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MINIMUM STANDARDS / BENCHMARKING FOR EUROPEAN SOLDIERS

*By the European Organisation of
Military Associations and Trade Unions
(EUROMIL)*



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EUROMIL is an umbrella organisation representing professional military associations and supports the concept of **Citizens In Uniform**, according to which military personnel should be entitled to the same rights and obligations as any other citizen. Besides, EUROMIL as a European organisation promotes further defence integration, coordination, and synchronisation of Europe's Armed Forces. Hence, this paper stresses the importance of all military personnel in Europe to enjoy a minimum of common standards. The Minimum Standards for European soldiers should particularly be taken under consideration when they are trained and working side by side, especially under an EU umbrella as it is the case with the Strategic Compass' Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC). However, this should not be confused with the current requirements and structural working conditions within the EU military structures. This initiative concerns comparative minimum standards for European militaries with the possible prospect of an EU force (such as the RDC).

Drawing from EUROMIL's papers, surveys, discussions, and expertise, we have categorised the minimum standards into four distinct categories: working conditions, social conditions, fundamental rights and freedoms, and values.

Chapter 1 "Working Conditions"

First and foremost, the working conditions for the military should adhere to **safety and health**; involving proper training, education, equipment, and access to a decent working environment.

To elaborate more, military personnel should receive adequate equipment and training to be able to respond to emerging threats and challenges, apart from the conventional ones, while also being able to protect themselves. In this regard, there should also be **compulsory educational modules** on emerging challenges such as AI-ready workforce and climate change awareness and mitigation, as stated in the [Strategic Compass](#) and the [European Commission's communication on the climate-security nexus](#). Besides, it has become imperative to train our members of the Armed Forces on mental health prevention, gender equality and mainstreaming. It should also not be forgotten that safety and health apply to the conditions at the barracks, where each European soldier should have access to **well-constructed and functional barracks** following the [EU Green Deal](#) and the [Renovation wave](#).

To continue, military personnel, as every other citizen, should enjoy **the right to working time and right to overtime payment in peacetime**.^[1]

[1] More information on [EUROMIL's Position Paper on the Working Time Directive](#).

Besides, and following [EUROMIL's fair pay campaign](#), military personnel should have the same rights and obligations as any other citizen, as it is unacceptable that military personnel are paid less than civilian employees in the public sector. Hence, EUROMIL advocates for a military salary to be at least comparable to the levels of payments in public services. Lastly, in order to secure access to appropriate working conditions, each soldier should also have access to a **military ombudsman** or a similar authority.

Minimum standards for military working conditions and conditions of employment must in no way be lower than those already set out in European directives, regardless of whether they apply directly to Member States. Any deviations can only be made after consultation and agreement with the (military) trade unions or associations of each Member State.

Chapter 2 “Social Conditions”

In such times of increased geopolitical uncertainty, the social conditions of military personnel play an important role in the big issue of recruitment and retention in the European Armed Forces. Hence, providing members of the Armed Forces with a minimum of common rights can positively reverse the declining trend. Such rights should include free access to **healthcare, housing** (under conditions), and assistance for **transition to civilian life** and the labour market while also ensuring adequate **veteran care**. Regarding healthcare, access to **mental health** care and psychological support are a panacea for the well-being of military personnel. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to make sure that each soldier is protected as a **whistle-blower** and has access to **complaint mechanisms**.

Chapter 3 “Fundamental Rights and Freedoms”

A key right for members of the Armed Forces is the right **to form and join military associations and trade unions** and for trade unions to participate in a regular **social dialogue**. In that essence, the [right to strike](#) should be an available tool to the military when all other means for social dialogue have been exhausted.

The EU also grants to its citizens the basic right of **free movement** based on Article 3(2) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). However, there are still members of the European Armed Forces who are not allowed to have a civilian ID and to freely travel intra-Schengen.

Chapter 4 “Values”

The European values, as interpreted in [Article 2 of the TEU](#), should also be reflected in the military. Thus, it should represent a place of **non-discrimination** on gender or towards LGBTIQ+ people, a place with **freedom of religion and freedom of expression**, as it is also stated in the “[Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel: Compendium of Standards, Good Practices and Recommendations](#)”, by DCAF, OSCE, and ODHIR. In order to defend these values and integrate them into their profession, European military personnel must be trained in them and explain to them, as Citizens in Uniform, why and within what limits restrictions are possible. Building a **common military culture** must be a priority for European states, representing inclusion and diversity. Many actions can be taken to faster cultivate a common military culture, as through educational training, the introduction of English language learning as a compulsory one at military academies - so that soldiers when participating in missions abroad can communicate effectively with each other - and thus move forward with a well-established Erasmus+ for military personnel of all ranks.

Conclusion

In today’s world where no state can tackle external threats and challenges on its own, and cooperation among NATO and EU members is further advancing, European soldiers are at the heart of such developments. European countries have pledged to increase their defence budgets to meet the 2% goal, increase interoperability, capabilities, and capacities to be able to respond to today’s geopolitical challenges. Thus, European countries should not forget that the **men and women in uniform** are the ones that make all these changes a reality, and establishing minimum standards for members of the European Armed Forces will lead to better synchronization of capabilities and rights, while it will also foster national recruitment and retention campaigns.

The document has been approved by the 129th General Assembly on 26 April 2024 in Lisbon (Portugal)



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