



By: TA | AP Insight

# Germany needs more recruits—can a new government campaign help?



Germany's leaders launched a drive to attract more people into voluntary military service as the country scrambles to strengthen its armed forces in the face of growing fears about Russian aggression, a **project** that some in the governing coalition say doesn't go far enough.

Germany, a leading NATO and European Union member, has moved to **modernize** its long-neglected military since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

That year, it set up a 100 billion euro (\$117 billion) special fund to modernize the Bundeswehr, much of which has been committed to procuring new equipment.

New Chancellor Friedrich Merz's coalition this year **pushed** plans through parliament to enable higher defense spending by loosening strict rules on incurring debt.

Merz has said repeatedly he wants the Bundeswehr to be "the strongest conventional army in Europe."

## Germany needs more recruits

The government is redoubling its efforts to attract more recruits, which the military struggled to do in recent years.

Germany had some 181,000 active servicepeople at the end of last year. But the government says it needs to increase that in the long term to 260,000, plus some 200,000 reservists.

"The Bundeswehr must grow — the international security situation, above all Russia's aggressive behavior, make this necessary," Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said Wednesday. "We need not just well-equipped forces, we are going at full speed on that ... we also need a Bundeswehr that is strong in terms of personnel. Only then is deterrence toward Russia really credible."

## The plan foresees more attractive pay and conditions for people who agree to join the military for short periods

Pistorius spoke after Merz's Cabinet approved his plan for a new military service system. It aims to draw sufficient recruits without reviving compulsory conscription for men, which was suspended in 2011, but leaves the door open for parliament to do so if not enough people volunteer.

The plan foresees more attractive pay and conditions for people who agree to join the military for short periods and what Pistorius describes as attractive training offers for those who join up for at least six months, as well as flexibility on how long people can serve.

Beginning next year, the government plans to send questionnaires to young men and women turning 18 about their willingness and ability to serve in the military.

Starting in mid-2027, young men will be required to undergo medical examinations, though not to sign up for the military.

## Some want easier return to compulsory service

The plan still needs parliamentary approval. It was authorized at a Cabinet meeting held for the first time in many years at the Defense Ministry.

Before the decision, NATO's supreme commander in Europe, U.S. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, briefed ministers on the security environment.



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But there has been tension in the conservative Merz's coalition with Pistorius' center-left Social Democrats over whether the new system should foresee an automatic return to compulsory service if the military can't draw enough volunteers.

Some conservatives pushed unsuccessfully for compulsory service. But Pistorius says the conditions aren't in place at the moment as sufficient barracks and trainers aren't currently available.

The plan allows for the government to move toward compulsory service “if, in the course of the next one, two or three years, we see that the target figures aren't being reached,” Merz said. He added he was “confident, at least from today's point of view, that in any case to begin with we will reach the figures we need.”

A senior conservative ally of the chancellor, Bavarian governor Markus Söder, told ARD television Sunday that Pistorius' plan is “a first step in the right direction.”

“I don't think we are going to manage with these appeals, by making the Bundeswehr a bit more attractive,” Söder said. “I think there won't be a way past compulsory service. ... Some say (Russian President Vladimir) Putin could be in a position to challenge NATO in 2027, others in 2029 – why wait if we already know today at least that the danger is there?”

## New ammunition factory

Later Wednesday, Pistorius joined Germany's vice chancellor, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte and others to **inaugurate** a new artillery ammunition factory built by defense company Rheinmetall at its Unterlüss site in northern Germany, a project that underlines Europe's efforts to ramp up its weapons production.

**We are increasing the reliability of our supplies here in Germany – Boris Pistorius**

Rheinmetall aims to produce 350,000 artillery shells a year at the facility.

The inauguration only 18 months after a groundbreaking ceremony is “a strong signal that we are increasing the reliability of our supplies here in Germany,” Pistorius said.

Rutte said that “we are being challenged” by Russia and China, “but Europe and America together are on course to turn the tide on defense production.”