



## Culture, Identity, and Attrition: *An Evaluation of the Recruitment and Retention Strategies of the Canadian Armed Forces*

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The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) are presently incapable of effectively responding to security threats. Currently experiencing a reported gap of 13,600 members, the CAF have been struggling with staggering personnel shortages for the past several years.<sup>1</sup> This shortage has critically hampered the military's operational readiness in the face of increasingly complex security challenges.<sup>2</sup> It is the result of numerous compounding issues which have plagued the CAF for years, including COVID-19, the exposure of rampant sexual misconduct, and an overreliance on American resources, among others.<sup>3</sup>

The CAF's organizational culture has, for the past several years, been the subject of significant scrutiny and criticism for its reproduction of sexist, racist, colonial, homophobic and ableist systems of exclusion.<sup>4</sup> These systems were blatantly exposed in 2021 when numerous military leaders were accused of sexual misconduct and promoting misogynistic organizational culture, resulting in a reckoning from which the CAF is still reeling.<sup>5</sup> Attempts at addressing this culture have been dismissed as manifestations of "woke culture" – petty strategies which distract from the true ethos of the military. This could not be more inaccurate; the strength of the CAF is dependent on its capacity to capitalize on the diversity in backgrounds, experiences and skillsets of the Canadian population.

I begin with an exploration of how the CAF's organizational culture has historically excluded, and continues to marginalize, underrepresented groups such as women, 2SLGBTQIA+ members, and visible minorities, resulting in a hyper-masculine organizational culture rooted in heteronormativity and whiteness. Subsequently, I engage in a critical assessment of four key CAF publications pertaining to recruitment and retention, in order to understand how the CAF addresses organizational culture and underrepresented groups within this context. Then, I conduct a comparative analysis between the CAF's recruitment and retention strategies and that of the Belgian and Norwegian armed forces, in order to facilitate knowledge-sharing between our NATO allies. Lastly, I offer four recommendations based on my analysis to bolster the CAF's culture reform and recruitment and retention efforts. Ultimately, I identify that the recruitment and retention crisis cannot be solved without



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addressing the CAF's issues pertaining to its military culture, as both problems are endemic and inextricably connected, requiring tandem solutions.

### **Characterizing Exclusion**

Throughout the CAF's history, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and visible minorities have experienced the consequences of different systems of exclusion and have found themselves uniquely positioned as "different" or "other than" the average soldier.

#### **Women**

As of December 2024, women made up 16.3% of total regular force members within the CAF – put differently, about 10,269 of the army's 63,000 regular force members.<sup>6</sup> Since 1997, the CAF has had the goal of increasing the population of women within its organization to 25% by 2026.<sup>7</sup> One year out from this deadline, the CAF finds itself nearly 10% off from its goal.<sup>8</sup> The gap between the CAF's goal and its actual proportion is indicative of a consistent inability to resonate with young women.

Despite formal inclusion into the armed forces, female military personnel have experienced isolation, marginalization, sexualization and abuse. Harmful social norms and informal practices within the CAF serve as manifestations of "a culture that has resisted the integration of women into its ranks", posing yet another set of barriers to women's inclusion in the military.<sup>9</sup> As elucidated in the Arbour Report, the proliferation of "antiquated stereotypes and sexist assumptions", combined with endemic patterns of sexual misconduct, result in a hostile environment to women.<sup>10</sup> These systems are "serious deterrents" for women contemplating joining the military.<sup>11</sup> Thus, women who might otherwise be willing to serve Canada are being swayed, not from fear of the "enemy" but from fear of their fellow military members. Moreover, women experience other barriers to women's integration and recruitment unrelated to the culture of the CAF such as inflexible work schedules, a lack of parental support, limited spousal employment opportunities, and more.<sup>12</sup>

#### **2SLGBTQIA+**

There is little data on the actual number of 2SLGBTQIA+ service members in the CAF. As of 2022, it was reported that 0.1% of military members were transgender, and 0.2% were non-binary.<sup>13</sup> This gap in knowledge is problematic, given that the Deschamps Report defined the CAF as a "hostile" environment for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community a decade ago.<sup>14</sup>

2SLGBTQIA+ community members have a long history of exclusion and marginalization within the CAF. For much of its history, the military was inhospitable to 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; "sodomy" and "indecent assault" were forbidden, the latter being a vague, umbrella-term charge for any intimate acts between men, even if they were consensual.<sup>15</sup> This institutional homophobia escalated, resulting in the LGBT Purge. Between the 1950s and 1990s, surveilled and dismissed thousands of 2SLGBTQIA+ servicemembers due to the perceived threat they posed to national security.<sup>16</sup> The CAF would spy on soldiers to identify homosexual behaviour, and 2SLGBTQIA+ servicemen and servicewomen were forced to participate in military interrogations, which were described by one victim as "mental torture", and by another as "degrading".<sup>17</sup> In order to identify gay or lesbian service

members, the RCMP used a device referred to as the “Fruit Machine”, pseudoscientific technology which would track pupil dilation to determine if the victim was aroused by the images they were being shown.<sup>18</sup> 2SLGBTQIA+ members whose identities were exposed were pressured to provide the names of other queer servicemembers and were given the choice to resign with an honourable discharge or be court-martialed and receive a dishonourable discharge.<sup>19</sup> It is estimated that approximately 9,000 people were purged from the CAF.<sup>20</sup> While survivors of the purge were successful in securing a settlement and formal apology from the Canadian government, the effects of this period were consequential, with outcomes including poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, gay aversion therapy, having to go back into the closet, and in some cases, suicide.<sup>21</sup> Presently, 2SLGBTQIA+ military members continue to face challenges, including being statistically more likely to experience sexual assault or discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

### Visible Minorities

It was reported that between 2021-2022 visible minorities made up 11.3% of the CAF population, or 7,119 of the then-68,000 regular forces.<sup>23</sup> This number is just 0.5% less than the CAF’s target of 11.8%, but it is important to note that 25.4% of the Canadian population was part of a visible minority group in 2021 – a number which is projected to increase.<sup>24</sup>

Visible minorities have also experienced structural barriers to integration throughout history. Black and Asian men were historically rejected from enlisting “due to a culture that fostered systemic racism”.<sup>25</sup> The few Black men who enlisted during WWI were segregated and placed in a non-combat unit, which disbanded in 1920 with no acknowledgement of their service.<sup>26</sup> The targeted recruitment of non-Indigenous racialized soldiers began in the 1980s, despite the CAF not having an official policy on racism until 1993.<sup>27</sup> Military members of colour experience marginalization in countless components of their experience within the armed service. Systemic racism pervades the CAF, manifesting in the form of what Tammy George describes as “institutional whiteness”, wherein the overwhelming majority of members within the institution are white, placing non-white bodies in a position of subjugation and difference.<sup>28</sup> Blatant racism also significantly impacts the experiences of racialized servicemembers. A class action lawsuit has been approved in Federal Court to recognize victims of systemic racism within the CAF; one of the original plaintiffs reported experiencing racist slurs and jokes, leading to the development of PTSD: “not even outside the country in the line of fire, I suffered at the hands of people at my own base”.<sup>29</sup>

### Impact on Recruitment and Retention

The Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination’s final report states that Canadians are being “repulsed” from joining the CAF due to its toxic organizational culture.<sup>30</sup> This is not necessarily the case in the context of broad recruitment patterns, as recruitment data shown in Table 2 from the Canadian Global Affairs Institute (CGAI) finds that applications to the CAF have been steadily increasing (except for a slight dip between 2021-2022) since 2019.<sup>31</sup> In fact, applications to the CAF nearly doubled between 2022-2023 and 2023-2024.

Table 2

Fiscal Year (1 April to 31 March)	Applications Received	Candidates Enrolled
2019-2020	36,662	5,167
2020-2021	45,626	2,023
2021-2022	38,030	4,778
2022- 2023	43,934	3,930
2023-2024	70,880	4,301

The lull in applications in 2021-2022 could have been in response to both the sexual misconduct crisis and the pandemic. Yet, the quick recovery and explosion of applications in 2023-2024 indicates that whatever motivated this lull was not influential enough to make a long term impression on the broad Canadian workforce. More data on the motivations of Canadians who are applying to the CAF is needed to understand whether this short-term lapse was motivated by events such as the sexual misconduct crisis and/or the pandemic, or the result of internal processes.

While the CAF's organizational culture did not necessarily have a repulsive effect on application generation, it may have more of an effect on the underrepresented groups who are more directly impacted by a toxic organizational culture. Despite a substantial increase of applicants to the CAF, the enrolment of underrepresented groups remains low. In her independent report, Arbour identified that CAF recruiting processes do not screen candidates for attitudes and issues related to sexual misconduct or cultural diversity.<sup>32</sup> The gap between increasing applications and stagnant representation levels of equity-deserving groups substantiates the CAF's need to prioritize targeted recruitment. Meanwhile, the impact of organizational culture on retention is clear. The CAF Retention Strategy outlines countless complex dissatisfiers which negatively impact the experiences of underrepresented groups in the CAF, and identify these dissatisfiers as influences on unhealthy attrition.<sup>33</sup> Data shows that Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities, women and persons with disabilities have "much lower retention rates than white men", severely limiting the amount of people from these underrepresented groups who reach leadership positions within the CAF.<sup>34</sup> As such, there is clearly a relationship between organizational culture and recruitment and retention patterns. While data shows that there was no long-term impact of the sexual misconduct crisis on overall applications to the CAF, the consistently low recruitment levels of underrepresented groups despite generally increasing application rates suggests that underrepresented groups remain unconvinced by CAF recruitment efforts.

### **Assessing Canada's Recruitment and Retention Policies**

I now turn to a critical analysis of four HR policies and directives: the CAF Retention Strategy, the Reconstitution Directive, CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve, and Our North, Strong and Free to gain a better understanding of how each of these documents addresses the issues of organizational culture and the needs of underrepresented populations within the CAF.

### CAF Retention Strategy

Published in 2022, the CAF Retention Strategy provides a high-level overview of the factors which cause attrition among different demographics within the Canadian military and proposes a series of solutions to address dissatisfiers. The strategy was written with the purpose of disseminating knowledge among CAF leaders and membership and broadening public awareness of strategies in place. As elucidated by then-Chief of Defence Staff General Eyre, “the CAF is at a point of transformation change, where outdated past practices, new global challenges, and an extant vision for defence places a renewed focus on people and how best to champion their needs as our most valuable resource”<sup>35</sup>

The strategy acknowledges how dissatisfiers (negative experiences which may lead to unhealthy attrition) are experienced differently depending on one’s identity, and recognizes the importance of approaching these dissatisfiers intersectionally.<sup>36</sup> Leading dissatisfiers for women include experiences of incompatibility with the military lifestyle and a lack of training and development opportunities, advancement, and promotions.<sup>37</sup> The strategy identified survivors of sexual misconduct as its own distinct demographic with specific dissatisfiers, reaffirming that sexual misconduct is not a “woman’s issue”, but is a problem which impacts people across the gender spectrum. This is critical, given that males were victimized in nearly half of the 1,431 reports of sexual misconduct from 2022-2023.<sup>38</sup> Experiences of racism and discrimination from other CAF members are identified as a leading dissatisfier for visible minorities.<sup>39</sup> The rise of white nationalism and far-right ideology has been flagged by scholars as a serious concern for the CAF; for example, Professor Andy Knight found that some individuals will join the military in order to gain access to resources and training to fight a “race war”, and clandestinely participate in white supremacist behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

A key factor that inhibits the strategy’s ability to address the experiences of underrepresented populations is the lack of data. As the strategy acknowledges, there is a critical gap in the CAF’s understanding of its 2SLGBTQIA+ populations, and the experiences of marginalized individuals who did not self-identify.<sup>41</sup> The rate of self-identification of underrepresented populations was low, likely caused by fear of reprisal, thus critically disabling the strategy from drawing conclusions about these groups’ experiences to address the problems they face.<sup>42</sup>

### Reconstitution Directive

Published in 2022 and updated in 2024, the Reconstitution Directive presents a high-level overview of the state of the CAF’s operational capacity, and address concerns about the CAF’s personnel shortage. It directly addresses military leaders (L1s) as its target audience, and outlines their responsibilities in promoting reconstitution efforts. The directive acknowledges that its recruitment and retention challenges will remain “unless appropriate professional culture and personnel management modifications are implemented”.<sup>43</sup>

While the directive promises that personnel generation efforts will “broaden and deepen our strength through diversity”, it does not elaborate further on how it intends to accomplish this.<sup>44</sup> While military directives are intended to provide situational overviews and clear directions to L1s, and not necessarily to provide descriptive outlines, the sweeping statements within this Directive that pertain to diversity are unsupported by clearly defined

directions, thus not meaningfully considering the unique needs and experiences of such individuals. On priorities such as balancing the workload to assuage the burden from certain departments, the Directive outlines specific initiatives such as reviewing force generators task management processes to ensure the alignment of tasking authorities, contributing to reviews to identify unrealistic force employment outputs, and many more.<sup>45</sup> The lack of a similar outline for diversification strategies reads as an effort to signal equity-informed thinking, rather than identifying meaningful and actionable goals which will actually address the unique needs of underrepresented groups whom the CAF is seeking to both recruit and retain.

### **CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve**

This doctrine is a code of conduct for the CAF, which was published in 2023 and outlines the ethical values and behaviours which all CAF members, regardless of rank, are expected to uphold. Accordingly, ameliorating the CAF's issue of the CAF's organizational culture is a central priority to the ethos. It advances the CAF's efforts in creating a safe and inclusive environment for all and prioritizes diversification by defining respect for others as "appreciating the other person's unique identity, skillset, perspective, history and experiences", thus highlighting the importance of appreciating diverse individuals.<sup>46</sup>

However, the doctrine stops short at explicitly addressing the behaviours which have historically contributed to negative experiences among underrepresented populations. Trusted to Serve could have gone further to expressly aver that the CAF is intolerant of any behaviour which is aligned with racist, sexist, homophobic, colonial and otherwise oppressive ideologies. Although the policy notes that its broad language was intentional to allow for wide-ranging applicability and individual interpretation, this generality risks ambiguity. Without explicit reference to systemic discrimination or marginalized groups, it lacks the clarity needed to meaningfully confront the structural barriers facing underrepresented groups.

### **Our North, Strong and Free**

Published in 2024, this policy outlines the most pressing threats to Canada's defence and is focused on the readiness capacity of the CAF to respond to security threats.<sup>47</sup> It was written with the target audience of policymakers, military leadership, and the Canadian public. It outlines DND's commitment to modernizing its recruitment processes, and removing barriers to deployment, retention and career progression for "diverse women".<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, this is the only explicit mention of an underrepresented group – something which should have been broadened.

The policy advocates for a defence team which reflects the diversity and talent of Canada's workforce, and similarly connects diversification with operational effectiveness: "strengthening an institutional culture of inclusion is not just the right thing to do, it is foundational to operational effectiveness – because diverse groups make better decisions".<sup>49</sup>



### *A Canadian Problem? A Comparison with Belgian and Norwegian Armed Forces*

Militaries around the world are dealing with personnel shortages and being confronted with gender norms and historical prejudices. Thus, exploring the recruitment and retention policies of the Belgian Armed Forces (BAF) and Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF), offers important insight into the strategies of Canada's allies which may inform CAF reconstitution efforts.

#### **Belgian Armed Forces**

The BAF are experiencing a striking personnel shortage characterized by a dip from 41,000 in 2003 to 14,000 by 2018.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the CAF, the BAF's personnel shortage derives largely from unattractiveness. Before the pandemic, only 13% of young Belgians reported interest in serving in the military – a number that shrank to 9% in 2022.<sup>51</sup> This differentiation is noteworthy in that they reflect distinct underlying challenges; while the BAF faces the issue of declining public appeal, particularly among specific demographics, the CAF attains continued interest from applicants yet struggles with internal institutional barriers that limit its recruitment abilities.

Moreover, BAF attrition rates are even more drastic than that of the CAF, with 44% of new recruits leaving the military during basic training.<sup>52</sup> The CAF also finds that attrition rates are most pronounced among new recruits, as well as members with 20-25 years of experience, particular occupations, and underrepresented groups.<sup>53</sup> The BAF are afflicted with an organizational culture that has, similarly to the CAF, historically enabled sexual assault and discrimination and exclusion. It is estimated that over 67% of female military personnel in Belgian Defence have experienced sexual assault while in the armed forces – approximately 1494 of the total female population of 2230.<sup>54</sup>

The first Belgian defence policy which I will assess is the STAR-plan (“Security and Service, Technology, Ambition, Resilience”), a key readiness policy introduced in 2022. Under this plan, the BAF will benefit from a gradual investment of €10.3 billion by 2035.<sup>55</sup> The plan outlines a strategy to increase its personnel to approximately 29,000 by 2030.<sup>56</sup> In a similar fashion to the CAF's recruitment and retention strategies, the BAF are seeking to increase opportunities for career advancement and professional development, incorporate civilian roles into defence, and more.<sup>57</sup> There are no mentions of cultural or gender diversification. However, the plan includes a focus on dual capacities, which are defined as strategies with both military and civilian outputs.<sup>58</sup>

Another relevant directive, the Update of the Strategic Vision 2030, was written by an independent expert group as an updated evaluation of the needs of the BAF in 2021. The document highlights that “it is vital to avoid a strategic vacuum that would leave our country unable to anticipate phenomena and trends and would lead us to reactive policies”.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, reactivity resulting in incapability is an issue which Arbour warned against in her analysis of the CAF's responsiveness to crises. The policy advocates for a total-defence approach, wherein the civilian force will be bolstered, and interconnectedness between civil and military institutions will be prioritized to provide an improved work-life balance, stronger access to socio-economic opportunities and better resources for military families.<sup>60</sup> It also advocates for making the reserve force more attractive through increased

flexibility to boost its size, and suggests a non-deployable civilian reserve to improve personnel diversification.<sup>61</sup> It calls for the increased recruitment of underrepresented groups, particularly women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQIA+ members.<sup>62</sup>

### **Norwegian Armed Forces**

The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) are also experiencing personnel challenges. In contrast to both the BAF and CAF forces, Norway utilizes a selective compulsory conscription model. Male and female Norwegian citizens aged 19 or older can be chosen for physical tests based on their responses to a questionnaire. Of the roughly 60,000 Norwegians who are eligible to be drafted, around 9,000 make it to the compulsory military service.<sup>63</sup> Despite becoming the first NATO member and first European country to introduce compulsory military service for both women and men in 2015, gaps in equity and retention persist.<sup>64</sup> In 2020, women made up 29% of those who were conscripted.<sup>65</sup> However, women made up only 15% of the armed forces in 2021 – a reflection of Norway’s ongoing challenges with retention.<sup>66</sup> While roughly three-quarters of the men who are summoned to military service volunteer, only half of the women do – a dropout rate of 55%.<sup>67</sup> Sexual harassment is also persistent issue for women in the Norwegian Armed Forces, with 63% of women under the age of 30 having reported being sexually harassed in 2020.<sup>68</sup>

The first NAF policy under assessment is the Norwegian Defence Pledge, a long-term plan from 2025-2036. In the policy, Norway committed to significantly increasing defence spending to address a variety of weaknesses in the military by boosting personnel through innovative recruitment and retention strategies, improve the use of the conscription system, and expand the usage of the reservists.<sup>69</sup>

Another key policy is the Norwegian Defence Commission’s 2021 publication, which outlines national security priorities for the next 10-20 years.<sup>70</sup> The principal recommendation put forward by the policy is one of total defence. The policy outlines its goal of total defence as “a whole-of-government approach is needed to enhance the resilience of society against military and non-military threats and challenges”.<sup>71</sup> This means a more efficient civil-military relationship, wherein defence priorities become integrated into civil and private sectors in order to “utilize the totality” of Norwegian resources, and the coordination of decision-making and executive bodies.<sup>72</sup> The policy emphasizes the importance of bolstering security efforts on a number of fronts simultaneously, in order to match the need to address complex military challenges. This includes large-scale coordination across sectors and an increased reliance on the private sector, in order to “utilize the totality of our available resources”.<sup>73</sup>

### **Discussion**

My analysis of the CAF’s recruitment and retention-related policies and comparison to that of the BAF and NAF opens several pathways for further analysis. Most importantly, it is vital that militaries back their progressive language within policies with effective implementation through buy-in from CAF leadership and the allocation of financial resources. The CAF has implemented changes to its recruitment and retention processes following the publication of these documents. One such change is the CAF accepting applications from permanent residents with the intent to “broaden the pool to enable (permanent residents) who meet the same criteria as Canadian citizens to enroll in the CAF as new recruits or



officer cadets”.<sup>74</sup> While this move is positive in its efforts to not only grow but diversify the CAF’s personnel, its actual outcomes are lagging. In their first year of eligibility, over 21,000 permanent residents applied to join the CAF, yet fewer than 100 were enrolled.<sup>75</sup> A key contributing factor to this large gap is the “additional level of security screening” that permanent residents are subjected to, given “foreign implications”.<sup>76</sup> Applicants were told they could expect to wait up to 18-24 months for their files to be handled as a result. Approximately 15,000 permanent residents who have applied to the CAF have walked away amid the wait.<sup>77</sup>

Another strategy employed by the CAF is lifting barriers to enrollment due to medical conditions, namely ADHD, anxiety, asthma, or allergies.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the CAF launched a new online recruitment portal, which was identified by several CAF policies as a change which will enhance recruitment processes. However, technical issues emerged as soon as the portal launched, such as glitches which forced some applicants to re-upload their files dozens of times.<sup>79</sup> These technical difficulties dissuaded potential applicants from continuing the application process.<sup>80</sup>

In comparing the CAF with the Belgian and Norwegian Armed Forces, the clearest difference to emerge between their approaches to personnel shortages is our allies’ emphasis on total defence force strategies. The BAF’s STAR plan’s efforts to engage “dual capacities”, and the updated strategic vision’s emphasis on expanding the reserve force and bolstering civil society engagement are both examples of integrating subgroups and other organizations of personnel into the defence team, in order to adapt to intensifying demands. Bolstering the reserve forces is a key component of TDF; however, the CAF has historically struggled to integrate its regular and reserve forces into a unified team.<sup>81</sup> Coombs highlights that long-term barriers to failed integration have included a lack of supportive and effective terms of service, misaligned administration, and insufficient compensation.<sup>82</sup> Despite commitments to increase support for the reserve force, interviews with reservists indicate that a lack of training, unequal burdens among classes, and poor recruitment processes continue to impede integration and contribute to poor recruitment and retention outcomes.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Recommendations and Conclusion***

Thus far, I have explored the CAF’s past difficulties in including underrepresented communities, critically assessed its recruitment and retention strategy documents, and compared such approaches to that of Belgium and Norway to facilitate knowledge sharing between the nations. Key CAF policies The CAF Retention Strategy, Reconstitution Directive, CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve, and Our North, Strong and Free appropriately prioritize addressing organizational culture, yet lack thorough implementation strategies. Several projects implemented following these policies have also experienced difficulties in implementation. Additionally, in comparing the Canadian, Belgian and Norwegian Armed Forces, I found that both states are experiencing similar issues with recruitment and/or retention and are prioritizing a total defence strategy (TDF). As I described, Canada has historically struggled to integrate its regular and reserve forces; a key component of TDF. Based on these findings, I offer four key recommendations:

**1. Collect data on 2SLGBTQIA+ military members**

The lack of data on 2SLGBTQIA+ CAF prevents the CAF from accurately identifying causes of attrition or developing targeted strategies. This missing data may contribute to feelings of invisibility; without public acknowledgement that there are 2SLGBTQIA+ CAF members, individuals looking to join the CAF may hesitate or feel the need to hide their identity, as they cannot see themselves represented.

**2. Develop targeted strategies**

Recruitment and retention issues manifest differently for underrepresented groups. The CAF Retention Strategy highlights that attrition rates are higher among underrepresented groups, often due to persistent experiences of discrimination and exclusion. Despite increasing public interest in the CAF, as per Table 2, the number of women enlisting remains low. The Retention Strategy acknowledges that retention is not “one size fits all” and repeatedly emphasizes the value of targeted retention strategies to address unhealthy attrition among underrepresented groups. However, there remains limited information on what these targeted strategies entail. The CAF must not only actively recruit individuals from 37 underrepresented communities, but also ensure these individuals are entering an institution committed to supporting and protecting them.

**3. Make expectations explicit**

CAF policies, directives, and doctrines must clearly articulate the expectations regarding discrimination and exclusion. CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve is purposely broad to allow for personal interpretation. However, when it comes to defining ethical conduct, especially within an institution that has historically struggled to enforce accountability, such ambiguity is insufficient and dangerous. CAF policies must vehemently and explicitly communicate its intolerance of harassment and discrimination.

**4. Total defence is key**

The Belgian and Norwegian case studies show that a total defence approach is essential to effectively addressing personnel shortages, as they expand the pool of available personnel while fostering community-building and cohesion. Both countries’ recruitment and retention strategies emphasize strong civil-military relations and invest significantly in strengthening their reserve forces. To meaningfully address its ongoing personnel crisis, the CAF must do more to mobilize all available resources, including civil partnerships, reserve forces, and community-based outreach initiatives, within a comprehensive total defence framework.

Ultimately, the only way the CAF will be able to efficiently emerge from its current personnel crisis is by recognizing that the true hindrance of operational effectiveness is not diversity, but intolerance. It is through including diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and professional skillsets that we can create a stronger, more informed, defence community which will be ready to defend against the security threats of tomorrow.

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