relevant gynaecological aspects.

The **Bundeswehr Medical Care Insurance Ordinance** regulates the provision of free military medical care for service personnel. The military medical care insurance entitlement also extends to digital health applications, such as health apps in the form of diabetes- diaries and medication plans, or diagnostic or therapy software, for example. All products tested by the Federal Office for Drug Safety and temporarily or permanently included in the corresponding public list of this office are prescribable here.

- *In view of the long waiting times for outpatient psychotherapy, digital health applications in the field of mental health that meet these requirements can be a further and faster therapy option, at least as a bridging solution. There has been criticism of the fact that, until now, individual approval by the Federal Ministry of Defence has been required for a corresponding prescription at the expense of free military medical care, which has made the procedure longer.*

The fact that the Ministry has delegated responsibility for this to the Regional Medical Service Support Command since July 2024 is also very welcome. This should result in a simplification and acceleration of the authorisation process.

- *A problem with the ordinance governing digital health applications is the fact that service personnel must pay in advance to have access to the corresponding online programme.*

The Federal Ministry of Defence has announced that it will swiftly find a pragmatic solution in the interests of the servicewomen and men affected. This is very welcome.

In the summer of 2022, the Federal Administrative Court ruled that the obligation for service personnel to be **vaccinated against COVID-19** was compliant with the constitution. At the same time, it also pointed out that it is the task of the Ministry of Defence to regularly evaluate and monitor how long the duty to tolerate the COVID-19 vaccination must be maintained. On this basis, in May 2024, the ad-hoc working group of the Medical Advisory Council recommended downgrading the previous duty to tolerate for all servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr to recommending vaccination against COVID-19. As a result, the Bundeswehr Medical Service

Command proposed amending the relevant regulation after reassessing the situation. The Federal Minister of Defence followed the proposal.

Several visits to the troops once again showed how important the early introduction of a digital **health record** is. The Bundeswehr has, for the most part, maintained these “M-records” manually since its foundation. The susceptibility to errors, with reassignments or training courses, for example, due to the postal dispatch of paper files is often a considerable stress factor:

- *During a visit to Flotilla 1 in Kiel, servicewomen and men reported that the loss of medical records in the post had caused career-related consequences for some of them and also made deployment planning more difficult.*
- *At the Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum (Netherlands), service personnel also referred to the uncertainties of sending medical records by post after moving abroad.*
- *Another serviceman complained that his medical record could not be found with several medical appointments in the Bruchsal medical centre. It emerged that it was not known here that the serviceman had already been assigned to the support centre for civilian initial and follow-on occupational training in Bruchsal a year earlier. His medical record was still at the previously responsible medical centre in Ahlen.*
- *The result was far less favourable in the case of a lance corporal whose medical record had disappeared after an appointment in June 2023 at the Stadtallendorf medical centre. Despite an intensive on-site search and a nationwide search report, the record could no longer be found.*

The petitioner’s displeasure at the handling of his highly personal and sensitive medical data, which cannot be reconstructed for the replacement record, is entirely understandable.

After only partial funding of EUR 18 million was initially available in 2023, there are now funding commitments for necessary digitalisation projects in the medical services area – including the electronic health record. This is urgently required, as the digitalisation of medical services as a whole is inadequate.

- *The lack of a digital appointment allocation system or technical problems with video consultations are further examples of this.*

The Ministry of Defence conceded that the IT support system currently in place at regional medical facilities only rudimentarily meets the requirements of a modern medical information system.

Despite repeated enquiries by disciplinary superiors, those in charge were unable to clarify a long-standing uncertainty with regard to **medical confidentiality**:

- *Unit physicians had always referred to this when disciplinary superiors asked whether service personnel under their command were actually there for treatment. The Ministry of Defence immediately stated that such questions were permissible and should be distinguished from the actual medical treatment. Only the latter concerns the medical relationship of trust with patients and is therefore subject to the obligation to maintain confidentiality. At the same time, it also took the opportunity to communicate the legal situation to the subordinate agencies.*

It was astonishing that the questioner had not been able to obtain any reliable information on this from the superior offices in more than ten years, while the Ministry was able to respond to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces within less than two weeks. Disciplinary superiors must be able to find out where the servicewomen and men under their command are. The fact that they now have the certainty of action for this is to be welcomed.

Less encouraging, however, is the long processing time of a submission for **mountain rescue**:

- *During a visit to the troops in 2023, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learnt that there had still been no response to the submission prepared by the medical task force five years ago. In response to this, an enquiry to the Ministry of Defence revealed that there was a need for extensive adjustments to the updated draft of the “Medical service support for mountain troops on operations” concept and that the final co-signature was therefore still pending. In the year under review, the responsible office announced that it was not in a position to approve the scheme before July 2025 due to the unexpected, long-term absence of an administrator and an ongoing reorganisation.*

This is unacceptable. The justification for not co-signing the regulation, which has been in progress for six years, is not convincing.

Applied military psychology

In view of the stresses and challenges that arise for individual servicewomen and men with national and alliance defence, it is becoming increasingly important to have appropriate and sufficient nationwide troop psychology. This also applies with regard to supporting measures to maintain and increase mental fitness. The fact that the new “Maintaining and improving the mental fitness of servicewomen and men” service regulation now focuses more intensively on prevention than before is a positive development. The decoupling of low-threshold prevention measures from the Medical Service and their integration into the training programme is also good news.

And it is encouraging to see an improvement with the troop psychology at the Leer site:

- *As early as March 2023, NCOs from the Rapid Response Medical Service Command complained about the lack of a post for troop psychology during a visit to the troops by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Although the Ministry of Defence did not see any immediate need for action, in view of the command’s increasingly high operational workload however, it did consider it logical to provide original troop psychology support at the site. In the year under review, the Surgeon General then decided to set up this post as part of the Medical Service’s restructuring.*

Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learnt at the Naval Air Command in Nordholz, at the Bundeswehr Signals Intelligence Technical Analysis Centre in Hof and at the 12 Armoured Brigade in Cham. There is an urgent need for action in Nordholz in particular:

- *The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was informed about suicides here in the year under review. There is no troop psychology unit at the site. The two troop psychologists stationed in Wilhelmshaven cannot also support Nordholz. In addition to problems caused by the high workload, many of those in the unit are also afraid of losing their flying licence due to health reasons, complicated by worries of an abrupt end to their career. The current increase to around 2,800 posts also creates a further considerable need for on-site support. Against this background, it is therefore encouraging that the Navy, according to the Ministry of Defence, fully supports setting up a troop psychology unit in Nordholz and is working hard to set up the two posts planned for this.*
- *Members of the Bundeswehr Signals Intelligence Technical Analysis Centre in Hof complained that the nearest troop psychologist was only available in Daun in the Eifel region, almost 500 km away. There is no local psychosocial network at all. The responsible unit physician and the military chaplaincy are located in Weiden and Roth respectively and the social services are in Amberg, all of which are also 100 kilometres or more away. It is therefore not possible to interconnect the support. Also compounding the situation is the fact that the average service personnel age here is very high and many of them are on non-established posts due to health impairments.*
- *The commander of the 12 Armoured Brigade in Cham reported that his brigade only had three troop psychologists, although there was a very high need for them. Of the three, one troop psychologist is expected to be transferred, another will not receive a security clearance and the third is still in the familiarisation phase.*

The Bundeswehr could cover the additional need for troop psychologists from its own ranks, which servicewomen and men have rightly called for. It has been offering them a **psychology degree programme** since 2013. Nevertheless, it still only employs civilian troop -psychologists. This is incomprehensible, as many of the graduates are very interested in working in troop psychology in the Bundeswehr and have the best qualifications for this. They would be particularly suitable in this respect, as they bring with them an understanding of and suitable approaches to solving many types of psychological problems, which are certainly often related to service as a servicewoman or man. The Bundeswehr should reconsider its dismissive stance here.

Disablement pension

The Soldiers' Compensation Act, which had already been passed in August 2021, finally came into force in January 2025. This means there is a completely independent regulation for the provision of disablement pensions. The Act applies to all service personnel, regardless of their status, and applies equally to damage to health connected with service at home or abroad. This does not affect the special foreign assignments benefits and pensions.

One of the most important changes is the increase in non-income-related compensatory payments. The new point of contact is the **German Social Accident Insurance Institution of the Federal Government and for the Railway Services**, which in future will provide medical care, injury-related care services and benefits for participation in working life, provided servicewomen and men are entitled to them after completing their military service. Medical care is then essentially provided at the benefit level of statutory occupational accident insurance. Accordingly, military personnel with service-related disabilities are entitled to care with all suitable means and no longer only with the necessary means, as was previously the case. This scope of benefits also applies during the period of active service, provided it is for the treatment of the recognised damage to health. It should be emphasised that the act regulates the compensation for income losses with service-related disability with the compensation for loss of earnings in a new and transparent way. Those entitled to a pension who receive non-income-related and income-related benefits now have the right to choose between their previous benefits and benefits under the Soldiers' Compensation Act. It is therefore important that those affected receive comprehensive and correct advice on this, so they can exercise this right in the best possible way.

Procedural simplifications included with the Soldiers' Compensation Act are particularly welcome. Henceforth, the decision to recognise a health disorder as a service-related disability will apply beyond the end of the service period. Unlike in the past, a new application and administrative procedure is no longer required for the period after military service. In future, those affected will also be able to submit applications digitally. Online access will enable modern and barrier-free communication. It is hoped that the implementation of the act will run as smoothly as possible. In this respect, it is worrying that the Federal Office of Personnel Management must deal with the extensive and complex tasks that remain, despite the transfer of a sub-area to accident insurance without any increase in personnel.

Mission-related injury

In the year under review, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces received an increasing number of petitions in which servicewomen and men with mental health problems during the protection period expressed criticism of the way they were treated in the service:

- *They felt they were not sufficiently recognised or were only perceived as a burden, and their restrictions were not or not sufficiently taken into account.*

Regardless of the result of the reviews in individual cases, the petitions clearly show how challenging integration is in these cases. The aim is to treat those affected correctly and to get them back into full service. It is understandable and not always avoidable that differences can arise here. Nevertheless, dealing with those affected should be based on appreciation. The focus should not be on which activities they can no longer carry out but rather should be on where there is a meaningful place for them in the armed forces. Ultimately, the Act on the Continued Employment of Personnel Injured on Operations expresses Parliament's intention to enable servicewomen and men who have suffered mission-related injuries to access medical and professional rehabilitation as service personnel, thereby giving them the certainty that their employer will not abandon them during this difficult time. An appropriate and logical measure is the **evaluation of the Act on the Continued Employment of Personnel Injured on Operations**, initiated by the Federal Ministry of Defence. However, it would be welcome if this process, which has been ongoing since 2022, were to be finalised as soon as possible.

The one-week "Support and welfare under one roof" **specialised counselling seminar**, which was designed to provide assistance for servicewomen and men with mission-related injuries and their families, was held four times in the year under review. During a visit to one of the seminars, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces saw for herself how committed the multi-professional team of troop psychologists, social services staff, caretakers for those with mission-related injuries and the military chaplaincy are to caring for those affected and their families, advising them, offering them opportunities to interact and giving them a short break from the

stresses of everyday life with leisure and relaxation activities. The seminars are an important sign of the appreciation for the injured or ill servicewomen and men, and in particular for their families, who are also heavily burdened by their illness. The Bundeswehr should absolutely keep the seminars going and ensure that the necessary qualified personnel are released from their duties, even if the effort involved is high.

- *However, not every affected servicewoman or man is aware of the one-week specialised counselling seminar.*

Information about the existing offer should therefore be provided to all those affected as early as possible, so it can bring them and their families the best benefits at the right time. It would therefore be helpful if information on the specialised counselling seminar and the opportunities for participation were automatically provided upon acceptance into the protection period or into a special type of service status.

Servicewomen and men with mission-related injuries may develop a need for care as a result of their injury or illness, which also includes mental illness. If **home care** is provided by a private carer, there is a general entitlement to a care allowance in accordance with Volume XI of the German Social Insurance Code. As part of the favourable assessment here, it has been possible since 2021 to claim the care allowance under the Bundeswehr's medical care insurance ordinance depending on the type, severity and scope of the assistance required. Depending on the individual case, this may be a higher amount. The assessment required for this must be carried out by a service provider of the *Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung e.V.* (German Social Accident Insurance). It is incomprehensible that the Federal Ministry of Defence did not reach an agreement with a corresponding service provider to perform these assessments until the year under review. It is now important to promptly process appropriate applications from servicewomen and men.

The **German Foundation for Hardship Cases** supports those in need of personal and/or financial assistance, in particular active and former service personnel, reservists and civilian members of the Bundeswehr and the Nationale Volksarmee of the GDR, outside of the applicable pension law. This applies to special cases of hardship that may have been influenced by the performance of official duties. In the year under review, the foundation completed over 90 applications and paid out almost EUR two million. In view of the further increase in the number of applications, from 2025 on, it will require a significant increase in its consumption capacity. The fact that the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management set up an additional social worker post for the Foundation's office at the beginning of 2025 is a welcome development, but it must be filled as quickly as possible.

A **fellow soldier assistance** activity organised by service personnel of the 6 Military Police Regiment in Hamburg was outstanding:

- *As a result of his mission-related injury, a serviceman needed an assistance dog. As the Bundeswehr still does not cover the high costs for such animals, his fellow soldiers collected half of the required EUR 30,000 through coffee and cake sales and other fund-raising activities.*

The existing regulations must be amended so that **PTSD assistance dogs** are recognised as medical aids. Even if the care provided to those with mission-related injuries is good by international standards, the Bundeswehr should continue to promote the recognition of such animal-assisted therapies.

This also applies to **equine-assisted intervention** as part of the psychotherapeutic treatment of servicewomen and men with mission-related mental disorders. The Bundeswehr's Psychotrauma Centre is conducting a study on its effectiveness. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces informed herself about the progress to date during a visit to the Inclusive Equestrian Sports and Riding Therapy Centre in Berlin-Karlshorst:

- *The programme's participants gave extremely positive feedback on the centre and its impact on their mental well-being. The Psychotrauma Centre also drew a cautiously positive conclusion on the effectiveness of the equine-assisted intervention in an interim evaluation. However, whether and to what extent this can be continued as part of therapeutic treatment will only become clear once the study has been completed and analysed at the end of 2025.*

In view of the Bundeswehr's new focus on national and alliance defence, there is likely to be a considerably higher need for psychosocial care and support for service personnel than in the past as part of international crisis management. All agencies involved in this area, Medical Service, psychological service, social services and military chaplaincy, have indeed developed appropriate concepts within their areas of responsibility to take the varying needs into account. However, it is particularly important to ensure that all those involved cooperate as effectively as possible to meet these requirements. The fact that the Federal Ministry of Defence's representative

for mission-related post-traumatic stress disorders and victims of operational trauma will now develop a concept for an overall psychosocial strategy is therefore to be welcomed.

In addition to sports therapy after a mission-related injury, the **CISM Parasport** is especially important, as it is tailored to the extremely individual needs of servicewomen and men with mission-related injuries. Its primary focus is on integrating regular physical activity into everyday life (work-related) as an important part of maintaining or restoring health. In line with the “Friendship through Sports” motto of the *Conseil International du Sport Militaire* (CISM), the focus is not on pure performance, but rather on the possible experience gained for a further positive rehabilitation path, as well as mutual interaction. The Parasport Team is made up of active servicewomen and men with physical and mental challenges, regardless of their performance level, who want to participate in sporting activities along with their everyday duties. The Bundeswehr enables the team to take part in various national and international sporting events. In view of the superb acceptance that CISM Parasport enjoys worldwide and the considerable range of tasks involved, the Ministry of Defence should consider creating a permanent post for managing the Parasport Team. The position is currently still allocated as an honorary post.

Suicides and suicide attempts

The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces recorded 18 suicides (2023: 15 – 2022: 18 – 2021: 20 – 2020: 11 – 2019: 21) and 44 suicide attempts by servicemen and women in the year under review (2023: 57 – 2022: 64 – 2021: 58 – 2020: 61 – 2019: 52). As in the previous years under review, these statistics are based exclusively on the reportable events that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces receives as daily reports from the Ministry of Defence. These also include a small number of cases of suicidal ideation expressed purely verbally or feared by relatives. The actual number of suicides and suicide attempts may be higher. It can be assumed that the reporting offices are not aware of suicides and attempted suicides in all cases. For example, only doctors have access to medical files. Ultimately, the figures also include cases that have not yet been conclusively verified and in which the suspicion of suicide or attempted suicide will possibly not be confirmed.

Only one of the suicides and attempted suicides in the Bundeswehr reported to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in the year under review was committed with a service weapon. This is the first case known to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces for many years – an astonishing fact that indicates the successful implementation of security regulations for the storage of firearms in the Bundeswehr. The situation is very different in the USA, for example. Here, 67 percent of the more than 500 suicides by servicewomen and men known in 2022 were committed with a firearm.

In the cases of suicide and attempted suicide in the Bundeswehr known to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the responsible superiors and fellow soldiers acted in an exemplary, caring, prudent and swift manner. There were no indications of negligent, inappropriate or tactless behaviour in this year under review. This is very good news.

The review of a total of 62 cases of suicides and attempted suicides revealed a link to PTSD in five cases, after deployments abroad and due to operational stress, among other factors. In a small number of cases, service-related stress, such as imminent discharge from the Bundeswehr, examination failures, long absences from home, superior behaviour or dissatisfaction with an assignment were among the causes of suicides or suicide attempts. The reasons were, however, predominantly personal and private, very often connected with a mental illness.

Recognising life crises early on can save lives. The Bundeswehr has a “toolkit” for dealing with such crises, but unfortunately this is not known at every location. The Ministry of Defence should therefore do more to spread its use among the armed forces. This is all the more important, as the toolkit is explicitly not only aimed at leaders, because the duty of camaraderie mentioned in the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act is, in many cases, the first act of assistance for those affected.

- *In one case, a soldier suspected of being suicidal, who was in the barracks, called a soldier from his sub-unit at home while drunk to tell him about his planned suicide. He in turn immediately informed the unit's first sergeant and company commander and made his own way to the barracks. The guard duty officer who was then informed, found the soldier in the service facility and called an ambulance, which took him to hospital.*

However, offers of dialogue and help from within one's own fellow soldiers are only one building block in helping to stabilise people in life crises. In addition to the military chaplaincy, professional psychosocial support is

provided by social services, the Medical Service and the psychological service. Their assistance must be available to all servicewomen and men everywhere and at all times. It would also make sense for those involved in the reporting chain in the hierarchy to offer active support to the affected unit leaders after a reportable event of suicide or attempted suicide has been closed, and to pass on any experience gained in dealing with these events.

20. Welfare

The Legal Status of Military Personnel Act stipulates that the Bundeswehr has a welfare responsibility towards service personnel and their families as part of the bond of service and loyalty. This also includes not having to do without the things we take for granted in everyday life:

- *A senior officer cadet from the Bundeswehr University Hamburg complained that the service personnel living in the Hanseatic Barracks were expressly forbidden to have parcels sent to the property. The Ministry of Defence pointed out that there was no legal entitlement to private parcel deliveries within military properties. In the Hanseatic Barracks, this is also not possible for liability, personnel and organisational reasons.*

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces believes the ability to receive private **parcels** is essential in today's world. This in particular applies to young servicewomen and men who are studying. The fact that the university is working to find a solution is therefore to be welcomed.

The Ministry of Defence is already one step further in providing **SIM cards** for the Navy in domestic ports:

- *During a visit to the troops, a serviceman from a seagoing unit complained that he was unable to use the Bundeswehr's MWR media when in port in Germany, as official SIM- cards had so far only worked for MWR purposes abroad. Privately procured SIM- cards are incompatible. The Ministry has recognised the need, so that SIM- cards can also be officially provided for MWR purposes in domestic ports in the future.*

Financial

Military pay and incentive pay

The work of servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr is demanding. A special feature compared to many other professions is that they are frequently transferred, can be used throughout Germany and can be based anywhere between Flensburg and Füssen. Service or deployment abroad is also part of their normality and will become increasingly important with the planned stationing of the 45 Armoured Brigade in Lithuania. In view of these challenges, the troops can expect to receive appropriate military pay from their employer and, depending on their area of responsibility or deployment, incentive pay and allowances.

The existing structures do not fully meet these requirements and are repeatedly the subject of petitions.

- *For example, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces received letters in the year under review stating that the pay gap between the basic salaries of enlisted servicewomen and -men and those of the sergeant ranks was too small. According to the Ministry of Defence, situations are also conceivable in which service personnel with a lower rank receive a higher basic salary than their superiors.*

Although this is acceptable, it actually contradicts the idea of functionally appropriate military pay.

- *The Bundeswehr's incentive pay and bonus system is also a constant source of complaints from servicewomen and men, as its structure is sometimes difficult to understand. Those affected are often unable to understand why they are no longer entitled to an allowance or bonus that was previously granted.*

Better traceability and transparency, on the other hand, would make the service more attractive overall. For these reasons, the newly elected German Bundestag and the new Federal Government should address this issue and fundamentally overhaul the entire military pay structure, as well as the Bundeswehr's incentive pay and bonus system.

In future, service personnel who have a first or second residence in **urban centres** and regions with a high cost of living can hope to receive compensation that will be higher, in line with their lower rank. In 2020, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in two decisions that there was not a sufficient gap between the lowest salary groups and the basic social security level. In January 2025, the Federal Government therefore presented the German

Bundestag with the “Draft of an act to ensure a federal military pay and pension appropriate to the respective office”. Among other things, it provides for the introduction of a supplementary food allowance, the amount of which is to be based on marital status, the number of children and the place of residence. At the same time, it will be reduced by a “slash-off amount”, which will depend on the respective salary group – the higher, the bigger. The draft, however, was not discussed again in parliament until the early parliamentary elections. It is to be hoped the act will be passed swiftly in the new legislative period, not least of all in the interests of the servicewomen and men who will also benefit from the proposed legislation.

The amount of pay received by service personnel also depends, among other things, on the vocational civilian qualifications they acquired before joining the Bundeswehr. This is taken into account when recruiting with assignment to an “**experience level**”. This increases automatically over the course of the period of service. Re-employed personnel in particular must be able to rely on a correct assignment:

- *The displeasure of a staff sergeant returning to the Bundeswehr who complained about being assigned to experience level 1, even though he had already reached level 5 during his first service status as a temporary-career volunteer, was understandable. This circumstance and other difficulties finally prompted the petitioner to exercise his power of revocation.*

Even if a retroactive correction is regularly made in comparable cases and those affected receive corresponding back payments, the Bundeswehr cannot allow itself such an inconvenience in times of increasing shortages of personnel.

Servicewomen and men who continue to participate in active working life in retirement have, to date, had to accept that the income they earn from this is deducted from their retirement pay, which usually results in corresponding deductions. In view of the general labour shortage and the attractiveness of the service, these **limits on additional earnings** now seem somewhat outdated. The fact that the German Bundestag has decided to essentially abolish this regulation with the adoption of the Zeitenwende article law is therefore very welcome.

The payment of **incentive pay** is linked to the performed work and does not necessarily require posting to a specific post, as the following example illustrates:

- *As part of his participation in a vocational advancement programme, a staff sergeant was assigned to regular shift duty with a German fire brigade. Nevertheless, he did not receive a fire service allowance on the grounds that he was not in a post similar to a Vocational Advancement Service (VAS) post during the VAS programme and therefore was not in a post for direct fire-fighting. In the petition procedure, the Ministry of Defence clarified that the serviceman had carried out fire-fighting duties as his main task and therefore met the legal requirements for the functional allowance. According to the “Functional allowance and extra payment for difficult work” general regulation, incentive pay is due both for the performance of duties in certain posts and for other duties outside of posts.*

There is still a need for improvement in granting incentive pay in the Bundeswehr special forces area:

- *While specially qualified Army support forces are entitled to an extra payment for difficult work, the same forces in the Navy and the Air Force do not receive it, although their activities are comparable. As early as the end of January 2022, the Ministry of Defence therefore called on the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community to extend the regulation and the group of authorised persons. The latter has at least promised to include the demand in future negotiations on the amendment of the extra payment for difficult work ordinance.*

It is unfortunate that the Ministry of the Interior has repeatedly postponed dealing with this issue. It is long overdue for the same circumstances to be recognised equally and for the discrimination against the specially qualified support forces of the Air Force and the Navy to end.

Separation allowance and relocation allowance

In the Bundeswehr as a commuter army, many service personnel are dependent on payment of the separation allowance or the reimbursement of relocation costs. Wrong decisions or errors in processing can quickly have far-reaching consequences, as the following case illustrates:

- *Following a petition by a lance corporal in February 2024, it emerged that his former unit had failed to enter the recognition of his home under separation allowance law in the personnel management system back in*

spring 2018. This resulted in an incorrect assurance of the relocation allowance with a transfer shortly afterwards, although the serviceman did not lodge a complaint against this. Nor did he submit any applications for payment of the separation allowance within the one-year period, which is why this error was not noticed and the decision became final. A retroactive correction and subsequent payment of the separation allowance were therefore not possible. The petitioner suffered an irreparable financial disadvantage as a result of the negligence on both sides.

The deadlines for claiming payments under the Federal Removal Expenses Act and the Ordinance on Separation Allowance have been designed by the legislator as “**preclusive time limits**”. Once the deadline has expired, those affected can no longer assert any claims, and an extension of the deadline is also ruled out. In one’s own interest alone, it is therefore important to be advised extensively, to think decisions through carefully and to check the correctness of decisions without delay. All those entitled to benefits in particular should always keep an eye on the deadlines and apply for benefits in good time.

Servicewomen and men in the Bundeswehr must be able to rely on the responsible offices to process all relevant documents connected with a reassignment and thus with a service-related relocation carefully and without delay. This was not always the case in the year under review:

- *With regard to an upcoming reassignment, a serviceman submitted an application to the responsible senior personnel NCO at the end of July 2022 to have his home recognised under relocation cost law. Presumably due to the unit’s closing for annual leave from 31 July to 21 August 2022, no further processing took place before the petitioner was reassigned on 1 September 2022. In its statement, the Ministry of Defence criticised the fact that the personnel department was obviously not aware of the urgency of the matter. It should have processed the application before the reassignment, so it could still have had an effect on the payment of a relocation allowance or separation allowance.*

Due to the irreparable neglect by his former company and the expiry of the preclusive time limits, the serviceman suffered a significant financial disadvantage. The fact that the Ministry has made its criticism of the subordinate area clear is of course welcome.

The granting of a separation allowance was previously limited to a maximum of eight years in individual cases. This could have undesirable effects with regard to retaining specialists:

- *For example, the Bundeswehr Technical Centre for Aircraft and Aeronautical Equipment in Manching is particularly reliant on specialists who have generally done lengthy and expensive training, as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learnt during a visit to the troops. Losing such experts simply because commuting would no longer be economically viable for them once their entitlement to a separation allowance expires would ultimately be a far greater loss for the respective office due to the difficulty of replacing their expertise.*

The fact that the Zeitenwende article law is effecting a change here is therefore a positive development. In future, the Ministry of Defence will be able to grant separation allowances for longer than eight years in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Finance if there is an official interest.

As in civilian life, the start of a rental contract regularly overlaps with the continuation of the old contract in the case of service-related relocations, because it is not possible to give earlier notice at the old rented residence. In such cases, service personnel can apply for **rent compensation** or the rent still to be paid for the old residence in accordance with the Federal Removal Expenses Act.

- *One serviceman complained that he had to wait over two years for payment of this rent compensation. According to the statement by the Ministry of Defence, the responsible billing clearinghouse had already requested the Institute for Federal Real Estate in August 2022 to prepare the necessary rental value estimate. This had still not been provided in August 2024. According to the Institute, it has not been able to begin processing because of a considerable shortage of personnel. At the Ministry’s initiative, the serviceman was then given the opportunity to apply for a part payment. It also took the case as an opportunity to allow an advance payment on rent compensation as part of a revision of the application regulations for the Federal Removal Expenses Act and the Ordinance on Expenses for Relocating Abroad. Previously, it had already made a transitional arrangement for comparable cases.*

The measures initiated by the Federal Ministry of Defence were appropriate and in particular characterised by a tangible amount of care and attentiveness, which is of course very welcome.

In the past, there have always been problems with the payment of relocation allowances with aptly-named, “**advance relocations**”. If a servicewoman or man had already begun a relocation even though they had not yet received the written assignment order, there was no entitlement to reimbursement of the relocation costs. The Ministry of Defence has provided clarification in response to the distressed housing market, which often makes it difficult to rent suitable accommodation precisely on the planned date of entry into service. It explains that the costs incurred for an advance relocation are also eligible for reimbursement if they are related in cause and time to the upcoming relocation and there are effective removal expense commitments. For example, service personnel can relocate as soon as they become aware of a planned reassignment or notification of their intended re-employment before receiving the required personnel order. However, this may not be done more than twelve months before the actual date of starting duty, but it should be noted that special circumstances, such as failure to complete a probationary period, for example, may obstruct the reimbursement of costs.

The Ministry of Defence has made it easier for servicewomen and men entitled to separation allowances or travelling on official armed forces business to **book hotels**. The Travel Management travel offices can book hotel rooms for temporary personnel measures, such as training courses where the Bundeswehr’s own accommodation is not available, for example, without any time limit and using the discounts granted to the Bundeswehr. The Bundeswehr also covers the costs that go beyond the separation travel allowance. This means service personnel must no longer make advance payments in such situations, which is a big advantage.

A member of the Rapid Response Medical Service in Leer learnt that administrative actions are not always coordinated with servicewomen and men’s assignments:

- *The healthcare and nursing staff member was ordered at short notice to transfer to the Combat Support Ship FRANKFURT AM MAIN as part of a military evacuation mission and therefore had to cancel a private hotel stay she had booked. The responsible Bundeswehr service centre refused to reimburse the resulting cancellation costs in accordance with the Federal Travel Expenses Act. This is only permissible if superiors revoke leave that has already been approved, which was not necessary in this case due to the planned stay on an off-duty weekend. The Ministry of Defence confirmed this legal interpretation in accordance with the Federal Travel Expenses Act. For the Ministry’s area of responsibility, however, short notice and urgency, often with danger to life and limb, are the essence of the deployment of armed forces in special situations such as disasters and crises, national and alliance defence and, as in this case, evacuation operations. As a result, the armed forces may have to interrupt servicewomen and men’s leisure activities at very short notice and without planning. From the Ministry’s point of view, a claim for reimbursement of costs under the German Civil Code was therefore considered.*

This very practical and pragmatic decision by the Federal Ministry of Defence is to be welcomed in every respect. It offers the troops the legal certainty that they do not have to take all military contingencies into account when planning their private leisure time, no matter how far away, and that they will be reimbursed for costs that cannot be cancelled, even if they are deployed at short notice.

Rail travel in uniform

In August 2019, the Ministry of Defence, the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (now the Federal Ministry for Digital and Transport) and Deutsche Bahn AG agreed that servicewomen and men in uniform will be able to use Deutsche Bahn trains in 2nd class free of charge for private journeys within Germany from 2020. The offer was very well received by the troops. However, unpunctual trains are also a source of frustration for service personnel commuting between their place of work and home:

- *One petitioner wondered whether the State could claim compensation in the same way as other travellers in the event of longer train delays. The Federal Ministry of Defence informed that, according to the contractual agreement with Deutsche Bahn, fare compensation based on the special conditions and discounts granted by Deutsche Bahn for the Bundeswehr ticket was compensated on a flat-rate basis.*

As annoying as rail delays are, it should nevertheless be borne in mind that servicewomen and men are basically free to choose their means of travel. Furthermore, the offer of free rail travel is a public relations measure and not a welfare measure.

Funeral expenses

A sensitive topic was raised during several visits to the troops by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces:

- *In discussions, service personnel expressed their lack of comprehension that there had been a restriction on the acceptance of funeral costs for active service personnel. Specifically, here it was about the partial removal of the “Care and support in the event of a death” general regulation. The provision previously provided, among other things, for the employer to cover the costs of transport and burial, and it dates to a time when the reimbursement of funeral costs was part of statutory health insurance and aid for civil servants. Its aim is to prevent servicewomen and men from being put at a disadvantage. However, when the death grant and funeral allowance were later also regulated as part of the surviving dependants’ pension scheme, the Ministry failed to adapt or remove the service regulation. In the past, this had led to unauthorised additional- or double payments on a considerable scale.*

The removal of this part of the general regulation was therefore logical. As the statutory entitlements to death grant and funeral allowance remained unaffected and the surviving dependants of servicewomen and men continue to be entitled to them, the concern expressed during the troop visits about a restriction was unfounded. However, the cases here show how important it is to keep the troops well informed about such changes.

Working hours

As in previous years, in the year under review, service personnel clearly criticised the restrictive regulations of the Military Personnel Working Hours Ordinance. They felt the precise specifications were too strict and inflexible, especially for training and exercise programmes. The Federal Ministry of Defence is aware of these complaints and is constantly monitoring the further development of military working hours. It is therefore very welcome that there is now, for example, greater flexibility in the area of additional work as a result of the **Zeitenwende article law**. Financial compensation could previously only be paid in lieu if no compensation in the form of time off was possible within a preclusive period of twelve months. The legislator has reduced this period to six months. At the same time, the Bundeswehr was given the option of unilaterally ordering time off for additional work, in other words, without service personnel applying for it. This will counter an excessive build-up of time credits and ensure that service operations do not suffer from the individual reduction of additional work. It also makes sense to extend and specify the exceptions that allow deviations from the specifications set out in § 30 (1) to (3) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act. For example, these regulations will not be applied in the immediate preparation of deployments either, if this is required by military-specific special features. The increase in the exceptional circumstances supplement from EUR 91 to EUR 101 is also very welcome, as is the possibility of paying it in parallel with the foreign assignment allowance under certain conditions, for example if this serves to ensure operational readiness.

Another positive project is the introduction of a plannable **Friday off** with the 3 Minesweeper Squadron. With it, the seagoing units have the opportunity to reduce the compensation entitlements acquired due to the many sea voyages or special services, while otherwise maintaining the same weekly working hours on Fridays, which gives them an equivalent value to the regularly high workload. The Bundeswehr University Hamburg provided scientific support for the programme, which was initially designed as a pilot project, and conducted several surveys on its impact. As 70 percent of those surveyed saw this as enriching and felt that it reduced their workload, the unit decided to offer the scheme on a permanent basis.

The 3 Minesweeper Squadron’s second pilot project, to allow its members to live on board the ships again, was also just as successful. It has been very well received because of the difficulties on the housing market in the coastal and popular tourist regions, as well as the sometimes frequent and long periods away at sea. It also has the positive effect that those affected identify much more strongly with their units. The Navy has therefore decided to grant this option to all seagoing units. Both examples illustrate how even minor changes can increase attractiveness and satisfaction.

Duties at unfavourable times or changing working hours are often the norm in the **Bundeswehr hospitals** due to the round-the-clock nursing care facilities that must be maintained. To compensate for this, at least financially, the personnel concerned regularly receive a corresponding incentive pay. Several petitions from the Bundeswehr

Central Hospital in Koblenz illustrated the fact that there were some difficulties with payments in the year under review:

- *For example, one servicewoman reported that she had not received an incentive pay for eight months, even though she had been deployed on a constant rotation of early, late and night shifts, as well as at weekends and on public holidays. According to the inquiry made, the reason for this was the introduction of new software for deployment planning. This was extremely susceptible to errors in the early stage. The processors also lacked the required certainty to quickly and permanently identify and rectify any delays that occurred. The fact that the hospital did not have authorisation for all the tools necessary for the application from the outset to be able to remove programming errors independently made the processes even more difficult.*

It was therefore expedient to set up an in-house task force with the aim of remedying defects and offering additional training. It is hoped that the processing backlogs will be reduced quickly and, above all, that the additional payments will be paid in a timely manner.

The Bundeswehr still does not have a standardised time recording system. The planned introduction of an **electronic time and attendance recording** system at Bundeswehr pilot sites was also delayed. Criticism from service personnel therefore continued unabated in the year under review.

- *At the logistics school in Osterholz-Scharmbeck, service personnel reported that the school was actually a pilot facility for electronic time recording. The technical requirements are met and the administrators have been trained. However, the unit has been waiting two and a half years for the time recording terminal to be activated.*
- *In Hammelburg, a medical orderly wrote that the time and attendance recording tool has been in place since 2022, but there is no terminal for logging in. The unit uses a legacy system in which, for example, the working hours that go beyond those of the duty roster, must be recorded manually. This requires considerable additional work. The serviceman, who had already experienced a functioning automatic time recording system in his previous assignment, criticised the “two-tier system” of locations with and without electronic time and attendance recording. He in particular wanted to see an overview of his working hours in Hammelburg. In this context, the Ministry of Defence referred to the possibility of setting up an electronic interim solution until the target system is rolled out. This is possible for all troop units without a flexitime system.*

The Regional Territorial Command Bavaria, the International Helicopter Training Centre in Bückeburg and the Central Institute of the Bundeswehr Medical Service Kiel have been using the new time and attendance recording system as part of individual measures since mid-2023. Although none of the three locations are pilot sites and cannot replace the more comprehensive pilot project, they provide valuable insights for the further development of the introduction of an electronic time and attendance recording system. However, these individual measures highlight shortcomings in the system used, as well as suggestions for improvements. These include, for example, the discovery that the personnel requirement to maintain the system is too high, and that there are problems with the recording of different locations within a command and the seamless time recording with reserve services.

- *A new test cluster, which has been available at the Bundeswehr Central Hospital in Koblenz since November 2023 and is based on an existing time recording system, is also causing difficulties. The participating doctors and nursing staff identified numerous error sources and struggled with the system’s shortcomings in the year under review. One consequence of these deficiencies was, for example, outstanding allowance payments and the incorrect booking of night work to the disadvantage of those affected. Several discussions have been held with those responsible because of these deficits since early summer 2024. More training and better information as well as an increase in staff should help. At the end of 2024, uncertainties with system operation were remedied and problems with time account maintenance were solved. Nevertheless, the administrative processing of all accounts prior to the factually correct recording at the clinic/department level, so that the allowance processing can subsequently take place, is still massively time-consuming and extremely error-prone, which is due to the interaction of the two software systems used. This is exacerbated by the fact that the unit is still understaffed with a total of just six employees.*

It would be very difficult to digitalise all the exceptions and special features with service personnel time and attendance recording. The variants with the interpretation of the Military Personnel Working Hours Ordinance alone can scarcely be mapped in a standardised digital format. All data protection issues relating to the handling

of digitally generated personal data must also be clarified for numerous different cases. The solution therefore will not be found in the introduction of a single system that is identical everywhere but rather will be in gradually varying time recording tools that take the special features of locations and units, battalions etc. and individual data protection issues into account. These might also be mixed systems consisting of digital and manual time recording. To clarify the different requirements, the respective pilot projects will now at last get started. The immense commitment of the General Spokespersons' Committee and the participation committees in the year under review to a swift implementation must be emphasised here.

Catering and MWR food service

Camaraderie is one of the fundamental pillars of the Bundeswehr. Superiors certainly cannot simply order it – it must grow of its own accord among the servicewomen and men. Breaks and mealtimes are a good opportunity for this. Eating meals together creates trust between those involved and provides the conditions for having conversations, building new bonds and deepening existing contacts. It is therefore in the interests of the Bundeswehr to have a sound and reliable MWR food service programme. Unfortunately, demand from the troops has continued to decline in recent years. General price increases have fuelled this development. At many locations, all ranks clubs, which in the past existed separately for the individual rank categories, had to close for financial reasons.

It is not uncommon for the remaining **club associations** to cover the gap in supply in a straightforward way by opening up permanently for all rank categories. Even when there is a temporary need due to construction work, they have often agreed to meet the additional demand in their existing premises until the work is completed. The club associations, which are not exclusively profit-orientated, have many years of experience and offer continuity and a good catering offering.

- *In the year under review, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces was able to see the outstanding work of the Nordholz officers' mess for herself during a visit to the troops. It excels with its inviting ambience and excellent value for money in a friendly yet undisturbed atmosphere. The fact that the officers' mess transparently informs on its homepage about opening hours, contact points, availability and the association itself is also very positive.*

The immense commitment of the club associations is essentially based on voluntary work and camaraderie. It is therefore in the interests of the Bundeswehr to continue to support and promote them. The extension of the **decree on orderlies** was therefore a correct and important step. Locally, the heads of the respective offices should be generous in their decision to second orderly staff to ensure the continued existence of the club associations. At the same time, all servicewomen and men are encouraged to make regular use of the local offers, because the all ranks clubs can only exist if there is sufficient turnover.

Furthermore, the **casino model** has been established at eight locations in recent years as a further management element, in which one service provider per property will provide a modern offering tailored to the location. Inclusion in this pilot model proved to be particularly helpful whenever MWR facilities could no longer be operated economically and, despite repeated attempts, retendering was unsuccessful. It is encouraging that the Ministry of Defence now intends to test this pilot model at a further eight locations.

- *One is the very large Euskirchen site with a total of around 2,000 military and civilian personnel. It does not have a mess hall, as not enough of the service personnel stationed here are obliged to participate in canteen catering. Furthermore, there is no longer any MWR food service here either. The last operator terminated the contract in mid-2023 because it was no longer possible to operate the facility profitably.*

This location is therefore predestined for the casino model to guarantee a minimum catering service.

The Bundeswehr ensures service personnel are provided canteen catering on a daily basis with its approximately 260 **mess halls**. Their quality is the repeated subject of complaints:

- *The complaint by a trained chef that the proportion of fresh meat, vegetables and fruit in the dishes served in the mess halls was declining for cost reasons was particularly telling. The almost exclusive heating of pre-cooked meals is not conducive with keeping servicewomen and men healthy. In its statement, the Ministry of Defence conceded that there was a high level of convenience product use, in particular to reduce preparation time. This, however, does not produce a loss of quality in the catering offering. Depending on the number of*

staff in the mess halls, it is also still possible to order fresh food as well as convenience products. In addition to the four lunch menus offered, an extensive salad bar and fresh fruit are also available every day. And the breakfast and evening buffets both contain fresh ingredients. It is also possible to deviate from the centrally prescribed catering plan for seasonal meals, special occasions or the consumption of stored food before the best-before date with the prior consent of the Bundeswehr Subsistence Office. Furthermore, the troops can make special requests via kitchen committee meetings or the complaints and suggestions books.

What basically sounds quite positive is unfortunately rather sobering in reality. While mess halls deviated from the nationwide central **menu plan** in ten percent of all cases in 2019, it was only five percent in 2023. In view of this development, it would be important to revitalise the existing personal commitment of the chefs and allow more individuality in the offering prepared by the mess halls. Fresh, seasonal and regional catering in particular should once again take centre stage.

The mess halls have been offering a vegetarian menu line since the end of the 1990s. Providing this food on request is actually a matter of course. The following case illustrates that this has still not fully sunk in with some of those responsible for such in the armed forces:

- *A corporal complained that he had not received any vegetarian food at various official events, such as training, exercises and shooting programmes. His platoon leader had also repeatedly made disparaging remarks about his diet. The investigations confirmed that the platoon leader had not registered him as a person requiring vegetarian catering at least once. This information was also not passed on during other exercises, some of which were led by other platoons or companies.*

The statement by the responsible commander that it is the responsibility of the respective units to actively ensure the provision of **vegetarian food**, especially in cases of external responsibilities, was welcomed. This includes providing information about the corresponding requirements early on and then asking once again if the notification will be taken into account.

Food is an important part of social and cultural identity. Appropriate food offerings therefore express the socio-cultural diversity in the community. It is very encouraging that the Bundeswehr procured individual field rations with kosher ingredients in the year under review and is offering them to the troops as part of a two-year pilot project to subsequently examine what follow-up requirements there are. Unlike the **kosher diet**, the certification of a halal diet is unfortunately difficult due to the different tendencies of the Islamic religious communities. Service personnel can, however, already request vegetarian or pork-free individual field rations. The Bundeswehr Subsistence Office is also investigating whether the vegetarian individual field rations provided meet the requirements of vegan catering. Even if we must not lose sight of the fact that the individual field rations are intended as an emergency supply to provide service personnel with sufficient energy to keep them going during operations, the Bundeswehr is proving itself to be a modern army that responds to the catering needs of its troops.

The Bundeswehr Subsistence Office ran a pilot test with the aim of passing on or otherwise using leftover food from major training areas. This revealed that the organisational implementation of the measures to be taken would result in considerable practical burdens for the troops and the catering staff. The Ministry of Defence therefore believes that the entire procedure is not practicable and ultimately cannot be implemented. The aim, instead, is to raise awareness and advise the troops to use the catering even more in line with requirements, especially for exercises, and to ensure that less food is left over. This result is not satisfactory in every respect. It remains to be seen whether the Ministry's strategy will be successful in the long term.

Military chaplaincy

In numerous in-person meetings in the year under review, 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces once again learnt how valuable the services offered by the military chaplaincy are for servicewomen and men. All members of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish military chaplaincies deserve the appropriate recognition and respect for their dedicated work. During the discussions it became clear that, just as the troops themselves are, the military chaplaincy is also facing considerable challenges. In addition to national and alliance defence, these are due in particular to the changing requirements for target group-oriented pastoral support. It is remarkable how the military chaplaincy is able to constantly adapt to new framework conditions to create attractive offers and programmes.

An interdisciplinary research group from the Social Science Institute of the Protestant Church in Germany and the Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences has published the initial results of a **survey** on the topic of “Military chaplaincy and religion from the perspective of Bundeswehr service personnel”:

- *A total of 24,970 randomly selected servicewomen and men were contacted to ask them about their perceptions and experiences of the military chaplaincy. As a result, 91 percent of the respondents approved of the presence of the military chaplaincy in Bundeswehr routine operations – in deployments abroad it was even 95 percent. A total of 52 percent had already made use of pastoral support services, including many who did not feel they belonged to the Christian faith. The portion of respondents who rated their personal experiences with military chaplains as positive or rather positive was 75 percent. Only one percent of respondents reported rather negative experiences. A total of 75 percent were satisfied with the character guidance, which is not formally part of the military chaplaincy but is performed by members of the military chaplaincy. More than 80 percent also agreed with the comment that the character guidance lecturers behaved in an appreciative manner and were professionally competent. Topics such as dealing with conflicts, the compatibility of family and duty, questions of life and death as well as freedom, conscience and responsibility were considered especially important.*

It is true that the military chaplaincy can make a significant contribution to mediating with conflicts and strengthening camaraderie or team building. The military chaplains’ duty of confidentiality is also of key importance. Among other things, the Protestant Military Bishop would like to use the data from the study as a starting point for the quality assurance and further development of the **Protestant military chaplaincy** services in the Bundeswehr. The complete scientific publication has been announced for 2025.

The Protestant Military Bishop’s **religious operational plan** is also very welcome. Officially referred to as “Pastoral care and acute intervention in the event of tension and defence”, the plan is about preparing for emergencies together with pastoral care. This specifically includes accompanying people to NATO’s eastern flank, assisting the injured and dying, accompanying those wounded to Germany, delivering death notices, conducting funeral services and providing pastoral care for relatives. The military chaplaincy cannot do this on its own, which is why it will work together with the chaplaincies of the police, fire brigade, hospitals and regional churches.

An extremely successful example of the importance of military chaplaincy was the Protestant **service** from Rukla (Lithuania), which was broadcast live on television by ZDF on the fourth Sunday of Advent, and in which the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces also took part and led an intercessory prayer. The format made it possible in a unique way to make a military religious service accessible to the general public at home in Germany and to forge a bond between the servicewomen and men serving abroad and their families back home shortly before the festive period.

The fact that the military chaplaincy pursues a holistic approach and also involves civilian employees in the units in many formats is nothing new. One example here are the **retreats**, which can also be seen as team-building activities. Both status groups must therefore be treated equally:

- *A Protestant military dean explained that, unlike service personnel, civilian employees had not been granted time off or special leave to take part in a retreat. The civilian personnel therefore had no choice but to apply for leave. The Ministry of Defence justifies the different treatment with the assignment to the different status groups. For service personnel, retreats would count as official events in accordance with the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act. This means they are also insured against accidents in conjunction with the Military Pensions Act. Civilian employees, on the other hand, would only be able to apply for special leave or time off work. However, this could only be authorised if, in the context of retreats, the state-political components of the retreat represented its main focus in the overall view of all circumstances and characterised it accordingly. Standardising the two would require an amendment to the act or ordinance.*

The further expansion of the **Jewish military chaplaincy** is extremely positive, with a number of highlights in the year under review:

- *For the first time in more than 100 years, a military rabbi accompanied German forces on a mission on board the Donau tender, which was leading a NATO mine countermeasures force. The last time there were military rabbis in the German armed forces was during the German Empire and the First World War.*

- *A military rabbi also took up his post for the first time at the German Joint Force Command – formerly the Joint Forces Operations Command.*
- *In July 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces attended the ceremonial inauguration of the new premises of the Military Rabbinate in Berlin by the Minister of Defence and the President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.*
- *As during a visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to the branch office of the Military Rabbinate in Hamburg in January of the year under review, there was still a desire for the introduction of kosher individual field rations, the Bundeswehr already procured these in the summer as part of a two-year pilot test.*

However, there are still challenges that must be overcome:

- *During the same visit, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces learnt that, on the one hand, there were legal personnel problems in filling the rabbi posts and, on the other hand, that it would be desirable to adjust the work time regulation to take Jewish holidays into account. The daily rates for official trips are also too low to cover the costs of buying kosher food.*

Fortunately, the Ministry of Defence was able to find a solution to the shortage of personnel in the **Catholic military chaplaincy**:

- *During a visit to the troops at the Bundeswehr Logistics School, a military chaplain enquired whether it was possible to deploy pastoral assistants to fill vacancies. The Ministry of Defence announced that an agreement between the Minister of Defence and the Catholic Military Bishop, initially for a limited period, came into force in April 2024 to make this possible. The number of pastoral assistants should not exceed 20 percent of the planned established posts for Catholic military chaplains and should be counted towards the contractually agreed total number of military chaplains in the Catholic military chaplaincy. Furthermore, they should only be deployed where the filling of established posts due to a lack of military chaplains and pastoral assistants would be unsuccessful.*

The lack of pastoral support services for the approximately 3,000 soldiers of the Muslim faith in the Bundeswehr, on the other hand, remains unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence at least pressed ahead with preparations to establish such a service in the year under review. It plans to introduce the **Muslim military chaplaincy** in 2025.

The delays and difficulties to date are derived from the fact that, unlike the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish denominations, there is no umbrella organisation for the Islamic denominations with which a state contract can be concluded. The Ministry therefore intends to organise pastoral support via service contracts with suitable chaplains or imams. To ensure a comparable standard of pastoral qualification in this context in particular, a cooperation agreement will be concluded with a suitable and recognised educational institution that provides training in accordance with the guidelines of the German Society for Pastoral Psychology. If required, suitable Muslim chaplains, for example, can be trained in pastoral work. As Muslim servicewomen and men have already been waiting for some years for their own military chaplaincy, these good intentions must be realised as quickly as possible.

21. Environment and climate

The effects of climate change also require the Bundeswehr to adapt to related developments. Measures that can adequately guarantee the operational readiness to perform missions are required, while also taking impending climate changes into account. With the **Defence and Climate Change Strategy** published in the year under review, the Ministry of Defence has compiled guidelines for dealing with possible complex threats posed by climate change. The effects of climate change must be recognised and assessed early and in good time. Innovative technologies and research must be used to ensure the Bundeswehr's capabilities are maintained, even when influenced by climate change. Military and civilian personnel will deal with the challenges of climate change with the help of special education, training and further training programmes. Another component is maintaining the functionality of a defence-critical infrastructure under changing climatic conditions. For example, there is a risk that storms or heavy rainfall driven by climate change could cause damage to important military port facilities, buildings or communications masts. Among other things, the Bundeswehr plans to assess the respective

vulnerability in a systematic risk analysis, identify the need for action and improve the infrastructure accordingly, and it also plans to set up an internal warning management system.

The **Energy Report 2023**, which the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Infrastructure, Environmental Protection and Services presented in October of the year under review, provides an overview of the energy and water consumption in Bundeswehr properties. It is encouraging to see that the Bundeswehr's total energy consumption in domestic properties in 2023 fell by just under 6.6 percent compared to the previous year. The five-year average reduction for the years 2019 to 2023 is even 8.2 percent. Encouraging developments can also be seen in the individual categories for 2023 compared to 2022: Electricity consumption fell by 3.75 percent, heat consumption by 7.65 percent and CO₂ emissions by just under 4 percent. According to the Federal Office, the Bundeswehr has already exceeded the energy policy milestone target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 40 percent by 2020, compared to the reference year 1990. The next target of reducing CO₂ emissions by 65 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, has already been met at Bundeswehr properties in Germany.

The fact that the Bundeswehr is continuing to work on promoting climate protection is also demonstrated by a project framework agreement that it concluded with the Institute for Federal Real Estate in June of the year under review. The Institute will accordingly install some 500 rooftop photovoltaic systems and accelerate the expansion of the charging infrastructure for **electric vehicles** with over 18,500 charging points. The fact that the charging points are primarily intended for armed forces vehicles only was criticised in the year under review:

- *A senior NCO complained about the lack of a charging station at the Federal Language Office in Naumburg. Commuter traffic, he pointed out, is the rule, especially at schools and other Bundeswehr training facilities, which is why it would be expedient in the interest of environmental protection to enable course participants to charge their private electric cars. The Ministry of Defence pointed out that the installation of a single charging point in Naumburg was based exclusively on the site's official requirement. Charging private electric vehicles is considered a private matter, which is why employees and course participants are responsible for organising it themselves.*

The Ministry's position is counter-productive and irrelevant with regard to climate targets. As a modern employer, the Bundeswehr should also provide charging facilities for private vehicles, especially at bases with high commuter numbers.

The **contact explosions** of the decommissioned Frigate KARLSRUHE in the Baltic Sea attracted much attention in the year under review. The background to this was an investigation by the 71 Bundeswehr Technical Centre, which should provide insights into the effect of explosive devices such as sea mines on a ship as a whole, but above all on a crew:

- *After such tests and their effects on porpoises had been criticised in the past, the Bundeswehr developed new protective measures together with environmental associations. To preserve the marine environment, the Bundeswehr set up a double bubble curtain to dampen the blast wave from the explosions. The animals in the area were also scared away, as the high volume of the explosions can damage their hearing.*

As informed by the Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support, it is of course very welcome that the measures had the desired effect, which also illustrates that the Bundeswehr takes environmental issues very seriously.

22. Physical training

The Bundeswehr once again shone in the area of top-level sports promotion at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. The athletes sponsored by the Bundeswehr once again played a major role in Team Germany's success.

At the **Olympic Games**, 162 athletes were members of the Bundeswehr. They therefore accounted for approximately 38 percent of Team Germany. A further 17 sports service personnel were called on as substitutes or in the support team. With tenth place in the medals table, Germany fell short of its own expectations, but the Bundeswehr enjoyed a sporting success – its athletes won 20 of the 33 German medals, or approximately 61 percent. Women were on the podium in more than half of the medal wins, eleven times in total. A servicewoman also had the honour of carrying the German flag with another athlete during the opening ceremony.

At the **Paralympic Games**, 13 of the 143 athletes on the German team were sponsored by the Bundeswehr on individual contracts. One serviceman also participated as a guide for a visually impaired track and field athlete. The sponsored athletes won 13 of the total of 49 medals, or approximately 27 percent. Women won seven medals. The Bundeswehr also makes an essential contribution to **sports promotion** in Germany. Athletes find excellent conditions and support in the 15 sports promotion sections, as well as at the Bundeswehr Sports School and the Centre for Sports Medicine in Warendorf. The sponsored athletes are also good publicity for the armed forces. With their participation and successes in national and international competitions, they contribute enormously to the Bundeswehr's reputation and visibility in our society.

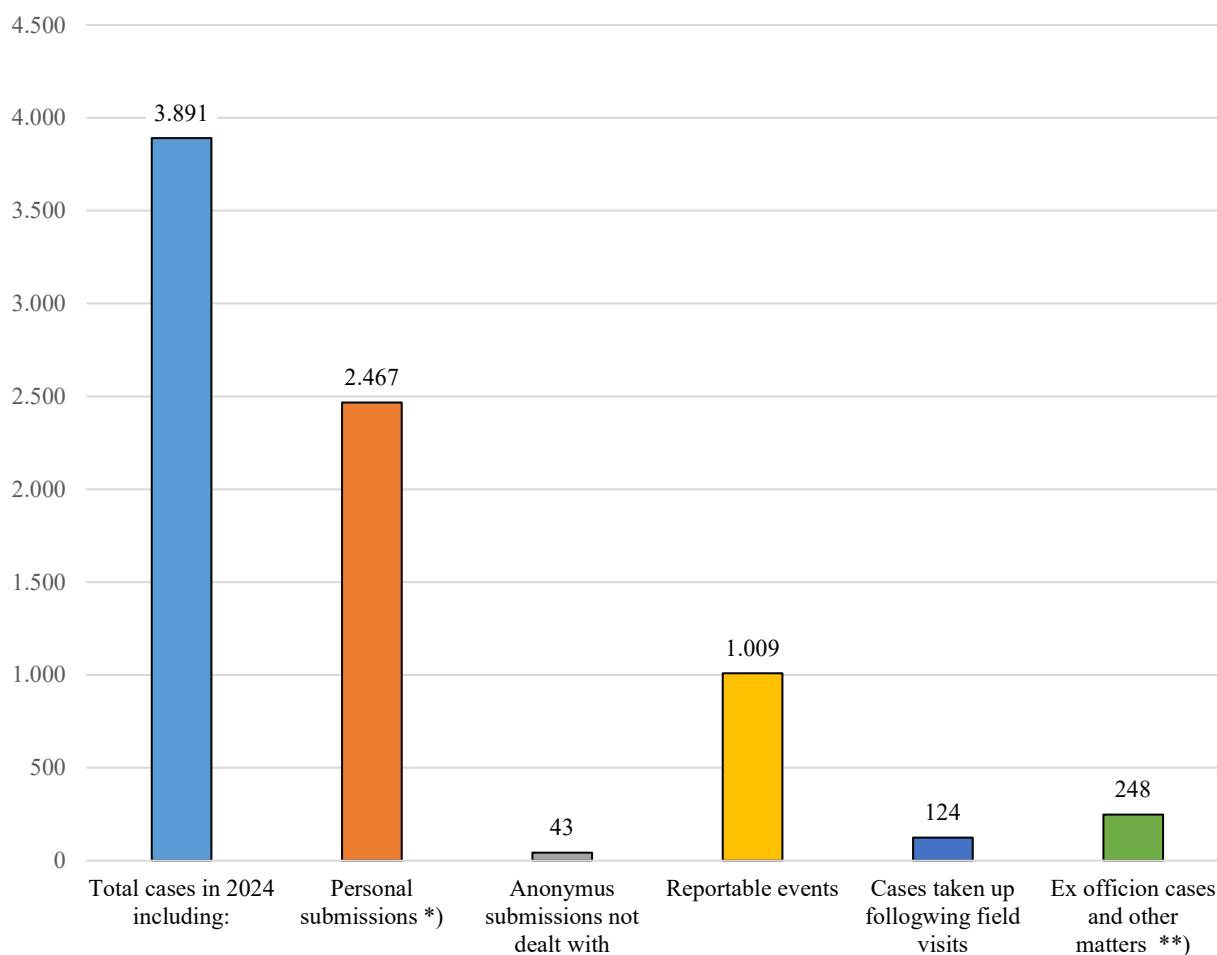
Dr Eva Högl

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

23. Cases and petitions: Statistical overviews

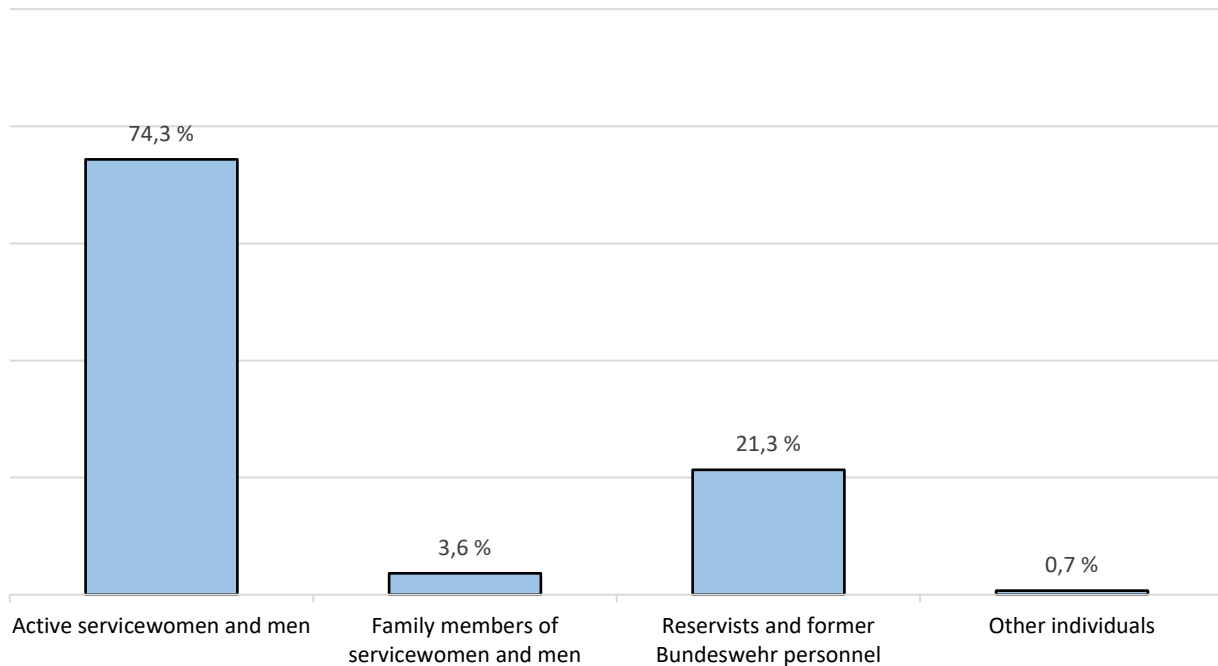
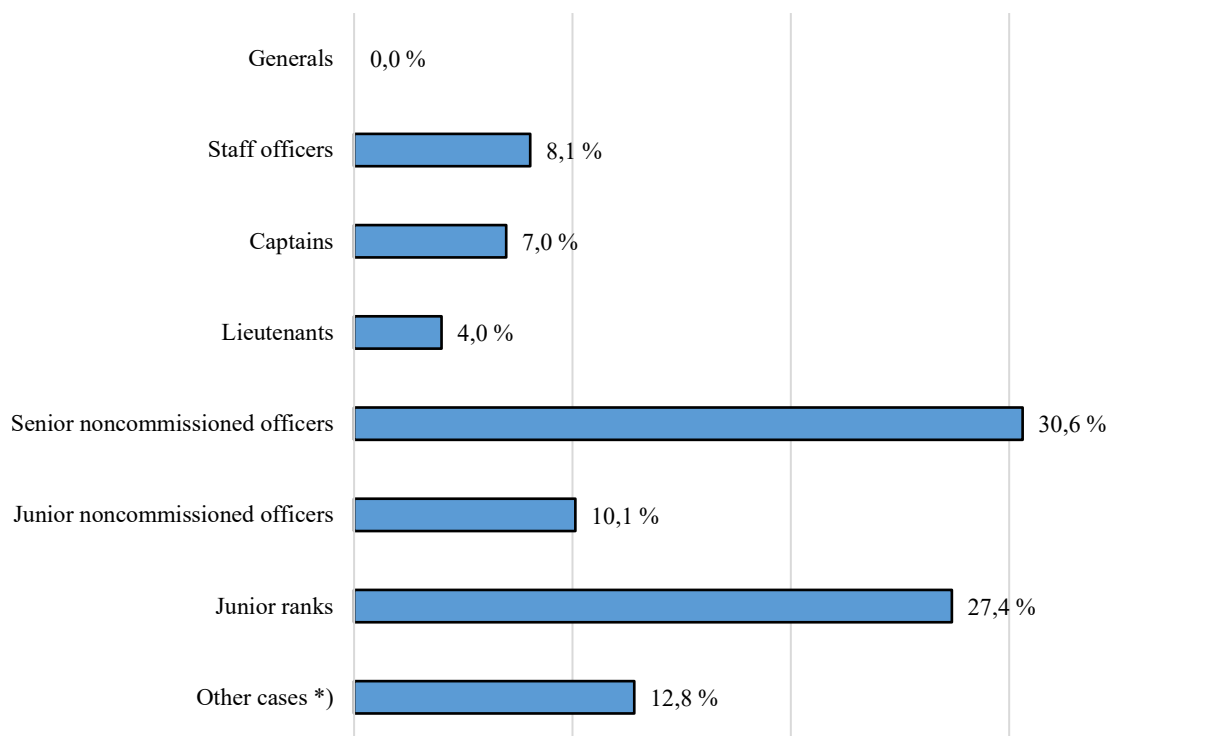
A total of 3,891 cases were recorded in the period under review. Cases are all processing items provided with a file number. In addition to the petitions of servicewomen and men, their family members and similar other people, this includes the reportable events in the Bundeswehr reviewed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, cases that are taken up after a visit to the troops, and cases that the Commissioner deals with ex officio. The latter include findings that the Commissioner receives from press reports or meetings and discussions, for example. Furthermore, letters from civilian employees submitted to the Petitions Committee of the German Bundestag and general enquiries from private individuals are recorded under “Other”.

Breakdown - absolute figures



*) Petitions from service personnel and their family members

**) Information from press reports and discussions, letters from civilian employees, general enquiries from private persons.

**Breakdown of 2.467 personal petitions
by petitioners in per cent****Breakdown by rank in per cent**

*) including family members

Breakdown of the 3,891 cases according to issues (6,285)

(Up to three incidents can be recorded in one case, therefore the amount of incidents is higher than the amount of cases)

Category	Amount
Personnel matters of active service personnel	2,410
<u>including:</u>	
Assignment planning, performance evaluation, promotion	644
Reasons and termination of service	510
Personnel processing and personnel management	491
Military pay and ancillary promotion and pay areas	339
Reservist affairs	179
Personnel structure	29
Disciplinary law, legal offences	912
<u>including:</u>	
Offences against sexual self-determination	441
Violation of the free democratic basic order	265
Leadership, camaraderie	620
Pension, social affairs	599
Health, medical services, medical care insurance	277
Compatibility of family and duty	271
<u>including:</u>	
Commuter issues	83
Deployments abroad, equipment in use	142
Training, equipment for training	139
Infrastructure, accommodation	127
<u>including:</u>	
Digitalisation	20
Catering, clothing, support	118
Suicide, attempted suicide, notice of a suicide	102
Diversity	87
<u>including:</u>	
Women in the armed forces (equal opportunity issues)	54
Sexual diversity	19
Service personnel with a migration background	14
Safety issues, accidents	87
Behaviour and appearance of service personnel on and off duty	76
Working hours	55
Bureaucracy	22
Other ^{*)}	241

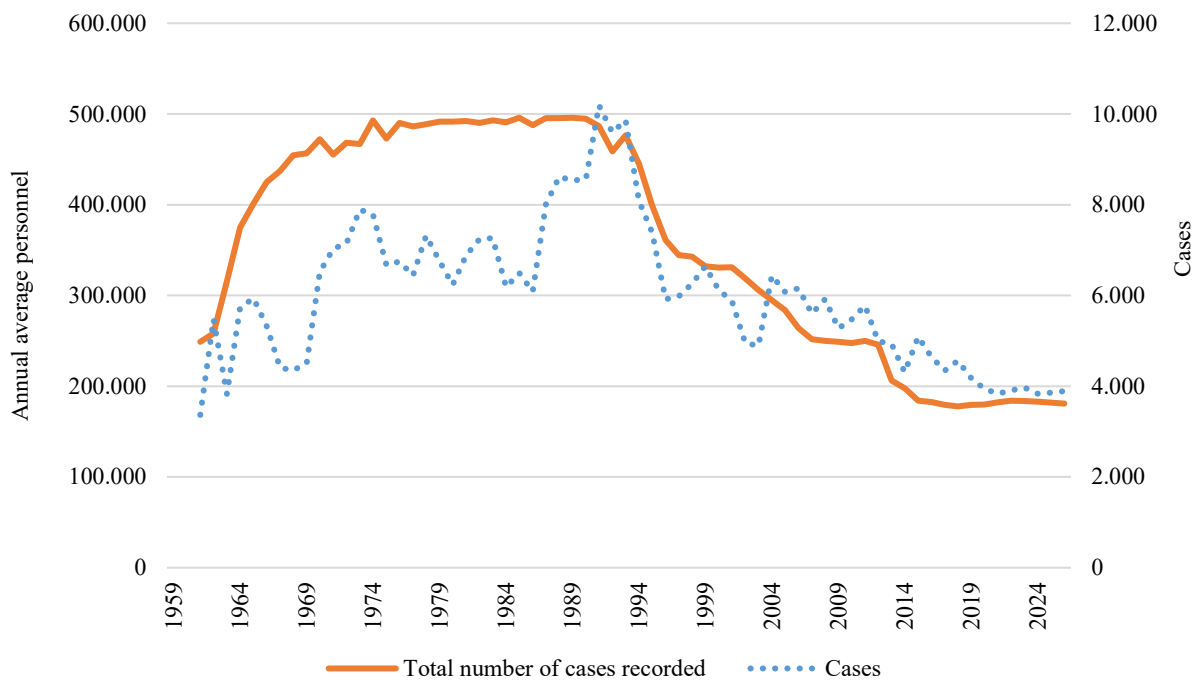
*) Among others, lack of competence, submission to the Petitions Committee, requests for access to files, responses to the annual report

Development of the number of cases from 1959 to 2024

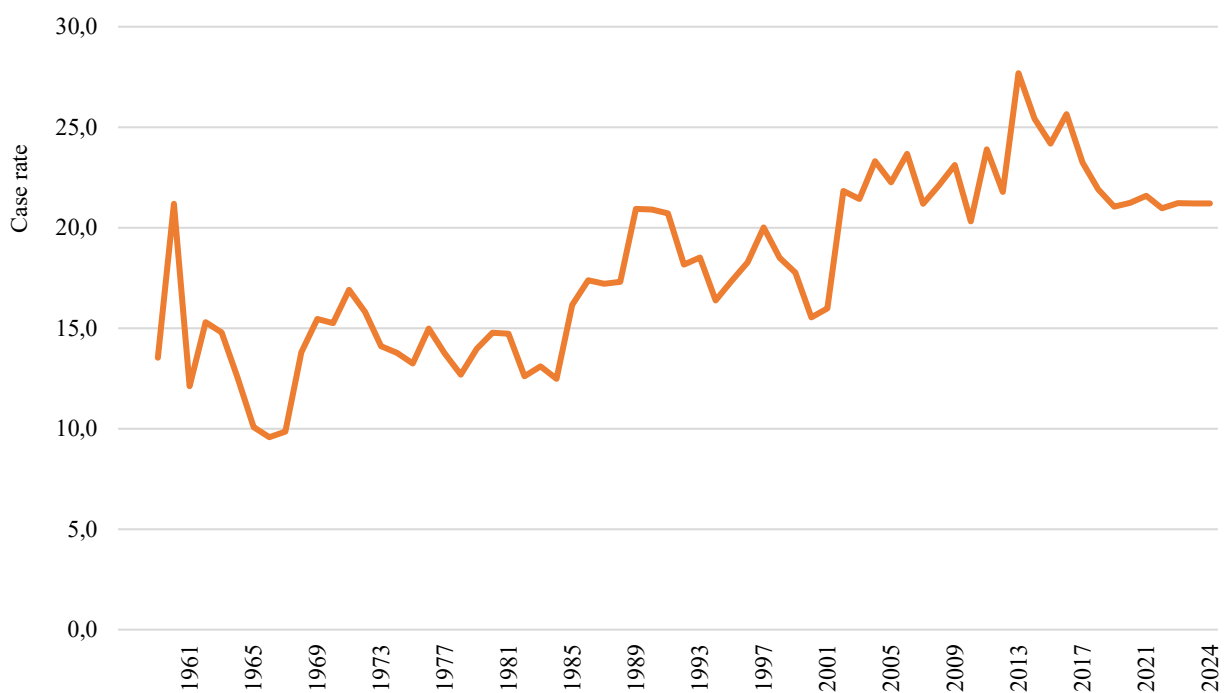
Year under review	Total number of recorded cases	Annual average Bundeswehr personnel (active service personnel)	Case rate per thousand active service personnel
1959	3,368	248,800	13.5
1960	5,471	258,080	21.2
1961	3,829	316,090	12.1
1962	5,736	374,766	15.3
1963	5,938	401,337	14.8
1964	5,322	424,869	12.5
1965	4,408	437,236	10.1
1966	4,353	454,569	9.6
1967	4,503	456,764	9.9
1968	6,517	472,070	13.8
1969	7,033	455,114	15.5
1970	7,142	468,484	15.2
1971	7,891	466,889	16.9
1972	7,789	492,828	15.8
1973	6,673	472,943	14.1
1974	6,748	490,053	13.8
1975	6,439	486,206	13.2
1976	7,319	488,616	15.0
1977	6,753	491,424	13.7
1978	6,234	491,481	12.7
1979	6,884	492,344	14.0
1980	7,244	490,243	14.8
1981	7,265	493,089	14.7
1982	6,184	490,729	12.6
1983	6,493	495,875	13.1
1984	6,086	487,669	12.5
1985	8,002	495,361	16.2
1986	8,619	495,639	17.4
1987	8,531	495,649	17.2
1988	8,563	494,592	17.3
1989	10,190	486,825	20.9
1990	9,590	458,752	20.9
1991	9,864	476,288	20.7
1992	8,084	445,019	18.2
1993	7,391	399,216	18.5

Year under review	Total number of recorded cases	Annual average Bundeswehr personnel (active service personnel)	Case rate per thousand active service personnel
1994	5,916	361,177	16.4
1995	5,979	344,690	17.3
1996	6,264	342,870	18.3
1997	6,647	332,013	20.0
1998	6,122	330,914	18.5
1999	5,885	331,148	17.8
2000	4,952	318,713	15.5
2001	4,891	306,087	16.0
2002	6,436	294,800	21.8
2003	6,082	283,723	21.4
2004	6,154	263,990	23.3
2005	5,601	251,722	22.3
2006	5,918	249,964	23.7
2007	5,276	248,995	21.2
2008	5,474	247,619	22.1
2009	5,779	249,900	23.1
2010	4,993	245,823	20.3
2011	4,926	206,091	23.9
2012	4,309	197,880	21.8
2013	5,095	184,012	27.7
2014	4,645	182,703	25.4
2015	4,344	179,633	24.2
2016	4,560	177,800	25.6
2017	4,173	178,881	23.3
2018	3,939	179,791	21.9
2019	3,835	182,219	21.0
2020	3,907	183,969	21.2
2021	3,967	183,725	21.6
2022	3,839	183,049	21.0
2023	3,859	181,807	21.2
2024	3,891	180,876	21.2
Total	396,114		

**Comparison of the development of cases
with the annual average personnel since 1959**



**Case rate
per thousand active service personnel since 1959**

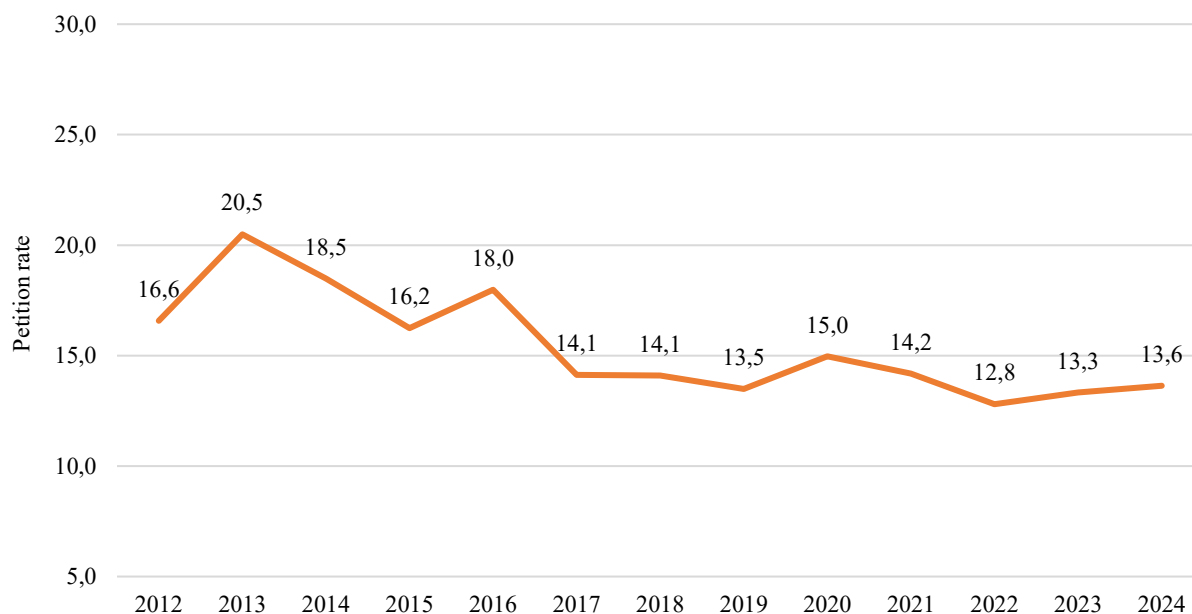


Development of the number of personal petitions in relation to the annual average since 2012

(Statistical recording of personal petitions has only been possible since the introduction of a new data recording system in the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in 2012)

Year under review	Annual average Bundeswehr personnel (active service personnel)	Total number of personal petitions	Rate of personal petitions per thousand active service personnel
2012	197,880	3,281	16.6
2013	184,012	3,770	20.5
2014	182,703	3,379	18.5
2015	179,633	2,917	16.2
2016	177,800	3,197	18.0
2017	178,881	2,528	14.1
2018	179,791	2,534	14.1
2019	182,219	2,459	13.5
2020	183,969	2,753	15.0
2021	183,725	2,606	14.2
2022	183,049	2,343	12.8
2023	181,807	2,423	13.3
2024	180,976	2,467	13.6

Petition rate per thousand active service personnel since 2012



24. Visits, meetings and talks by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces**Troop visits**

10 Jan.	Calw	Special Operations Forces Command
11 Jan.	Dornstadt	3 Medical Regiment
23 Jan.	Hamburg	Helmut Schmidt University / Bundeswehr University Military Rabbinate (Hamburg branch) 6/1 Military Police Regiment
24 Jan.	Kiel	Flotilla 1
25 Jan.	Kronshagen	Naval Institute of Maritime Medicine
29 Jan.	Holzdorf / Schönewalde	Air Transport Group 64 Helicopter Wing
5 Feb.	Hamburg	Bundeswehr Command and Staff College
6 Feb.	Wilhelmshaven	Naval Band Naval Operations School (branch office) Flotilla 2 / FRIGATE Hessen
7 Feb.	Bremen	“Military history collection” in Scharnhorst Barracks
8 Feb.	Wilhelmshaven	Bundeswehr logistics centre
26 Feb.	Mons / Belgium	German detachment, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
27 Feb.	Brussels / Belgium	NATO Headquarters
28 Feb.	Brunssum / Netherlands	Allied Joint Force Command/German Delegation, Netherlands
29 Feb.	Eindhoven / Netherlands	German detachment, European Air Transport Command Multinational Multirole Tanker Transport Unit
3 - 6 Mar.	Norway	Visit to the Nordic Response exercise with ombudspeople from the Netherlands and Norway
26 Mar.	Wilhelmshaven	Family support centre Flotilla 2 Naval Arsenal
27 Mar.	Oldenburg Osterholz-Scharmbeck	1st Armoured Division Bundeswehr Logistics School

8 Apr.	Burg	1 Logistics Regiment 171 Logistic Battalion 8/1 Military Police Regiment
9 Apr.	Bad Frankenhausen	393 Tank Battalion
23 Apr.	Strausberg	1 CBRN defence regiment
29 Apr.	Eckernförde	1st Submarine Squadron
30 Apr.	Eckernförde	Sea Battalion
14 May	Münster Warendorf	I German-Dutch Corps Bundeswehr Sports School / Team Invictus Germany 2024
22 May	Germersheim	Air Force Training Battalion
29 - 30 May	Lešt / Slovakia	German detachment, ENHANCED VIGILANCE ACTIVITIES
31 May - 1 June	Priština / Kosovo	German Contingent KFOR
2 - 4 June	Sarajevo / Bosnia and Herzegovina	German Contingent EUFOR ALTHEA
8 June	Augustdorf	Bundeswehr Day
17 June	Marienberg	371 Armoured Infantry Battalion
24 - 25 June	Fehmarn	Naval Underwater Detection Unit 2/Electronic Warfare Battalion 912 Navy radio transmitting and receiving station
2 July	Berlin	Inclusive equestrian sports and riding therapy centre
8 July	Veitshöchheim	10 Armoured Division
9 July	Hardheim	363 Tank Battalion
10 July	Veitshöchheim Hammelburg	Army Band Bundeswehr United Nations Training Centre
11 July	Hammelburg	Infantry School (Infantry Day)
15 - 16 July	Bad Reichenhall	23 Mountain Infantry Brigade 231 Mountain Infantry Battalion
17 July	Bischofswiesen	232 Mountain Infantry Battalion

5 Aug.	Euskirchen	Armed Forces Office / Regulation Management Bureaucracy Reduction Centre for Geoinformation Affairs
6 Aug.	Wesel	German detachment, 1st NATO Signal Battalion
7 Aug.	Udem	Bundeswehr Space Command
8 Aug.	Kalkar	Air Operations Command
13 - 14 Aug.	Helgoland	Naval Air Wing 6 (MFG 5 SAR) Naval signal station Air Force radio tower
15 Aug.	Flensburg	Mürwik Naval School
19 Aug.	Eckernförde	Naval Special Operations Forces Command
20 Aug.	Panker	61 Surface-to-Air Missile Group Surface-to-Air Missile Training Centre
26 Aug.	Nordholz	Naval Air Command
4 Sept.	Berlin	1 Military Police Regiment Ceremonial Band
12 Sept.	Erfurt	383 Communication and Information Systems Support Battalion
16 Sept.	Cham	12 Armoured Brigade
17 Sept.	Oberviechtach	122 Armoured Infantry Battalion
18 Sept.	Hof	Bundeswehr Signals Intelligence Technical Analysis Centre
19 Sept.	Weiden	131 Artillery Battalion 375 Armoured Artillery Battalion
20 Sept.	Kümmersbruck	472 Logistic Battalion
18 Oct.	Berlin	German Resistance Memorial Centre
21 Oct.	Kastellaun	282 Communication and Information Systems Support Battalion
22 Oct.	Hermeskeil	Polygone Multinational Programme
23 Oct.	Merzig Lebach	10/26 Parachute Regiment 260 Airborne Reconnaissance Company

24 Oct.	Saarlouis	1 Airborne Brigade 260 Airborne Engineer Company
27 - 29 Oct.	Goa / India	Indo-Pacific Deployment
1 Nov.	Berlin	Museum of Military History
6 Nov.	Federal Ministry of Defence	Video conference with the UNIFIL, Counter Daesh / Capacity Building Iraq, UNMISS, KFOR and ALTHEA German contingents
11 Nov.	Germany	Ukrainian Armed Forces (EUMAM UA) training mission
14 Nov.	Berlin	Veterans Office
19 Nov.	Manching	71 Bundeswehr Technical Centre for Aircraft and Aircraft Equipment Weapons System Support Centre 1
20 Nov.	Pöcking	Cyber and Information Domain Training Centre
21 Nov.	Dillingen a.d. Danube	292 Communication and Information Systems Support Battalion
26 Nov.	Prenzlau	610 Signal Battalion
12 Dec.	Sigonella / Italy	German detachment, Nato Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Force (NISRF)
17 Dec.	Bonn Rheinbach	Medical Centre Cyber Operations Centre
19 - 22 Dec.	Vilnius and Rukla / Lithuania	45 Armoured Brigade Parent Headquarters German Detachment – ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE

Meetings and talks with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and employees

In the year under review, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces spoke with representatives of many associations, organisations, foundations, offices and committees that are important for the Bundeswehr, including the German Armed Forces Association and the Reservists' Association, the General Spokespersons' Committee and the spokespersons committees of various military organisational components, as well as with those responsible in the Federal Ministry of Defence and the heads of the highest federal authorities and military organisational components, with members of the Bundestag and state parliaments, mayors, diplomats and military chaplains. She also exchanged views with representatives from academia, trade unions, the media, industry and civil society, as well as with international interlocutors.

Numerous civilian and military stakeholders, associations, organisations and institutions invited the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to give presentations and take part in discussions, including, among others: Members of the Bundestag, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Church District of Oldenburg-Land, Protestant Church Office, Bad Harzburg Civic Foundation, Garrisons Working Group of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, Society for Security Policy, Army Officer School, Museum of Military History, Association of the German Army, General Representation Committee for Disabled Persons at the Federal Ministry of Defence, military equal opportunity officers, Bundeswehr Military Police and Staff Duty School, German Armed Forces Association and Reservists' Association, Centre des hautes études militaires. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces regularly engaged in dialogue with young people, with Bundestag Administration interns and with school classes, for example.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces attended several swearing-in ceremonies, including the public pledge ceremony to mark the 69th anniversary of the Bundeswehr in Hanover and the public pledge ceremony of the 391 Armoured Infantry Battalion in Eisenach. She delivered the speech at the pledge ceremony of the 91 Light Infantry Battalion in Rotenburg (Wümme) and at the 325 Artillery Training Support Battalion in Munster, as well as at the pledge ceremony combined with a family day and a parade of returned servicewomen and servicemen for deployment in Slovakia of the 92 Armoured Infantry Battalion in Munster. She also attended various concerts by the different Bundeswehr bands.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces attended various commemorative events and laid wreaths at some: Day of National Mourning in Berlin (Plötzensee Memorial, Lilienthalstraße Cemetery, Jewish Cemetery, Bundeswehr Memorial), 80th Henning von Tresckow Memorial Day, 10th anniversary of the Forest of Remembrance, memorial service for the Captain of the German team at the Invictus Games 2023, Captain Lieutenant Jörg Hinrichs.

She took part in various politically, militarily and socially important events: The Munich Security Conference, symposium on armed drones and drone defence, parade of returned servicewomen and servicemen for the Bundeswehr mission in Mali, information event organised by the Chief of Defence for commanders, company commanders and first sergeants in Magdeburg, command handovers at the Special Operations Forces Command and at the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre, ceremony to mark the sponsorship of the city of Rottenburg with the 292 Light Infantry Battalion from Donaueschingen, specialised counselling seminars and the Kiel Week event.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited exhibitions, teaching collections, memorials and museums, including: Topography of Terror, the "Flight, Expulsion and Reconciliation" Foundation, Military History Collection Bremen, Anti-War Museum in Berlin-Wedding, "Women in the Resistance" at the German Resistance Memorial Centre, "*Prinzip Held**" (the hero principle) at the Military History Museum in Berlin-Gatow, Hailfingen/Tailfingen Concentration Camp Memorial, and the Synagogue and Jewish Cemetery in Baisingen.

She attended the inauguration of the Veterans Office and the premises of the Military Rabbinate in Berlin, a day care centre for members of the Bundeswehr in Kümmersbruck and a memorial plaque for Adolf Lewisohn in Berlin.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces visited the premises of the companies, Rheinmetall, MTU and MBDA, sometimes for the sod-turning ceremonies for new production facilities.

Together with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, the Commissioner hosted the 16th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF). A total of 120 participants from 41 countries and eight international organisations took part in the conference in Berlin from 30 September 2024 to 3 October

2024. She also engaged in bilateral dialogue with international colleagues on several other occasions, in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, among other locations.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces led an intercessory prayer with the Protestant Christmas service broadcast live on ZDF from Lithuania. She was also a jury member for the Bundeswehr's 17th Art Competition.

At the German Bundestag's Day of Insights and Outlooks on 7 September 2024, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, supported by staff members, provided information about her office, and her work and took part in several panel discussions.

In the year under review, the Commissioner's staff attended meetings and discussions with troop units, headquarters, departments and authorities of the armed forces and organisational components.

Visitor groups

In the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the Commissioner or her staff received and attended to 58 visitor groups. Eleven of these were international groups with servicewomen and men from the partnership seminars of the Leadership Development and Civic Education Centre. Of the visitor groups, 44 came from the armed forces and organisational components of the Bundeswehr. Three other visitor groups were representatives of the German Armed Forces Association, a group of pupils from a sixth form college in Berlin and participants from the International Centre for Conflict Studies.

25. Legal basis of the office, duties and tasks of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and servicewomen and servicemen's right of petition

Excerpt from the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany

of 23 May 1949 (Federal Law Gazette – BGBl. I, page 1), last amended by Article 1 of the Law of 19 December 2022 (BGBl. I, page 2,478)

Article 17

Every person shall have the right to address requests or complaints in writing to the responsible authorities and the national parliament, either individually or jointly with others.

Article 17a

(1) Laws on military service and alternative service may stipulate that, for members of the armed forces and alternative service during the period of military service or alternative service, the fundamental right to freely express and disseminate one's opinion in speech, writing and images (Article 5 paragraph 1, sentence 1, first half-sentence), the fundamental right of freedom of assembly (Article 8) and the right of petition (Article 17), insofar as it grants the right to make requests or complaints in community with others, shall be restricted.

(2) Laws for the purpose of defence, including the protection of the civilian population, may stipulate that the fundamental rights of freedom of movement (Article 11) and the inviolability of the home (Article 13) shall be restricted.

Article 45b

A Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be appointed to protect the fundamental rights and to assist the Bundestag in exercising parliamentary control. The details shall be regulated by a federal law.

Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

(Act on Article 45b of the Basic Law – Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces) in the version published on 16 June 1982 (BGBl. I, page 677), last amended by Article 17 of the Act of 22 December 2023 (BGBl. 2023 I, No. 414)

§ 1 Status under constitutional law, duties

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall perform their duties as an auxiliary organ of the Bundestag in exercising parliamentary oversight.

(2) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall act on the instructions of the Bundestag or the Defence Committee to examine specific cases. An instruction can only be issued if the Defence Committee does not make the case the subject of its own advisory work. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces may request an instruction from the Defence Committee to examine certain cases.

(3) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall act at their own discretion on the basis of their own decision if, in exercising their right under § 3 No. 4, through notification by members of the Bundestag, through petitions under § 7 or in any other way, they become aware of circumstances that indicate a violation of the fundamental rights of service personnel or of the principles of leadership development and civic education. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall not take action pursuant to sentence 1 if the Defence Committee has made the matter the subject of its own advisory work.

§ 2 Reporting obligations

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall submit a written general report (annual report) to the Bundestag for the calendar year.

(2) They may submit individual reports to the Bundestag or the Defence Committee at any time.

(3) If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces acts on instructions, they shall submit an individual report on the results of their examination upon request.

§ 3 Official powers

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall have the following powers in performing the duties assigned to them:

1. They may request information and access to files from the Federal Minister of Defence and all offices and persons subordinate to them. These rights may only be denied to them if there are compelling reasons for confidentiality. The decision on such a denial shall be made by the Federal Minister of Defence or their permanent deputy in office. They must represent the decision before the Defence Committee. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be authorised to hear the petitioner as well as witnesses and experts on the basis of an instruction pursuant to § 1 (2) and with a petition based on a complaint by the petitioner. These shall be compensated in accordance with the Law on the Compensation of Witnesses and Experts in the version published on 1 October 1969 (BGBl. I, p. 1756), last amended by Article 11 of the Law of 26 November 1979 (BGBl. I, p. 1953).
2. They may give the responsible agencies or offices the opportunity to settle a matter.
3. They may forward a case to the agency or office responsible for initiating criminal or disciplinary proceedings.
4. They may visit all Bundeswehr units, headquarters, departments and authorities and their facilities at any time, even without prior notification. This right shall be the exclusive personal right of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Sentences 2 and 3 of No. 1 shall apply accordingly.
5. They may request summary reports on the exercising of disciplinary powers in the armed forces from the Federal Minister of Defence and statistics reports on the exercising of criminal justice from the responsible federal and state authorities, provided this affects the armed forces or their service personnel.
6. They may attend court hearings in criminal proceedings and disciplinary proceedings, even if the public is excluded. They shall have the right to inspect files to the same extent as the prosecuting counsel and the counsel of the instituting authority. They shall also be entitled to the authority in sentence 1 in application and complaints procedures in accordance with the Military Disciplinary Code and the Military Complaints Regulations before the military disciplinary and complaints courts and in proceedings before the courts of administrative jurisdiction relating to their area of responsibility. In these proceedings they shall have the right to inspect files as a party to the proceedings.

§ 4 Administrative assistance

Federal, state and local courts and administrative authorities shall be obliged to provide the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces with administrative assistance in carrying out the necessary surveys.

§ 5 General guidelines, exemption from direction

- (1) The Bundestag and the Defence Committee may issue general guidelines for the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.
- (2) Notwithstanding § 1 (2), the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be exempt from direction.

§ 6 Compulsory attendance

The Bundestag and the Defence Committee may request the attendance of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces at any time.

§ 7 Service personnel's right of petition

Each and every servicewoman and man shall have the right to contact the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces directly and individually without having to go through official channels. They may not be reprimanded or penalised because of their appeal to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

§ 8 Anonymous petitions

Anonymous petitions will not be processed.

§ 9 Confidentiality of petitions

If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces takes action on the basis of a petition, it shall be at their discretion to disclose the facts of the petition and the name of the petitioner. They shall refrain from disclosure if the petitioner so wishes and there are no legal obligations to prevent meeting the request.

§ 10 Duty of confidentiality

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be obliged to maintain confidentiality with regard to matters that have come to their official knowledge, even after the end of their term of office. This shall not apply to communications in the normal course of official business or to facts that are obvious or do not require confidentiality due to their level of significance.

(2) Even if no longer in office, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces may not give evidence or make statements on such matters in or out of court without authorisation. Authorisation shall be granted by the President of the Bundestag in agreement with the Defence Committee.

(3) Permission to testify as a witness may only be refused if the testimony would be detrimental to the welfare of the country or a German state or would seriously jeopardise or considerably impede the performance of public duties.

(4) This shall not affect the statutory duty to report criminal offences and to advocate and stand up for the preservation of the free democratic basic order should it be endangered.

§ 11

(omitted)

§ 12 Federal and state authority information obligations

The judicial and administrative authorities of the Federal Government and the states shall be obliged to inform the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of the initiation of the proceedings, the filing of the public complaint, the ordering of the investigation in the disciplinary proceedings and the outcome of the proceedings if the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has forwarded the cases to one of these authorities.

§ 13 Election of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

The Bundestag elects the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces by secret ballot with a majority of its members. The Defence Committee, the parliamentary groups and as many MPs as to equal the required amount of a parliamentary group in accordance with the rules of procedure shall be entitled to submit proposals. Debate is not provided for.

§ 14 Eligibility for election, term of office, prohibition from pursuing another profession, oath, exemption from military service

(1) Any German person who has the right to vote for the Bundestag and has reached the age of 35 shall be eligible for election as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. (amended by the Act of 30 March 1990 – BGBl. I, p. 599)

(2) The term of office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is five years. Re-election is allowed.

(3) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces may not hold any other paid office, trade or profession and may not be a member of the management or supervisory board of a profit-oriented company or of a government or a legislative body of the Federal Government or of a German state.

(4) On taking office before the Bundestag the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall take the oath provided for in Article 56 of the Basic Law.

(5) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be exempt from military service for the duration of their term of office.

§ 15 Legal status of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, commencement and termination of the official relationship

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall have an official relationship under public law in accordance with this law. The President of the Bundestag shall appoint the person elected.

(2) The official relationship shall begin with the handing over of the certificate of appointment or, if the oath has been taken beforehand (§ 14 paragraph 4), with the swearing-in.

(3) Apart from expiry of the term of office in accordance with § 14 paragraph 2 or death, the official relationship shall end:

1 with dismissal,

2 with release on request.

(4) At the request of the Defence Committee, the Bundestag may instruct its President to dismiss the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. This decision requires the approval of a majority of the members of the Bundestag.

(5) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces may request their release at any time. The President of the Bundestag shall pronounce the release.

§ 16 Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, senior civil servant, employees, budget

(1) The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is in the Bundestag.

(2) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is supported by a senior civil servant. Further employees shall be assigned to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to perform their duties. The civil servants working with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces are Bundestag civil servants pursuant to § 176 of the Act on Federal Civil Servants in the version published on 3 January 1977 (BGBl. I, pages 1, 795, 842), last amended by § 27 of the Act of 26 June 1981 (BGBl. I, page 553). The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be the superior of all employees assigned to them.

(3) The necessary personnel and material resources to be provided to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to perform their duties shall be shown in a separate chapter of the Bundestag section of the budget.

§ 17 Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces representative

(1) The senior civil servant shall assume the rights of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, with the exception of the right under § 3 No. 4, if the Commissioner is prevented from doing so and after the end of their term of office, until a successor takes office. § 5 (2) shall apply accordingly.

(2) If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is unable to perform their duties for more than three months, or if more than three months have elapsed since the end of the Commissioner's official relationship without a successor's term of office having begun, the Defence Committee may authorise the senior civil servant to exercise the right under § 3 No. 4.

§ 18 Remuneration, pensions

(1) The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall receive official remuneration from the beginning of the calendar month in which the official relationship begins until the end of the calendar month in which the official relationship ends. § 11 (1)(a) and (b) of the Federal Ministers Act shall apply mutatis mutandis with the proviso that the official salary and the local allowance amount to 75 percent of the official salary and the local cost-of-living allowance of a federal minister. The remuneration shall be paid monthly in advance.

(1a) To mitigate the consequences of increased consumer prices, the following special payments shall be granted to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in corresponding application of § 14 (4) to (8) of the Federal Civil Service Remuneration Act:

1. A one-time special payment of EUR 1,240 for the month of June 2023.

2. A monthly special payment of EUR 220 for the months of July 2023 to February 2024.

(2) In all other respects, § 11 (2) and (4) and §§ 13 to 20 and 21a of the Federal Ministers Act shall apply mutatis mutandis, with the proviso that the two-year term of office (§ 15 (1) of the Federal Ministers Act) shall be replaced by a five-year term of office. Sentence 1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to a career soldier or temporary-career volunteer who has been appointed as a Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, subject to the proviso that for temporary-career volunteers retirement shall be replaced by termination of service with application of § 18(2) of the Federal Ministers Act.

(3) The provisions of the Federal Travel Expenses Act in the version published on 13 November 1973 (BGBl. I, page 1,621), last amended by the ordinance of 31 May 1979 (BGBl. I, page 618), the highest level of travel

expenses and the Federal Removal Expenses Act in the version published on 13 November 1973 (BGBl. I, page 1,628), last amended by Article VII of the Act of 20 December 1974 (BGBl. I, page 3,716) shall apply mutatis mutandis to relocations required by the appointment and termination of the official relationship.

§ 19

(omitted)

§ 20

(entry into force)

Excerpt from the Rules of Procedure of the German Bundestag

in the version published on 2 July 1980 (BGBl. I, page 1,237), last amended as published on 28 February 2024 (BGBl. 2024 I, No. 64)

§ 113 Election of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is elected by secret ballot (§ 49).

§ 114 Reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

(1) The President shall send the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to the Defence Committee, unless a parliamentary group or five out of one hundred members of the Bundestag request that this be placed on the agenda.

(2) The Defence Committee shall report to the Bundestag.

§ 115 Consultation on the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

(1) The President shall allow the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to speak in the debate on the reports submitted by them if this has been requested by a parliamentary group or by five out of one hundred members of the Bundestag present.

(2) A parliamentary group or five out of one hundred members of the Bundestag present may request that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces be summoned to sessions of the Bundestag. Paragraph 1 shall apply mutatis mutandis.

Procedural principles for cooperation between the Petitions Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

1. The Petitions Committee shall inform the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of a petition if it concerns a Bundeswehr servicewoman or man. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall inform the Petitions Committee whether a case has arisen in the same matter and whether they will take action.

2. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall inform the Petitions Committee of a case if the Petitions Committee recognises that a petition has been submitted on the same matter.

3. If the Petitions Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces are involved in the same matter, the case shall basically be handled by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces first.

If the Petitions Committee takes action, it shall inform the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces accordingly. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and the Petitions Committee shall inform each other, regularly and in writing, of the progress of the processing and its result.

Excerpt from the A-2600/2 general regulation, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces matters

Table of contents

- 1 Constitutional status of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces
- 2 Tasks and powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces
 - 2.1 Tasks
 - 2.2 Powers
- 3 Rules of procedures
 - 3.1 General remarks
 - 3.2 Processing
 - 3.3 Hearings
 - 3.4 Processing of requests when a complaint has been made concurrently
 - 3.5 Processing within the jurisdiction of the agency concerned
 - 3.6 Visits conducted by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces
- 4 Notification of servicewomen and -men, rights and obligations
- 5 Data protection
- 6 Cooperation in a spirit of trust

1 Constitutional status of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

101. A Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be appointed to protect the fundamental rights of servicewomen and men and to assist the Bundestag in exercising parliamentary oversight. Further details shall be stipulated by the Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces (Act pursuant to Article 45b of the Basic Law – Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces) in the version of the Notification of 16 June 1982 (Federal Law Gazette I, page 677), which was most recently amended by Article 15(68) of the Act to Restructure Civil Service Law of 5 February 2009 (Federal Law Gazette I, page 160).

2 Tasks and powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

2.1 Tasks

201. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall act

- on the instructions of the Bundestag or the Defence Committee to examine specific cases,
- at their own discretion and on the basis of their own decision, if circumstances become known to them
 - + with their visits in accordance with § 3 number 4 of the Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces,
 - + via notification by members of the Bundestag,
 - + via petitions in accordance with § 7 of the Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces or
 - + in any another way

that indicate a violation of the fundamental rights of service personnel or of the principles of leadership development and civic education.

2.2 Powers

202. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall in particular have the following powers in performing the duties assigned to them:

- a) They may request information and access to files from the Federal Minister of Defence and all agencies, offices and persons subordinate to them. This right may only be denied to them if there are compelling reasons for confidentiality. The decision on such a denial shall be made by the Federal

Minister of Defence or their permanent deputy in office. They must represent the decision before the Defence Committee.

- b) On the instructions of the German Bundestag or the Defence Committee they shall be authorised to hear the petitioner as well as witnesses and experts with a petition based on a complaint by the petitioner.
- c) They may visit all Bundeswehr units, headquarters, departments and authorities and their facilities at any time, even without prior notification. This right of access is reserved for the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces personally. Exercising this right may only be denied where there are compelling reasons for confidentiality. The decision of the Federal Minister of Defence must be obtained for this.
- d) They may attend court hearings in criminal proceedings and disciplinary proceedings, even if the public is excluded. They shall have the right to inspect files to the same extent as the prosecuting counsel and the counsel of the instituting authority. They shall also be entitled to the authority in sentence 1 in application and complaints procedures in accordance with the Military Disciplinary Code and the Military Complaints Regulations before the military disciplinary and complaints courts and in proceedings before the courts of administrative jurisdiction relating to their area of responsibility. In these proceedings they shall have the right to inspect the files as a party to the proceedings.
- e) They may give the responsible agencies or offices the opportunity to settle a matter.
- f) They may forward a case to the agency or office responsible for initiating criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

203. With the exception of the right of access in accordance with number 202 letter c), the powers may also be exercised by the staff of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Fact-finding visits by employees must be registered in advance.

3 Rules of procedures

3.1 General remarks

301. Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces matters must be dealt with as a matter of priority. If the matter takes longer to process, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall be informed of the status of the matter at appropriate intervals by the office that must issue the statement.

All offices entrusted with the processing must maintain secrecy and confidentiality. This shall also apply if a Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces matter is forwarded through official channels or to several offices.

If, in connection with a request by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces for information or access to files or with visits, there are doubts as to whether there are compelling reasons for confidentiality that prevent the request, the decision of the Federal Minister of Defence must be obtained without delay. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces must be informed of this.

3.2 Processing

302. If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces writes personally to members of the Bundeswehr, the person to whom the letter is addressed shall reply. If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces writes to an office of the Bundeswehr, the head of the office shall reply. The final statement must always be signed exclusively by the head of the office.

303. If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces writes to offices of the Bundeswehr, a confirmation of receipt must be issued by the office responsible for processing and providing information.

304. Any necessary investigations shall be performed by the responsible superior. Victims, affected or accused persons named in the petition must not be entrusted or tasked with an investigation. If a need for action is identified, any deficiencies found must be remedied after processing has been completed. The same shall apply if an office of the Bundeswehr has been instructed by the Federal Ministry of Defence to respond to a request from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

305. The processing of Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces matters within the Federal Ministry of Defence shall be governed by the provisions of the Federal Ministry of Defence's supplementary rules of procedure.
306. If a petitioner's superiors are requested by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces to submit a statement, they shall arrange for the facts of the case to be reviewed and send the results of the investigation submitted to them together with their own statement to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.
307. The documents resulting from the review must be sent to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. This shall in particular include:
- Questioning minutes, minutes of hearings
 - Official declarations or statements
 - Decisions on the submission of a case to the prosecuting authority
 - Notifications of proceedings
 - Disciplinary orders
 - Orders to refrain
 - Measures and decisions in the area of military personnel matters (e.g. dismissals, extension of service periods)
308. If the subordinate department of the Federal Ministry of Defence is directly involved by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, that is, without the involvement of the Ministry, the A-500/1 "Cooperation between the Federal Ministry of Defence and subordinate offices" general regulation shall apply. With cases that are important for the management of the Federal Ministry of Defence, the relevant specialised office in the Federal Ministry of Defence must be involved for information purposes. In cases of prominent fundamental or strategic importance, a report must be submitted to the technically responsible ministerial office through official channels before being issued. The EBU III 6 unit must be involved for information purposes in all cases.
309. Statements from Bundeswehr offices that were submitted at the request of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces on the basis of reports in accordance with the A-2600/10 VS-NfD "Reporting on the internal and social situation of the Bundeswehr" general regulation must be submitted to the Federal Ministry of Defence EBU III 6 immediately after they have been issued, together with the essential cases that have arisen.
- This concerns:
- Petitions or reports with "Suspicion of criminal offences in accordance with the Military Criminal Code" (A-2600/10, numbers 322 to 325).
 - Petitions or reports of "Suspicion of criminal offences against sexual self-determination and other forms of sexual harassment by or against members of the Bundeswehr" (A-2600/10, number 341).
 - Petitions or reports with "Suspicion of espionage, extremism or violation of the free democratic basic order, carried out by or against members of the Bundeswehr" (A-2600/10, numbers 361 to 363).
310. All statements submitted by Bundeswehr offices to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, together with the essential cases that have arisen, must be submitted to the Federal Ministry of Defence through official channels upon request, if
- the matter is of political or public/media importance or
 - judicial disciplinary proceedings have been initiated in the matter or criminal proceedings have been initiated or are expected to be initiated.
311. Where servicewomen or men release the attending doctors or medical experts from their duty of medical confidentiality in connection with their petitions to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed

Forces, this shall in case of doubt relate exclusively to their statements made directly to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

Copies of these statements and attached annexes, which are to be submitted to other offices in the Federal Ministry of Defence's area of responsibility through official channels, must not contain any facts or assessments that are subject to medical confidentiality.

312. The statements addressed to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces shall, where appropriate, be drafted in such a way that the statements subject to medical confidentiality are summarised in a special annex and sent only to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces directly with the original correspondence.
313. All parties involved must also observe the duty of confidentiality with regard to petitions, their content and corresponding statements in accordance with the statutory or collective agreement regulations (§ 14 of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act, § 67 of the Act on Federal Civil Servants, § 3 (1) of the Collective Agreement for the Public Service, for example).
314. A petition matter is generally concluded with a letter from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. If the Commissioner notifies the conclusion of the procedure, the office that received the letter shall notify all offices involved in the processing of the result of the Commissioner's review.
315. Petitions that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces sends to the Bundeswehr offices or the Federal Ministry of Defence for comment may only be treated as complaints in accordance with the Military Complaints Regulations (MCR) if such a reinterpretation corresponds to the express will of the petitioner. If necessary the petitioner must be questioned accordingly.

3.3 Hearings

316. If the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces exercises the right to information and access to files (number 202 letter a), this must be supported in every respect. Where required, leave or special leave in accordance with § 9 of the Military Leave Ordinance in conjunction with § 5 (2) of the Ordinance must be granted for a hearing. The possibility of travelling on official duty can be examined with consideration of the applicable instruction situation.
317. If servicewomen or men are to be questioned on matters that are subject to the duty of confidentiality in official matters, authorisation to give evidence must be obtained from the responsible disciplinary superior. Authorisation to give evidence shall be deemed to have been granted if the evidence does not contain classified information or only contains classified information up to a maximum OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE classification level. The provisions of civil service and collective bargaining law on confidentiality in official matters shall apply accordingly to statements made by staff. In their statements to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, the persons interviewed must state that their statements contain classified information.
318. The persons interviewed shall be compensated in accordance with the Judicial Remuneration and Compensation Act of 5 May 2004 (Federal Law Gazette I, pages 718, 776), which was last amended by Article 6 of the Act of 21 December 2020 (Federal Law Gazette I, page 3,229). This shall be done at the request of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces.

3.4 Processing of requests when a complaint has been made concurrently

319. If a complaint has been lodged in accordance with the MCR, including a disciplinary complaint in accordance with § 42 of the Military Disciplinary Code, and if a petition has been filed in the same matter, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces must be informed of the status and progress of the complaint. A copy of the notice of appeal must be forwarded unsolicited. The lodging of an appeal and the non-appealability of the decision on it must be notified separately.
320. If a petition matter goes beyond an appeal lodged in accordance with the MCR, this part of the petition must be dealt with in the same way as other petitions.
321. A petition to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces does not replace the appeals in accordance with the MCR and the MDC. Even if a petition to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces is to be regarded as a complaint or an application in accordance with the MCR or the MDC,

the dates specified here are only complied with if the petition is received by the office responsible for receiving the complaint or application within this period.

3.5 Processing within the jurisdiction of the agency concerned

322. The following applies to the processing of cases that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces sends to Bundeswehr agencies or offices for settlement for which they are responsible:

- a) If the case concerns a servicewoman or man, it must be forwarded to the relevant disciplinary superior.
- b) Other cases must be forwarded to the office responsible for assessing the subject matter of the case.

323. The office referred to in number 322, letter b) shall provide the petitioner an answer through official channels, which may also be given orally by the responsible disciplinary superiors.

3.6 Visits conducted by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

324. Visits by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces for special reasons (in connection with reportable events or several identical or similar petitions in the same unit or office) must be reported to the Federal Ministry of Defence in writing/by e-mail by the heads of the offices concerned as follows:

Bundesministerium der Verteidigung
EBU III 6
Stauffenbergstraße 18
10785 Berlin

(E-mail: BMVg EBU III 6/BMVg/BUND/DE) for information purposes through official channels:

Higher command authorities and higher federal authorities of the respective organisational component or military offices directly subordinate to the Federal Ministry of Defence

(KdoH, KdoLw, MarKdo, KdoSKB, KdoSanDstBw, KdoCIR, EinsFüKdoBw, PlgABw, LufABw, ZInFü, FüAkBw, BAMAD, BAPersBw, BAAINBw, BAIUDBw, BSprA, BiZBw, UniBw HH/M, EKA, KMBA, BWDA, ZMSBw)

Contents:

Re: Troop visit by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces for a special reason

- Date/time
- Unit/office
- Location and accommodation
- Reason

4 Notification of servicewomen and men, rights and obligations

401. All servicewomen and men must be informed of the duties, tasks and powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces at the beginning of initial training and again by their next disciplinary superior after transfer to their parent unit.

402. Every servicewoman and man shall have the right to submit petitions directly to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces without having to go through official channels.

403. The address is:

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces

Platz der Republik 1

11011 Berlin

(E-mail: wehrbeauftragte@bundestag.de or wehrbeauftragter@bundestag.de)

The address must be announced in accordance with the A2-2630/0-0-2 “Life in the military community” general regulation, number 145 by posting it on the information board or the information portal in the unit/office.

404. Petitions/letters from members of the Bundeswehr to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces are also sent with the postal service. They can be handed in at the unit/office.
405. Servicewomen and men may only contact the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces individually.
406. Anonymous petitions will not be processed.
407. If servicewomen or men contact their disciplinary superiors before drafting a petition, they must be given advice and assistance. It may be a disciplinary offence and at the same time a criminal offence in accordance with § 35 of the Military Criminal Code (MCC) if superiors use orders, threats, promises, gifts or other means contrary to their duties to prevent subordinates from making petitions to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces or to suppress petitions. Even such an attempt is punishable and can be punished as a disciplinary offence.
408. The servicewoman or man may not be reprimanded or penalised because they have submitted a petition to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Compliance with the prohibition of discrimination pursuant to § 7 sentence 2 of the Act on the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces must be ensured. If the petition contains breaches of official duty or criminal offences, e.g. insults or defamation, this can be punished by disciplinary action or prosecuted as a disciplinary offence (see number 3323 of the A-2160/6 “Military Disciplinary Code and Military Complaints Code” general regulation).
409. Servicewomen and men may not enclose documents classified as CONFIDENTIAL or higher with their petitions to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. This restriction also extends to the disclosure of information which, to their knowledge, is subject to a higher level of confidentiality than OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE. If the petitioner considers it necessary to report these circumstances, this can be indicated in the petition or the petitioner can contact the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces directly to present their concerns in compliance with the applicable security regulations. **Classified documents may only be processed electronically on or by information technology that is approved for processing classified information and sent electronically. Passing on classified documents with the OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE classification level by e-mail via the open Internet is therefore not permitted. Classified documents with the OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE classification level may be sent by private delivery services as ordinary letters or parcels. The envelope or parcel is not labelled “Classified documents”.**
410. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces has the authority to request information and access to files from the Federal Minister of Defence and all offices and persons under their authority in the performance of the tasks assigned to them. These rights may only be denied to them if there are compelling reasons for confidentiality. The decision on such a denial is made by the Federal Minister of Defence or their permanent deputy in office. Classified information rated as CONFIDENTIAL or higher is forwarded to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces via the Federal Ministry of Defence to the recipient’s TOP SECRET control office.

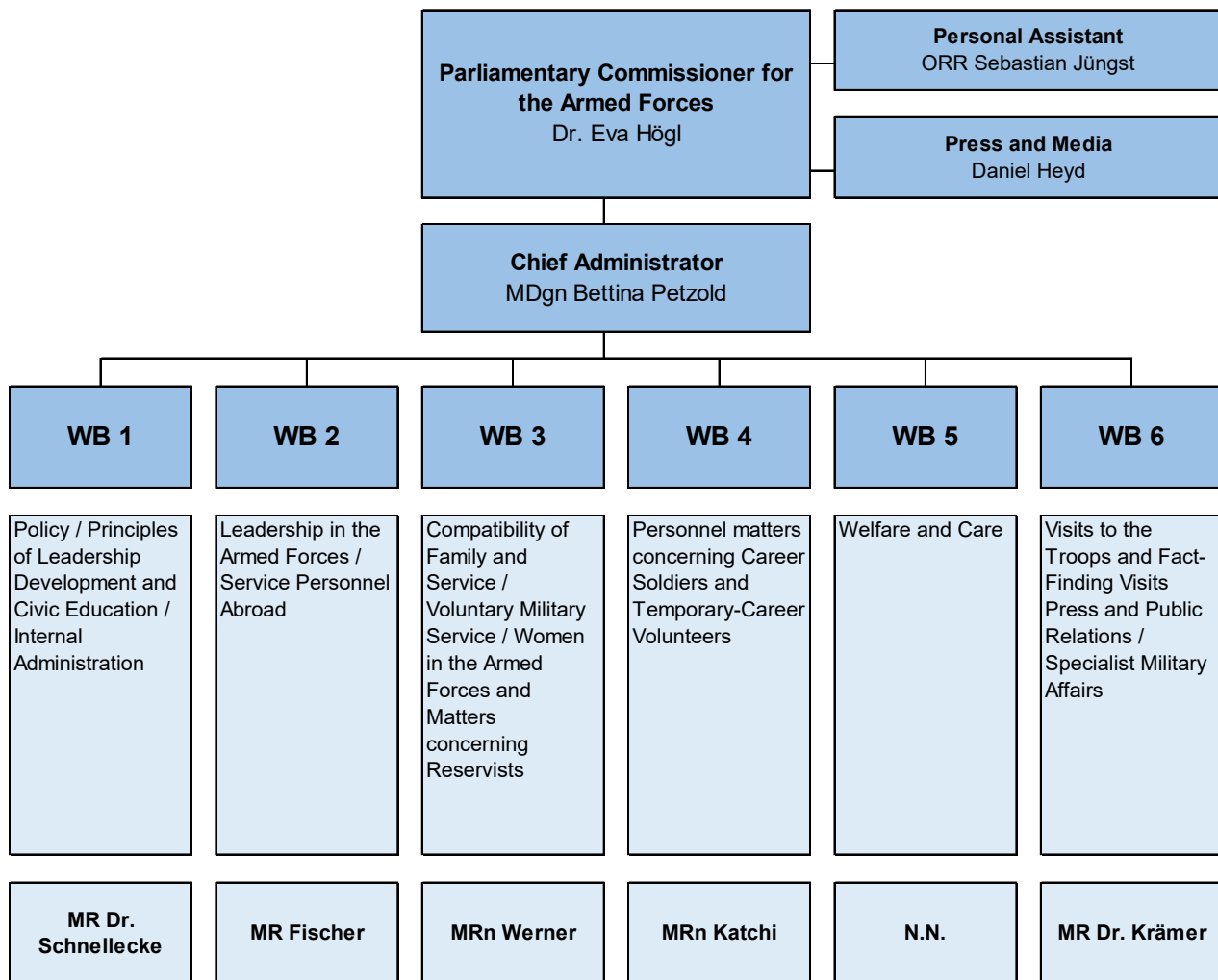
5 Data protection

501. The European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the German Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG) must be observed when processing matters concerning the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces (questioning, obtaining statements, preparing reports/original documents, written replies, and so on). The provisions of the A-2122/4 “Data protection – requirements for implementing the European General Data Protection Regulation and the Federal Data Protection Act” general regulation, in particular with regard to the information obligations to be met, apply here for explanatory purposes. The planned security measures, up to restricted area 3, must also be taken into account.
502. The information obligations pursuant to Article 13 ff. GDPR are generally complied with as follows: The petitioner has already been informed of the processing procedure by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. There is no obligation to provide information here. Third parties named in the petition processing must generally be informed as part of the procedure (e.g. as part of an enquiry – see general regulation A-2122/4, numbers 5001 ff., section 5 “Information obligations sample”).

6 Cooperation in a spirit of trust

601. All superiors are expected to work together with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces in a spirit of trust, thus providing them the opportunity to obtain information quickly and thoroughly.
- The service personnel’s understanding of our system of government and legal system, trust in democracy, but also in the Bundeswehr, can thus be significantly enhanced.

26. Organisational chart of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces



Postal address

Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin

Address for visitors:

Neustädtische Kirchstraße 15
10117 Berlin
Phone: +49 30 227-38100
IVBB-Rufnummer: +49 30 1818-38100
wehrbeauftragte@bundestag.de
www.bundestag.de/parlament/wehrbeauftragte

27. Index

1

292 Light Infantry Battalion	153
1 Airborne Brigade.....	152
1 Military Police Regiment.....	128, 149ff.
12 Armoured Brigade	42f., 126, 151
122 Armoured Infantry Battalion	8, 15f., 43, 48
141 Combat Service Support Battalion.....	96
171 Logistic Battalion.....	43, 53, 150
1st Committee of Inquiry (Afghanistan)	12, 26
1st Submarine Squadron	45

2

23 Mountain Infantry Brigade	43, 150
231 Mountain Infantry Battalion	53, 150
232 Mountain Infantry Battalion	41, 52, 56, 150
26 Parachute Regiment	53, 56, 151
292 Communication and Information Systems Support Battalion	54, 152

3

3 Medical Regiment.....	42
3 Minesweeper Squadron.....	63, 134
325 Artillery Training Support Battalion	96, 153
363 Tank Battalion.....	48, 56
371 Armoured Infantry Battalion	150
375 Armoured Artillery Battalion	52
383 IT Battalion.....	38
393 Tank Battalion.....	30, 38, 150

4

4 Medical Regiment.....	96
472 Logistic Battalion.....	33, 151

6

610 Signal Battalion.....	52, 56, 152
64 Helicopter Wing.....	149

7

71 Bundeswehr Technical Centre	140
--------------------------------------	-----

9

91 Bundeswehr Technical Centre	39
91 Light Infantry Battalion	96, 153
93 Tank Demonstration Battalion.....	96

A

accommodation.....	25, 42f., 48, 50, 109, 164
Act on Equal Opportunities for Female and Male Military Personnel.....	12, 75f., 79f., 115
Act on the Continued Employment of Personnel Injured on Operations	12, 127
additional work.....	9, 17, 25, 33, 134
administrative assistance	6f., 156
Afghanistan.....	6, 12, 14, 26, 96
age limit	58, 62, 107, 121

Ahlen.....	125
Air Force.....	8, 19, 23, 29, 44, 51, 53, 60, 75, 97, 131, 151
Air Force Force Protection Regiment	39
Air Policing	19
air transport base.....	22
alcohol.....	54, 86, 91, 101f.
Ämari (Estonia).....	19
Amberg.....	126
ammunition.....	28, 44, 102, 103, 110
application	10, 33, 52ff., 57, 72, 74, 107, 122
applied military psychology	27f., 91, 94, 100, 126
Armed Forces' Disciplinary Attorney.....	11, 83, 86, 88, 92, 98f., 101
Army.....	8, 27, 29, 38, 43, 47f., 51, 56, 60, 75f., 81, 97, 107, 131, 153
Army Officer School	47, 96, 153
Army's Combat Manoeuvre Training Centre	47
assault rifle.....	79
assessment.....	54, 57, 94, 110, 122
assessment of potential	68
assignment planning	117, 144
assurance of livelihood	108f.
Augustdorf	8, 15, 150
average age	9, 50

B

Bad Frankenhausen.....	30, 38, 42, 150
Bad Reichenhall.....	41, 43, 53, 150
Baghdad (Iraq).....	21
Baltic Sea	20, 117, 140
Basic Law..	8, 12, 52, 64f., 68f., 74, 81, 83, 88, 155, 157, 160
Basic training.....	56, 83
Battle Management System	38
Bavaria	11, 49, 60, 75, 135
benchmarks.....	65ff.
Bergen.....	47f.
Berlin.....	13, 43, 46, 95ff., 111, 128, 139, 150ff., 164f.
Bischofswiesen	41, 52, 56, 97, 150
Bogen	120
Bonn.....	123, 152
bonuses.....	60f., 130
Bosnia and Herzegovina	14, 22, 150, 154
Bremen.....	149, 153
Bremerhaven	47, 54, 97
Bruchsal.....	125
Brunssum (Netherlands)	125, 149
Büchel	44, 49
Bückeburg	45, 135
Bundeswehr Central Hospital	135
Bundeswehr Centre of Military History and Social Sciences.....	12, 78, 86, 89, 97, 138
Bundeswehr disciplinary and complaints courts.....	11, 84, 98
Bundeswehr Foreign Duty Medal.....	24f.
Bundeswehr Hospital	57, 76, 114, 134
Bundeswehr Intranet	31, 67
Bundeswehr Logistics School	45, 53, 135, 139, 149
Bundeswehr Medical Academy.....	40
Bundeswehr Military Police and Staff	

Duty School 34, 90, 153
 Bundeswehr procurement acceleration law 35
 Bundeswehr Signals Intelligence Technical
 Analysis Centre 64, 126
 Bundeswehr Social Services 16, 23, 100, 102, 119, 126, 128,
 130
 Bundeswehr Sports School 141, 150
 Bundeswehr Subsistence Office 137
 Bundeswehr Technical Centre for Aircraft and
 Aeronautical Equipment 132
 Bundeswehr University Hamburg 45, 48, 61, 77, 130, 134
 Bundeswehr University Munich 41, 61
 Bundeswehr's Directive on Tradition 95
 bureaucracy 11, 27, 30ff., 56, 144, 151
 Bureaucracy reduction contact point 31ff., 36
 Burg 43, 53, 150
 Burgas (Bulgaria) 25
 BwFuhrparkService GmbH 33f.
 BWI GmbH 34

C

Calw 118, 149
 camaraderie 81, 89f., 111f., 120, 129, 136, 138, 144
 cannabis 102
 Care 95, 128, 135
 career soldiers 50f., 58, 60ff., 64f., 67f., 70, 74f., 77, 84,
 106, 115, 158
 career training 52, 64
 careers centre 39, 53ff., 61, 68, 71, 73, 78, 94, 104, 106,
 109, 110
 Caretakers 127
 Casino model 136
 Catering 18, 136, 137, 139, 144
 CBRN defence 45, 51, 150
 Celle 45
 Central Institute of the Bundeswehr Medical
 Service Kiel 135
 Cham 37, 42f., 126, 151
 change of status 58f., 64, 67f.
 Character guidance 86, 138
 Chief of Defence 12, 35, 115
 childcare 12, 16, 115, 117f., 153
 civic education 11, 75, 86, 91, 96
 Civilian initial and follow-on occupational
 training 70f., 125
 close-to-home assignment 63, 105, 109
 clothing 9, 30, 38ff., 79, 114, 144
 Club associations 136
 CO2 140
 coalition agreement 26
 Coblenz 45, 123, 135
 Cold start file 12, 16
 Cologne 104
 combat clothing 30, 38f., 41
 combat helmet 38ff.
 combat medal 20, 24f.
 Combat Support Ship FRANKFURT AM MAIN 23, 133
 combat swimmer 11, 46
 command supervision 57, 86, 91f., 100f., 103
 Committee of Inquiry 26

commuter 17f., 42f., 120, 131f.
 company sergeant 67, 77, 129, 153
 comparison groups 65ff.
 Compatibility of family and duty 115, 144
 compulsory military service 7, 10, 74, 104, 106f., 110
 Conseil International du Sport Militaire (CISM) 129
 construction project 43ff., 48f.
 corporal 63
 Covid-19 pandemic 6f., 32, 46, 48, 53, 73, 116, 124
 Crimes against the Bundeswehr 12, 54, 89, 102, 104, 157,
 162, 165
 cyber 8, 29, 75
 Cyber and Information Domain Training Centre 34, 152

D

Daun 54, 126
 Decree on orderlies 136
 defence budget 9, 29f., 69
 Defence Committee 96, 155ff.
 deployment abroad 6, 12, 14, 17, 21, 24, 26, 28, 57,
 79, 87, 96, 129, 138, 144
 Diez 97
 digital health record 125
 digitalisation 11, 32ff., 38f., 47, 74, 110, 125
 Dillingen an der Donau 54
 disablement pension 127
 disciplinary court order 98
 disciplinary offence 11, 85, 87, 90, 98, 165
 disciplinary proceedings 82ff., 87f., 92, 98f., 101, 103, 157,
 161f.
 discrimination 12, 77, 85, 89ff., 100, 112, 114
 Diversity in the Bundeswehr 94, 111ff., 137, 144
 Division 2025 121
 domestic address 24
 Dornstadt 42, 149
 Dresden 47, 96
 drones 20, 21, 30, 36f., 153
 drugs 101
 duration of the procedures 35, 72f., 84, 98
 Düsseldorf 7, 13, 83, 111

E

ear defenders 39
 Eckernförde 11, 40, 45f., 48, 90, 123, 150f.
 economic feasibility study 36
 Eisenach 96, 153
 electronic health record 125
 electronic time and attendance recording 11, 135
 Electronic Warfare Battalion 931 54
 ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE 7f., 15, 17f., 25, 38, 152
 ENHANCED VIGILANCE ACTIVITIES 19, 150
 environment and climate 48, 50, 88, 90, 100, 139
 equal opportunity 12, 79f.
 equal opportunity officer 12, 77f., 80f., 89, 91, 114ff., 119
 equal treatment 25, 108
 equality of opportunities 79f., 112
 equipment 9, 16, 26, 28, 30, 35, 38f., 42, 75, 79, 140, 144
 Erbil (Iraq) 21
 e-recruiting 53
 Erfurt 38, 151

Erndtebrück	47
established posts	10, 59f., 69f., 121f., 139
Estonia	19
EUFOR Althea	14, 22
EUMAM UA (EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine)	9, 14, 27f., 99, 152
EUNAVFOR Aspides	9, 14, 20
EUNAVFOR MED IRINI	14
EUR 25-million proposals	9, 28f., 35
Euskirchen	136, 151
EUTM Mali	22
existing personnel	63
external appearance	113
extra payment for difficult work	131
extremism	12, 71, 83ff., 162

F

F-35	44, 49
Facebook	53, 85
Family support	27, 119f., 149
Faßberg	48
Federal Labour Office	53
Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support (FOBwEITISS)	34, 38, 40, 83, 164
Federal Office of Bundeswehr Infrastructure, Environmental Protection and Services (FOBwIEPS)	43, 47, 140, 164
Federal Office of Bundeswehr Personnel Management (FOBwPM) ...	10, 20, 57f., 60, 63, 65, 68f., 71, 76ff., 80, 82, 84, 86f., 106, 108, 121, 124, 127f., 164
Federal Office of Military Counter-Intelligence (FOMCI)	11, 17, 72ff., 84, 87f., 110, 164
Federal state building authorities	35, 43ff., 47f.
filling posts ...	10, 15f., 29, 44, 50ff., 55, 57, 59ff., 63ff., 68ff., 72f., 76, 98f., 106, 114, 121, 123, 126, 128f., 131
first sergeants	67, 77, 129, 153
fitness for on-board duty	51, 123
Flensburg	41, 130, 151
Flotilla 1	42, 77, 90, 123, 125, 149
foreign assignment	18, 24, 73, 120
Foreign assignment allowance	21, 25, 134
Forest of memory	153
Forest of Remembrance	96
framework agreement	46, 71
Frigate BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG	23
Frigate HAMBURG	20
Frigate HESSEN	9, 14, 20
Frigate KARLSRUHE	140
full resourcing	6, 9, 28f., 36ff., 47, 56, 79, 81, 118
functional allowance	131
Funeral expenses	134
Fürstfeldbruck	53
Füssen	130

G

Gardelegen	47
GAZELLE	22
General Spokespersons' Committee	93, 136, 153
German Army Headquarters	28, 40, 56, 81

German Cyber and Information Domain Service Headquarters	57
German Foundation for Hardship Cases	128
German Joint Force Command	24, 28, 99, 139
German Self-Determination Act	114
Germersheim	39, 43f., 150
Goa (India)	23, 152
gunnery training	57

H

Hair and Beard Decree	11, 113
Hamburg	49, 61, 79, 128, 139, 149
Hammelburg	97, 109, 135, 150
hand money	30
Hannover	90, 96, 153
Hardheim	48, 56, 150
health	24
Help Network	111
Hof	126, 151
home defence	55, 104ff.
homosexuality	112
Husum	97, 123

I

Incentive pay	69, 130, 131, 134, 135
incitement to enmity and hatred	85
Individual field rations	137, 139
Indo-Pacific Deployment	9, 14, 23, 41, 152
Infantry School	150
infrastructure	6, 11, 14f., 18, 25, 29f., 42ff., 75, 133, 139f., 144
Ingolstadt	46
initial training	34, 39, 41, 53, 55ff., 72f., 82f., 86, 89, 107, 113f., 164
Instagram	85
Institute for Federal Real Estate	43, 45, 47f., 132, 140
internal labour market	64f.
International Conference of Ombuds Institutions (ICOAF)	13
International crisis management	6, 20, 26
International helicopter training centre	135
Internet	23, 28, 165
Invictus Games	7, 13, 111, 150, 153
Iraq	14, 21
Islamic extremism	87
Israel	21, 85
Istanbul Convention	92

J

Joint Forces Operations Command	8, 24, 28, 139
Joint Support and Enabling Service	8, 29, 75, 107
Jordan	14, 21

K

Kabul (Afghanistan)	6
KFOR	14, 21, 150, 152
Kiel	42, 123, 125, 149
Kosher food	137
Kosovo	13f., 21, 150, 154

Kümmersbruck 33, 118, 151, 153

L

Lahnstein 46
 lateral entry 57
 Latvia 19
 Leadership development and civic education ..81f., 93, 95f., 150, 160
 Leadership Development and Civic Education
 Centre 81f., 84, 88, 100, 114, 153f.
 Leave..... 134, 138, 163
 Lebach 151
 Lebanon 20f.
 Leer (Ostfriesland) 126, 133
 legal instructors 99
 Legal Status of Military Personnel Act ... 12, 56, 65, 83ff., 87, 102, 107ff., 129f., 134, 138, 163
 Limit on additional earnings 131
 listed buildings under preservation order 49
 Lithuania 7ff., 14ff., 23, 25, 119, 130, 138, 152, 154
 Lithuania brigade 7, 8, 9, 15ff., 23, 30, 130, 152
 lockers 42, 103
 Long-range maritime patrol aircraft 49
 lower secondary school leaving certificate 64

M

Mali..... 6, 14, 22, 153
 Manching..... 132, 152
 medical care 92, 100, 110, 114, 123, 124
 Medical centre..... 24, 44, 122f., 125, 152
 Medical Service..... 8, 29, 54, 57, 62, 113f., 121ff., 126, 128, 130, 133, 144
 Medical Service Command 114, 123, 125
 Merzig..... 53, 56, 151
 mess halls 18, 46, 136f.
 Military Career Regulation..... 108
 military chaplaincy..... 12, 16, 27, 87, 91, 100, 112, 115, 126ff., 137ff.
 Military Counterintelligence Service..... 11, 17, 87
 military pay 130, 144
 Military Personnel Working Hours Ordinance 134, 135
 military police 15, 88, 91, 103
 military postal service..... 21, 42
 military rabbi 138f., 149
 minors..... 57f.
 MINURSO 14
 MINUSMA 14, 23
 Mission-related injury..... 127ff.
 Mobile working 115f.
 moral harassment..... 99f., 112
 morale, welfare and recreation (MWR)..... 129
 Mountain rescue..... 125
 Munich..... 39f., 49, 61
 Munster 47f., 96f., 118f., 153
 Mürwik 34, 41, 95, 151
 MWR communication..... 23
 MWR food service 44

N

narcotics 101

National and alliance defence..... 6, 8, 12, 14f., 19, 25f., 28, 31, 37, 43, 49, 59, 61, 99, 105, 113, 115f., 118, 124, 126, 128, 133, 137
 National Security Strategy..... 14f.
 NATO Force Model (NFM) 8, 19
 NATO Response Force (NRF) 8, 14, 19
 NATO Security Assistance and Training for
 Ukraine (NSATU)..... 9, 28
 NATO's eastern flank..... 6, 12, 14f., 17, 138
 Naval Air Command 90, 126, 151
 Naval Arsenal 149
 Naval Band 46, 149
 Naval Operations School 47
 Naval School..... 34, 41, 95, 97, 151
 Navy 8f., 14, 19f., 23, 29, 34, 38, 40f., 46, 48, 51, 54, 63, 75ff., 82, 89f., 95, 97, 116, 118, 123, 126, 130f., 134, 149ff.
 Navy Headquarters 40, 63, 77, 90, 116
 Navy Special Operations Forces Command (NSOFC) ... 11, 46
 NBC defence regiment 1 29, 45
 Netherlands 125, 149
 NH-90 51
 Niamey (Niger) 14, 22
 Nordholz..... 35, 49, 126, 136, 151
 Nordic Response exercise 38, 40, 149

O

Oberviechtach..... 8, 15, 43, 48, 151
 Oldenburg 149, 153
 Onboarding 54f.
 operator-user model..... 45
 ordinance on Domestic Help for Soldiers..... 120f.
 Osterholz-Scharmbeck 45, 135, 149
 overtime..... 17, 25

P

Panker 151
 Paralympic Games..... 141
 Parasport..... 129
 parental leave 10, 80, 116, 121
 part-time employment..... 80, 115f.
 Pension..... 62, 69, 83
 performance evaluation..... 65ff., 76, 117, 144
 Personnel Task Force 9, 50ff., 55, 59, 65, 93
 physical training 7, 13, 46, 111, 114, 129, 140f., 150, 153
 Pöcking..... 34, 152
 posts abroad 23
 post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 128f.
 Prenzlau 52, 56, 152
 preparation for deployment 22
 procurement 29, 30, 35f., 38ff., 47f.
 Programme for Bureaucracy Reduction 31
 promotion 10, 63, 65, 67ff., 72f., 76, 108, 144
 protection period 127f.
 protective vest 6, 9, 38ff., 42, 79
 Psychotrauma Centre..... 128
 PUMA 16, 19, 36, 43
 Q
 Quadriga 25, 110
 Queer 85

R

radios	38f.
rail travel.....	133
Ramstein Legacy	25
Rapid Response Medical Service Command.....	126
Reassignment	16, 55, 58, 63f., 69, 72, 93, 100, 117, 123, 125, 132f., 164
Reconnaissance Battalion 13	96
recruits.....	34, 39, 44, 53, 55f., 82f., 96
re-employment.....	57
re-enlistment	55, 59ff., 114, 121
Regional Medical Service Support Command.....	97
Reichsbürger.....	87
Religious operational plan	138
Report of the Federal Ministry of Defence on Armaments Affairs	36
reportable events	12, 84f., 89f., 99
reserve assignment for retiring service personnel ..	10, 105f.
Reserve strategy	105ff.
reservists	35, 45, 84, 96, 105ff., 135
RESET project.....	34
retirement	58, 62, 121
Retreat.....	138
Rheinbach.....	152
Rheine.....	96
Rhineland-Palatinate	44, 46
Right of petition.....	156
right to vote	21, 80, 127, 157
rights to places	117f.
Rostock	19, 42
Rotational crew model	51
Rotenburg (Wümme).....	96, 153
Roth	126
rucksack.....	38
Rukla (Lithuania).....	16ff., 138, 152

S

Saarlouis	152
sabotage	12, 72, 104
Schnöggersburg military training town	47
schools.....	11, 16, 22, 37, 75, 119, 140
Sea Battalion.....	40, 42, 63, 150
SEA GUARDIAN	14
security clearance	11, 54, 71ff., 107, 109f., 126
selection conference	58, 64f., 67f., 80
separation allowance.....	17f., 34, 42f., 131f.
serious personal reasons	117
service-related disability.....	127
sexual self-determination	12, 88ff., 144, 162
shortage of personnel.....	10, 51, 60, 72, 97, 110, 131, 139
Single rooms	43
Slovakia.....	14, 19, 150, 153
social media	53, 85
society year.....	75
Soldier's Compensation Act.....	127
Solingen	94
special forces	22, 40, 71, 131
special fund.....	6f., 9, 29f.
Special Operations Forces Command (SOFCOM) ...	7, 40, 46, 48, 149, 151, 153

specialist career	61
spokespeople	90, 93, 115
Stadtallendorf	97, 125
staff corporal.....	63
standby commitments	8, 14, 25, 120
standing operational tasks	8, 14, 120
Stetten am kalten Markt	118
Stiewi	34
Strausberg.....	29, 42, 44, 150
Structural reform of the Bundeswehr	8, 28, 93, 120, 122
submarines.....	45
Sudan	14, 24
Suicide.....	129
Support	119f.
Surface-to-Air Missile Training Centre	151
surviving dependants	120
Szczecin (Poland).....	24

T

Telegram	85
Teleworking.....	115ff.
Torgelow	24
Training courses ..	22, 36, 41, 64, 66f., 76, 79ff., 83, 107, 115
Transfer	41, 86
Transidentity	114
Translators and interpreters	9, 22, 27
Travel allowance	17
Travel expenses.....	109
Troisdorf.....	39
turning point.....	6, 8f., 11, 14f., 17, 25, 37f., 48, 50, 53, 60f., 79, 88, 107f., 120f., 131f., 134

U

Ukraine.....	6ff., 14, 17, 19, 25, 27ff., 37, 41, 71, 99
unfitness for service.....	9, 17, 54, 62, 70, 92
UNIFIL.....	14, 20f., 23, 152
uniform	12, 21, 38, 41, 81, 83, 85f., 94f., 102, 104f., 111, 113, 133
unit physician	123, 126
United Kingdom	8, 13f.
UNMISS	14, 152
USA.....	8, 129

V

vacancies.....	10, 51, 62, 121
vaccinations	32, 124
vegan diet	137
Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).....	8, 14, 19
Veterans.....	7, 13, 111, 120, 153
Vilnius (Lithuania)	16, 152
Vlasenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	22
Vocational Advancement Service.....	65
voluntary military service.....	10, 45, 50f., 55f., 59, 74f., 84f., 92, 104ff.

W

Warendorf.....	141, 150
Weiden in der Oberpfalz	52
WhatsApp	85

Wildflecken.....97
Wilhelmshaven 42, 46f., 119, 126, 149
WLAN.....44
women....10f., 26f., 53, 75ff., 90, 96f., 104., 110, 112, 140f.,
144, 153
working from home116

working hours117, 134f., 144

Y

youth officers11, 60, 75