**State defence service: frequently asked questions**

***What is state defence service (SDS)?***

SDS is a modern response to current geopolitical challenges. Mission of SDS is to continuously strengthen national defence capabilities. SDS provides basic military training and understanding of the value of the Latvian State to maximise the involvement of population in national defence activities.

Through SDS, population can access knowledge and understanding about national defence, enhance individual skills and contribute to better national defence.

***Why is SDS necessary?***

SDS allows any citizen of Latvia join national defence forces and provides new skills, competences and knowledge about defence sector and industry. It is also a good choice towards professional career. SDS gives young people personal military experience, allowing them to become a part of broader national defence community, make new friends and meet new cooperation partners. After the active service, they can continue to contribute to better national defence as non-governmental actors or business organisations registered in Latvia.

***Which age groups will SDS cover?***

According to State Defence Service bill, all Latvian nationals – men aged 18 and full-aged men who have not completed their primary or secondary education – shall be drafted within 12 months of reaching the age of 18 or graduation in the case of those still in education system until the age of 24.

Voluntary enlistment is open to Latvian nationals of both sexes aged 18-27.

***When will the first SDS recruits be drafted?***

The first enlistment round will start on 1 July 2023. It will be open to volunteers only. Mandatory conscription will come to force on 1 January 2024. Voluntary enlistment will also be the only option in the initial phases of the second round.

***Which categories of citizens are not covered by SDS law?***

SDS law will not apply to:

1) citizen not meeting SDS health standards
2) Latvian nationals acting as guardians of children whose other parent is deceased or incapable of parenthood, family court-appointed guardians and custodians of foster children

3) Latvian nationals acting as caretakers of their spouse, children aged under 18 months or elderly parents according to relevant laws or specific court order

4) Latvian nationals with double citizenship (nationality) having served abroad or completed alternative civilian service (alternative service) in another country

5) alumni of Colonel Oskars Kalpaks Military School for vocational education

6) Latvian nationals who have served on the professional force at least 11 months without interruptions
7) ranking officers of agencies under Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia and Latvian Prison Administration having been employed by these institutions more than 24 months

8) Latvian nationals convicted of severe and serious crimes, irrespective of whether convictions have been lifted or deleted

9) Latvian nationals convicted of aforementioned crimes without penalties, or found guilty under criminal investigation that has been closed

10) Latvian nationals acting as parents, guardians or custodians of disabled minors

***Can SDS be deferred?***

Latvian nationals subject to SDS may defer military service until the age of 26 years in case of one of the following conditions: university scholarship, national sports team membership, child care leave, family situation or other reasonable cause.

***What are the enlistment procedures for SDS?***

SDS draft is announced by order of the Minister of Defence. Announcement will indicate the date of enlistment and number of recruits for each type of state military defence force. Decree will be published in the official journal “Latvijas Vēstnesis” no later than 6 months prior to actual draft date. Transitional provisions of the bill stipulate that the initial draft announcement may also be published later than 6 months prior to enlistment.

SDS draft will mainly focus on Latvian nationals volunteering for military service. Latvian nationals applying for military service voluntarily will be offered to choose which type of state defence service they prefer.

Remaining recruits for state defence service units will be drafted based on random selection from the eligible pool. Recruits will be randomly selected to serve in the military for the duration of 11 months. Random selection will be proportionate to number of eligible state defence service recruits officially registered in each region. Specific criteria and procedure of selection is regulated by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Latvian nationals training to become professional medical doctors, assistant physicians or nurses may choose the preferred type of state military defence service regardless of priorities defined by National Armed Forces. Skills and competences of such students may be used to assign them to particular state defence service positions.

**Why is the state defence service compulsory for men and voluntary for women?**

Conscription for male population is sufficient for reaching current national defence targets. Mandatory enlistment of women in SDS is currently not necessary. Women are also eligible for voluntary military service in SDS forces.

***Can I join SRS after 27 as a volunteer?***

All Latvian national aged 28 and above can join the National Guard, professional army or complete basic military training for army reserve.

***What is the duration of SDS?***

Duration of SDS will depend on the type of enlistment: **11 months** inregularforces of the National Armed Forces or National Guard; **5 years** in National Guard with at least 21-day total of individual training and no more than 7 days of collective training days per year; **5 years** inreserveofficertraining programme foruniversity and college students with the total training and military exercise time of at least 180 days.

Persons eligible for SDS who cannot serve in the military because of their ideological views, beliefs or religious convictions may choose civilian service instead of SDS if the Law permits and all relevant procedures are followed.

***What are the penalties for evasion?***

State military defence force troops are subject to disciplinary, administrative and criminal penalties if they breach any laws. SDS draft evasion is punishable according to the provisions of the Criminal Law.

***Does Latvia have enough resources for SDS?***

SDS will be introduced gradually to make sure training meets relevant quality standards, equipment is modern, infrastructure and living conditions are good, and there is no problem with drafting a massive number of recruits without sufficient training and other resources.

***What is the pay and social security when serving in SDS?***

SDS troops who have chosen voluntary service and will be assigned to NAF for 11months will have the monthly pay of 600 euro for everyday needs, whereas those selected for SDS on mandatory basis will receive 300 euros. SDS recruits serving in National Guard or in reserve officer training programmes for university and college students will be paid according to the number of days spent in service. Upon completing service, troops will receive discharge bonus of 1,100 euro.

SDS recruits opting for 11-month military service will receive free meals and accommodation in barracks, as well as free healthcare. Depending on the type of duties, recruits may be offered an opportunity to acquire driver’s licence.

Employers, universities and colleges are required to take their employees or students back after the military service.

***Will persons serving in National Guard, in reserve officer training programmes for university and college students or alternative civilian service be paid?***

SDS recruits serving in National Guard or in reserve officer training programmes for university and college students will be paid according to the number of days spent in service. They will be offered free meals on the days they spend doing service-related activities.

As currently planned, persons in alternative service will also be entitled to SDS pay in the amount of 300 euros. Those in alternative service are not entitled to free meals.

***How will I benefit from SDS?***

Experience of other countries such as Finland, Estonia, Switzerland shows that those who have completed military training are more resilient and capable of accepting and overcoming civilian-life challenges. Employers also view such employees more favourably as they believe that military service has taught these employees discipline, ability to work in a team and resilience towards stress and contingencies. Military service makes people tougher – an important quality that may help in various life situations. Finally, military service is a tangible way in which we individually, and as a society, show that we have values that we treasure and are ready to defend and fight for.

Moreover, SDS is a way to promote mental resilience and physical health of young people. It is also a way to promote discipline in population and offer everyone exciting and new career opportunities in national armed forces. SDS will contribute to long-term development of national armed forces, making them numerically stronger and better prepared, with reserve force that complements the regular force, filling vacancies and contributing to comprehensive national defence framework where every citizen is ready to join national defence forces at any time.

***What obligations will troops have after SDS?***

After SDS, recruits are discharged and become part of the reserve forces. They are required to be ready to undergo up to seven day-long regular annual training at any time in the next five years following the discharge. After this five-year period, recruits, who have completed SDS and are discharged into army reserve, are registered for additional training according to general procedures for reserve forces.

After completing state defence service, you automatically become member of reserve forces and may be drafted for regular or readiness civil defence training aimed at testing and improvement of skills and competences acquired while in service.

***Will Latvians with dual citizenship or living abroad be drafted?***

Latvian nationals permanently residing abroad and having, in line with applicable rules and regulations, notified Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of their current registered residence abroad will not be drafted until 2027.

***How will the introduction of SDS affect National Guard service?***

National Guard have been and will remain one of the pillars of Latvia’s national defence. As a division of NAF, it will continue to offer all citizen voluntary military training.

***Will national defence course be cancelled in schools?***

As a subject, national defence course is still relevant and will become compulsory in all secondary schools providing general education from 2024/2025 school year. National defence lessons are designed to give pupils, including female students, basic knowledge about national defence.

***Does the introduction of SDS mean that Latvia cannot rely on NATO?***

Latvia is and will continue to be a member of NATO, enjoying the same collective defence guarantees as before. At the same time, Latvia must also utilise internal resources to build its own national defence force. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty requires all member states to develop and maintain national armed forces in a state of readiness required to defend against any invasion. War in Ukraine has shown that countries need enormous resources to withstand the aggressions of that scope. This means Latvia must make sure it has sufficient resources to defend itself – it must train and maintain such assets. Allies will complement these resources with their technical capabilities that Latvia is not likely to be able to afford in the next decades – planes, long-range air defence systems, tanks or warships.

***Is SDS a lower level training compared to National Guard and professional force training?***

No, basic elements of civilian SDS training are the same as for professional force and National Guard. Latvian army aims to train the most competent, knowledgeable and skilled troops to prevent any aggressions against Latvia.

***Why is SDS introduced only now?***

Until now, the main focus was on the rearmament of military units and their training. This phase has now been completed. There is also lack of new recruits volunteering for professional service. For many years Latvia mostly relied on volunteers enlisting in army to defend Latvia. Russian invasion of Ukraine has however shown that Latvia needs to reach sufficient size of militarily trained population in the long run, which means creating well-prepared and sufficiently sized reserve forces.

***What have Ministry of Defence and NAF done to prevent threats?***

Ministry of Defence and NAF have been working on significant increase of national defence capabilities since 2014. But no one could have predicted the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. That is why it was decided to introduce SDS and thus significantly improve national security of Latvia and its population in the long run.

***Where can I apply for SDS?***

First round of voluntary enlistment in SDS is open until 15 May 2023. To apply, call +371 6707 2793, send e-mail to vad@klustikaravirs.lv or go to National Armed Force Recruitment and Selection Centre at Krustabaznīcas iela 9, Riga.