Voluntary and compulsory military service is approaching, and preparations are already under way.

By Jane Roy and Karina Knight Spencer (SFW), 1 November 2026

Those who should be most concerned are parents, grandparents and children aged 11 to 18, as well as all French citizens aged 18 to 35.

Will they choose the military path or the path of non-violence?

The threats and propaganda begin at school. We should question what is being protected, and who is being protected, by the security forces, as well as the predominantly military response to violence, both locally and internationally. We should therefore reflect on the imminent prospect of MILITARY conscription and what we can do now to address it.

The Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC) at military bases

President Emmanuel Macron has stated that "in the event of a major crisis, Parliament could authorise the recruitment of those whose skills have been identified during this mobilisation day (the JDC), in which case national service would become compulsory" (1)

The Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC) has recently been revised (2) and applies to young people aged 17 to 24. It is now compulsory for registration for the Baccalauréat, the BEP (vocational qualification) and civil service examinations, and is also essential for obtaining a driving licence.

The institutionalisation of support for war begins at school. This concerns us all, and every young person and every parent can take action. An opinion piece published in *L'Humanité* on 23 May 2024 suggests that a young man or woman could make the following declaration during the JDC:

"I wish to state at this stage my refusal, on grounds of conscience, to undertake armed military service, and I request that this internationally recognised right be acknowledged. My convictions, based on the pursuit of collective harmony, lead me to seek other ways of serving the nation and its people rather than resorting to weapons." (3)

At present, there is no non-military alternative, nor any debate about what such an alternative might look like for conscientious objectors.

Conscientious objection to military service is a fundamental human right that must be protected. It is inherent in the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as set out in the Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Declaration.

This is not about self-defence – protecting oneself or one's family against a violent attack – but rather about refusing to become part of the industrialised war machine. Do young people really want to be trained to kill, or to contribute behind the scenes to injuring and killing other people's children, whether directly or through the destruction of infrastructure?

There are non-violent approaches to dealing with conflicts, invasions and the suppression of civil liberties, which can help ensure our security and that of our society.

Recruitment

The National Voluntary Military Service – announced in November 2025 for French men and women aged 18 to 24 – will be open to 3,000 young people in 2026, with the aim of reaching 10,000 volunteers by 2030.

It will last ten months. Each volunteer will receive a minimum payment of €800 per month, as well as accommodation, meals and equipment. It also promises vocational training. These funds could instead finance non-violent training, but it is impossible to apply if one refuses to carry a weapon. National service entails the ability to handle a weapon, which is inherent in military status.

In view of the risk of compulsory military service being reintroduced, a legal framework is urgently needed.

Once you have enlisted, there is no real way of refusing to do what you are asked to do.

“If everyone refuses to kill, no war will be possible.” (4)

The reality behind war propaganda

Propaganda sets one group against another, portraying one side as good and the other as evil. Often, wars are not fought to protect populations; other interests are at stake: the arms trade, oil, power, profit, revenge and so on. Nor do we always save those we claim to be saving – women in Afghanistan, for example. We do not go to war for the reasons that propaganda would have us believe.

The reality facing young people, the so-called “young heroes”, may be idealised in governments' nationalist propaganda and in films, but it is far removed from reality.

In Russia, the reality of war is as follows: once a soldier has signed up to fight, they can expect to survive for only 10 days to three weeks – from their arrival at a training centre to their death in combat. (4) The latest figures published by the CIA Director estimate the life expectancy of a Russian soldier fighting in Ukraine at 35 minutes.

Conflicts result in violence against civilians. In 2024, a civilian was killed every 12 minutes in armed conflicts. (5) Survivors are forced to flee their homes in the face of destruction, bombs, massacres, abductions and rape.

Why fight, if not for your freedom, your democratic rights, human rights and our planet (so often forgotten during wars and situations of violence)?

Conscientious objectors in other countries

In other countries, students are demonstrating against military recruitment, and the same situation could arise in France.

Germany: Conscientious objection is enshrined in the Constitution. Compulsory military service has been suspended, but since January 2026 the system has been based on voluntary participation. Every young person born since 2008 must complete a questionnaire and undergo a medical examination in connection with this voluntary military service, which will become compulsory if there are insufficient volunteers. The aim is to reach 20,000 reservists by 2026, followed by

260,000 additional soldiers by 2035. The new military service law has led to a sharp increase in applications for conscientious objection, with 2,656 applications in the first quarter of 2026. This dramatic increase reveals the deep-seated reluctance of young people towards national rearmament.

Russia: The right to conscientious objection is enshrined in the Constitution, but since the war against Ukraine began, applications have been systematically rejected.

Israel: "Refuseniks" remain a minority, but their numbers have increased since the war in Gaza. They risk prison sentences of between 20 and 120 days and are subjected to personal persecution.

Ukraine: Conscientious objectors are arrested and persecuted. Propaganda accuses them of lacking patriotism. Often, they have no choice but to leave the country.

Conclusion

What can we do?

The positive aspects of military life – community, teamwork, a sense of duty, learning opportunities, social benefits, pay and opportunities for advancement – should be made available in other fields. This could be achieved through a range of alternative institutions, but the government must fund a new pathway and reduce and restrict the military-industrial complex.

We can resist an invader through non-violent means and civil resistance. It is not necessary to enlist in the military in order to resist and succeed.

Perhaps you belong to a religion that opposes killing and harming others? Perhaps you believe in the sacredness of the Earth and refuse to destroy it or pollute it with chemicals and explosives? Military training, fear and group dynamics can lead people to commit profoundly inhumane acts. It is worth remembering that there were more suicides among soldiers after the Vietnam War than combatants killed during it.

What kind of society do you want to create: one that turns its back on social justice and social welfare in favour of war? Which direction do you want to take?

It is time to think seriously about this!

1) Discours du 27 novembre 2025 à Varces https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2025/11/27/l-integralite-du-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-le-service national-militaire_6655077_823448.html

2) Ministère des Armées / Publié le : 25 juin 2025 https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/infographie-journee defense-citoyennete-nouvelle-generation

3) Humanité 23 mai 2024 https://www.humanite.fr/en-debat/armee-francaise/objecteur-de-conscience-a-la-journee-defense-et-citoyennete-cest-possible

4) Yuri Sheliazhenko, défenseur des droits humains et objecteur de conscience ukrainien. Message du 19 novembre 2022 https://www.mvtpaix.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Message-de-Yurii-Sheliazhenko-le-19 novembre-2022.pdf

5) Volker Turk, haut commissaire ONU, 18 juin 2024 https://www.franceinfo.fr/monde/onu/le-nombre-de-civils-morts-dans-les-conflits-a-bondi-de-72-en-2023-selon-l onu_6611418.htm