



# Policy Brief

October 2021

Volume 7, Issue 5

## Transitioning from Exclusion to Integration and Ultimately Inclusion:

### *Enabling Greater Participation of Immigrants/Non-citizens in Countries' Armed Forces*

**Dr. Grazia Scoppio**

*Professor of Defence Studies, RMC*

**Dr. Sara Greco**

*Research Associate, CIDP*

**C. Alexander Olteanu**

*Ph.D. Candidate, Queen's University*

### *Introduction*

In our globalized world, many countries rely on immigration for both economic and demographic reasons. Immigrants, in turn, bring with them diverse cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, skill-sets, and perspectives. The greater participation of newcomers in many countries' workforce and the increasing diversity make-up of their population, however, are not always reflected in their armed forces. In some countries, the number one requirement to serve in the military is citizenship, while in others, immigrants who are legal residents can apply to join the armed forces. Indeed, it appears that in some instances military service is the last bastion of nationality, while in others, it offers a pathway to citizenship.

Looking at immigrant military participation across countries, what are the different recruiting policies, barriers and challenges, as well as the various approaches towards diversity and inclusion? These were some of the questions that sparked the idea for this project, underpinned by the goals of achieving greater equity, diversity, and inclusion in defence organizations, globally.

The project started as a small panel at the 2019 Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society (IUS) conference, then grew into a larger undertaking, to include a workshop, an edited volume, and this policy brief. The workshop, hosted by the Centre for International and Defence Policy (CIDP) and held virtually on 25-26 June 2021, brought together participants from diverse groups, including leading experts, students, researchers, military personnel, and other stakeholders. Attendees heard from and engaged with 25 international contributors with interdisciplinary backgrounds from 12 countries, namely: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, India, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States (U.S.). These presentations mirrored the chapters of the forthcoming edited volume, which will be published with McGill-Queen's University Press in the spring of 2022.<sup>1</sup>

### *Four Key Findings*

*A wide spectrum of policies regarding recruiting of non-citizens in the military.* A spectrum exists when it comes to



The Centre for  
International and Defence Policy

138 Union Street, Suite 403, Queen's University,  
Kingston, Ontario Canada K7L 3N6

[cidp@queensu.ca](mailto:cidp@queensu.ca)



a country's openness to recruit immigrants/non-citizens. On the more open side of the spectrum, countries like the U.S. not only allow non-citizens who are legal U.S. residents to enlist in the military, they also enable these immigrant soldiers to apply for naturalization under special provisions. Next are countries that permit citizens from neighbouring or allied countries to serve in the military. For example, some European Union (EU) states such as Belgium, allow citizens of other EU members to join their armed forces. Similarly, the Indian Armed Forces recruits foreign citizens who intend to settle in India and are nationals of neighbouring countries including Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Tibet, Thailand, and Vietnam. Some other states recruit citizens from a specific country; as is the case with Norway, which has a bilateral agreement with Iceland, allowing the latter's citizens to enlist in the Norwegian military. Continuing to move towards the less open side of the spectrum, there are countries like Canada and Australia. For these countries, although the number one requirement to serve in the military is citizenship, there are exceptions, such as for individuals with specialized skills, or if a position cannot be filled by a citizen. On the more restrictive side of the spectrum, in some countries, for example Brazil, Israel, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland, enlistment in their armed forces is only allowed for citizens.

***Barriers to immigrant military participation.*** There are various barriers to immigrants/non-citizen military participation, which can be categorized into different groups, including legal, socio-cultural, language, and information barriers. First, external legal barriers are critical: with this barrier, not only are non-citizens excluded from the militaries of various countries under study, but some, like Brazil, have more stringent requirements, specifying that certain military leadership positions be filled strictly by native born citizens. These intersect with internal barriers within armed forces. Stringent and lengthy security clearance processes can dissuade many immigrants/non-citizens from applying and create significant delays for those who decide to accept the burden. Socio-cultural institutional barriers are centered around traditional military constructs of the citizen-soldier, where only those individuals deemed loyal citizens are considered trustworthy to defend the country. This is for example the case in the U.S. Army, which does not allow the enlistment of dual U.S. citizens unless they declare citizenship for the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Language barriers play an important role primarily in multi-lingual countries such as Belgium and Canada, where officers must be fluent in the country's official languages and address subordinates in their preferred language, such as in Switzerland. Despite the formal equality of each country's official languages, one language tends to dominate as the primary idiom of communication and therefore inhibits those citizens and immigrants who are primarily fluent in minority languages from joining. Communication and information barriers also impede immigrants' military participation: immigrants themselves often do not perceive their adoptive country's armed forces as an attractive and realistic career path because of insufficient relevant information existing such as the advantages and benefits they might derive from a military career. This was exemplified during the workshop in the case of the Dutch Armed Forces but applies as well to other militaries.

***Different approaches towards Diversity and Inclusion.*** The militaries of the countries studied present significant differences in their approaches towards diversity and inclusion with respect to immigrants and other underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities. Some armed forces, like Brazil for example, consider themselves to be the ultimate "guardians

of nationality,”<sup>3</sup> pay only lip-service to including women in their ranks, and actively mould all recruits into what they consider to be patriotic citizen-soldiers capable of defending their vision of the nation and self-constructed narratives of national identity. Other militaries have formally endorsed principles of diversity and inclusion but have backtracked in their application under the pressure of recent refugee crises and ensuing recrudescence of right-wing political nationalist movements – Sweden is one such example here. Other militaries, such as the Belgian Defence Forces “do not seem really convinced by the need for a more multicultural element reflected in its ranks,”<sup>4</sup> while in the Netherlands, some army officials have exhibited a clear lack of trust towards Dutch Muslim youth who are interested in pursuing careers in the military. Israel has gradually moved away from an assimilationist approach regarding various diversity groups, such as women, minorities, and immigrants; however, research in this country focuses primarily upon Jewish immigrants, paying less attention to non-Jews, such as youth born to non-Jewish migrant workers. Militaries belonging to the Five Eyes’ countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the U.S., deploy a variety of “diversity management” approaches, where “capability arguments” highlighting the instrumental benefits of a diverse institution often overshadow normative arguments claiming that armed forces must closely mirror the diversity of the societies they protect.<sup>5</sup> Overall, as the workshop’s Keynote Speaker, Dr. Alan Okros, noted, the more inclined militaries are to assimilate and reshape recruits into their views of what good citizen-soldiers ought to be, the more resistant these armed forces are to policies of diversity and inclusion, and thus, the more reactive they are to social change.<sup>6</sup>

***Opportunities to facilitate the inclusion of immigrants/non-citizens in modern militaries.*** *Adapting military institutions to their soldiers’ diversity.* Transitioning from exclusion to integration and ultimately to inclusion means transforming militaries into institutions capable of adapting their preferred version of the warrior-soldier model to the actual practices of their increasingly intersectional soldiers. Full inclusion acknowledges soldiers’ differences and seeks to sustain them. A delicate balance must be struck between military institutions and their soldiers, between who exactly needs to change, how, and to what extent. This means, for example, giving young immigrant/non-citizen soldiers a say in the design and progress of their own career paths in the armed forces, and empowering them to align their personal values and beliefs with those of the militaries they serve in.

*Creating a culture of authenticity.* Military organizations must self-critically and reflectively recognize their shortcomings and failures, they must continue to fight to bring them about in a proactive manner. A vitally important objective in doing so is moving from mere training and formalistic certification procedures to real educational journeys in the CAF and allied armed forces. This signifies the acceptance, internalization, practice, and celebration of diversity and inclusion values that are inculcated, encouraged, monitored, and assessed on a continuous basis by experienced and committed professional role-models, as well as by means of innovative teaching and mentorship processes across all armed forces’ branches.

*Incentivizing best leadership practices.* Leadership in general, and educational leadership in particular, must be reframed and recognized as “distributed leadership” – a dynamic relational phenomenon embedded in fluctuating networks of actors.<sup>7</sup> Such a transformation from positional leadership based on rank to character-based leadership embedded in institutions’ daily practices is of critical importance in effectively implementing diversity

and inclusion strategies at all relevant levels of large organizations such as the armed forces. This means identifying, incentivizing, and rewarding best leadership initiatives displayed by women, minorities, and immigrants/non-citizens across military institutions. Reframing in such a manner the leadership narrative and practice in militaries, such as the CAF, is an indispensable way to ensure that modern armed forces will effectively reach, appeal to, and persuade young immigrants/non-citizens to build their careers with them.

### **Three Tangible Recommendations**

The following recommendations focus on Canada, but their applicability may extend to other allied countries around the world.

***Change the law on citizenship requirements.*** There is a strong argument to be made for the inclusion of immigrants/non-citizens in countries' armed forces as a moral and strategic imperative. Therefore, the Canadian government should adopt legislation to allow immigrants who are permanent residents of Canada to join the CAF. A change in law may, however, be a gradual process. Based on the international perspectives surveyed in this project, we note that there is a spectrum for lawmakers to consider when determining how open or selective this change should be. It may be preferable for Canada to open its recruitment pool to allies, neighboring countries, or specific countries, much like Belgium with the European Union; India with Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Tibet, and Vietnam; and Norway with Iceland, respectively.

***Update and expedite security screening processes.*** Given today's global challenges, Canada must design and implement innovative approaches that will bring military security clearance processes in line with other Government of Canada security requirements for civilian jobs that are fully accessible to immigrants/non-citizens. The aim here is to permanently remove an internal institutional barrier that may prevent immigrants/non-citizens from building careers within the CAF. One such approach would be to allow immigrants who are permanent residents of Canada to join the CAF and start attending military schools such as the Canadian military colleges or participating in CAF initial training courses at the same time as security checks are being performed rather than only after their completion, with the understanding that their final status in the military will be determined by the outcome of such security checks. A second course of action would be for the CAF to grant full equivalence to security clearances obtained by those who served as soldiers in allied NATO countries. A third avenue would require the Department of National Defence to improve the acquisition of critical information required for security clearances from countries beyond North America and outside NATO, with whom Canada does not have strong defence ties.<sup>8</sup>

***Recruit and retain diverse members more proactively.*** The CAF must train recruiting personnel and design recruitment and career management processes that can reach, appeal to, and involve more effectively diverse individuals, and members of minority groups, which includes immigrants/non-citizens. The Canadian Government's 2017 Defence Policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) made a clear commitment to work towards "a military that looks like Canada."<sup>9</sup> SSE also noted that the CAF needs to become a more competitive employer within Canada's labour market to ensure it attracts and retains talented individuals. These concerns were reconfirmed by the Canadian case study presented at the workshop. This is

where retention is critical: immigrants/non-citizens must not only be able to join the armed forces but must be willing to continue serving over the long-term.

Ultimately, the workshop highlighted the fact that the shortage of soldiers and lack of diversity in armed forces is a nearly ubiquitous concern for countries around the world and advanced the argument for full participation of immigrants/non-citizens in militaries. The recommendation herein is, for both moral and strategic reasons, the removal of all external legal, internal administrative, and institutional social barriers to their participation, and consequently the provision with clear pathways towards citizenship for immigrants/non-citizens willing to serve in their countries' armed forces. It is, however, important not to place an undue burden on such individuals to become the main vector of transforming the institutional culture of their countries' armed forces: they certainly can help in doing so, but the final responsibility to achieve this aim ultimately rests with the military institution itself.

#### Endnotes

- 1 This project developed with the support of several institutions and organizations, including the CIDP, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Department of National Defence, Queen's University, the Royal Military College of Canada, the Canadian Defence Academy, as well as the Canadian Defence and Security Network.
- 2 Anita U. Hattiangadi et al., *Non-citizens in Today's Military: Final Report*, Alexandria, VA, CNA, 2005: 11.
- 3 Maria Celina D'Araujo, "Nationalism and Absence of Immigrants in the Brazilian Armed Forces", *The Power of Diversity Workshop*, CIDP, Kingston, Canada, 25-26 June 2021 (The Workshop, 2021).
- 4 Delphine Resteigne, "Fighting for Your Host Country: A look at Non-Citizen soldiers in Belgium", *The Workshop*, 2021.
- 5 Jarrod Pendlebury, "Whose Military Is It Anyway? Transforming the Australian Defence Force into Australia's Defence Force", *The Workshop*, 2021.
- 6 Alan Okros, "Concluding Chapter: Expanding the Considerations of Immigrants and the Military", in Grazia Scoppio and Sara Greco, eds., *The Power of Diversity in the Armed Forces: International Perspectives on Immigrant Participation in the Military*, McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming, 2022.
- 7 Jeffrey S. Brooks and Lisa A. W. Kensler, "Distributed Leadership and Democratic Community", in Fenwick W. English, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Educational Leadership Distributed Leadership and Democratic Community*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011: 56-67.
- 8 Grazia Scoppio, Nancy Otis, and Yan Yan, "The Military as a Path to Citizenship, Integration, and Identity: Visible Minorities and Immigrants' Perspectives about the Military in Canada", *The Workshop*, 2021.
- 9 Government of Canada, National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged. Canada's Defence Policy*, Government of Canada, 2017: 20. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.