

----- Original Message -----

From: kommunikation@zivi.admin.ch

To: ebco@ebco-beoc.org

Date: 06/02/2023 14:11 EET

Subject: Questionnaire about EBCO's Annual Report 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your questionnaire which was forwarded to the Federal Office for Civilian Service. Please find Switzerland's answers in the attachment.

With regard to last year's report, we noted that Alexia Tsouni stated in her foreword that "Europe was not a safe place for many conscientious objectors in several countries who faced prosecution, arrests, trials by military courts, imprisonments, fines, intimidation, attacks, death threats, and discrimination", and that Switzerland was one of those countries. In the 2020 Annual Report, however, Switzerland was not part of that list. It is unclear to us why the EBCO President added Switzerland in 2021 since there were no changes in law or in practice.

Please note that conscientious objectors in Switzerland do not face any such consequences. They have the unrestricted right to apply for alternative civilian service at any time, and there is no pressure exerted by the state (e.g. via "death threats", "attacks", "intimidation").

We are therefore interested to know on what basis the EBCO President came to the conclusion that Switzerland ought to be added to that list. **Thank you for removing Switzerland from the list or for a short explanation.**

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Brückner

**Thomas Brückner**

Responsable de la Communication

Membre du Cadre supérieur

Département fédéral de l'économie, de la formation et de la recherche DEFR

Office fédéral du service civil CIVI

Office central

Malerweg 6, 3600 Thun

Tel. +41 58 467 41 44

Mobil +41 79 718 95 26

[thomas.brueckner@zivi.admin.ch](mailto:thomas.brueckner@zivi.admin.ch)

[www.zivi.admin.ch](http://www.zivi.admin.ch)

*European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)*

[www.ebco-beoc.org](http://www.ebco-beoc.org)

[ebco@ebco-beoc.org](mailto:ebco@ebco-beoc.org)



## Questionnaire about EBCO's Annual Report 2022

*1. What is the duration of the military service, and what is the duration of the alternative civilian service?*

The duration of the military service is determined by a conscript's military rank. A Private E-1, for instance, serves for a total of 245 days.

In any case, civilian service duty generally lasts 50% longer than military service. Civilian service duty lasts longer than military service for conscripts who apply.

*2. How was the human right to conscientious objection to military service first recognised? Which year and by which law/article of Constitution? Please share it with us.*

In 1992, a mandatory referendum was held regarding the proposition to modify the Swiss Constitution in order to create a civilian service. Swiss voters approved by 82.5%. Hence, the Swiss Constitution was modified by introducing the following phrase in Art. 59 lit. 1: "Alternative civilian service shall be provided for by law."

*3. How are the conscripts officially informed about the human right to conscientious objection to military service? What exact information about the possibility of applying for alternative civilian service is included with call-up papers?*

Prior to recruitment, all conscripts are called-up for a mandatory information day (usually at age 18). Regarding this information day, art. 15a lit. 2 of the Federal Act on Alternative Civilian Service (SR 824.0) as well as art. 11 lit. 3 of the Ordinance on the Compulsory Military Service (SR 512.21) prescribe that conscripts are also to be informed about civilian service as an option in case of conscientious objections to military service.

The information day is organized by military personnel. However, the information material (posters, film, flyers) is provided by the Federal Office for Civilian Service (see below).

Call-up papers do not contain any information about civilian service.

*4. What is the procedure for a conscript to serve alternative civilian service, in all times (e.g. peace, national emergency, partial/general compulsory mobilisation and war)? What body decides in an individual case whether the application is accepted or rejected, and what is its composition? To which Ministry does it pertain? Please provide for the recent years the number of applications, and the number of acceptances and rejections, if any. Are applications normally accepted without enquiry? If not, what process is followed? Does it involve a personal interview? In all cases, or only in some? For the above, please provide disaggregated data (a) between those citing religious and those citing non-religious ("ideological") grounds for conscientious objection, (b) according to denominations (for those citing religious grounds), (c) where relevant, between those applicants who have been summoned to interview and those who have not.*

The procedure for a conscript to apply for alternative civilian service remains generally the same in all times and can be summarized as follows:

- An application may only be submitted once recruitment has been completed and ability to perform regular military service has been established.
- Conscripts with conscientious objections may then submit an online request for admission to civilian service. Since 2009, applicants are not required to provide detailed evidence of their conscientious objection to military service and there is no further enquiry. Readiness to undertake civilian service is regarded as sufficient proof for conscientious objection.
- Within three months of submitting their application, conscripts must attend a one-day introductory course. In this course, employees of the Federal Office for Civilian Service inform them about the duties and rights that come along with civilian service.
- After attending the introductory course, applicants are requested to confirm their application online within two weeks.



- Subsequently, applicants are admitted to civilian service – provided that the application form has been correctly completed and the admission procedure has been followed as described above.

The Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) is responsible for civilian service issues; its Federal Office for Civilian Service processes applications and administers the civilian service system in general. It is composed entirely of civilian public servants.

The following table shows the number of applications and admissions from 2018 to 2021. As for 2022, the numbers will be available by the end of February on our website and in a press release:

Year	Applications	Admissions
2021	8'239	6'148
2020	6'951	5'254
2019	8'342	6'088
2018	8'248	6'205

Please note that applications to civilian service are not “rejected” per se. The discrepancy between the number of applications and the number of acceptances is due to uncompleted admission procedures, e.g. because application forms were incomplete, the mandatory introduction course was not attended or the application was not definitively confirmed. Furthermore, conscripts may apply for civilian service as many times as they wish and at any time. Some conscripts, thus, submit several applications, thereby increasing the total number of applications.

*5. Is the alternative civilian service system genuinely civilian indeed, managed by a non-military authority/ministry? What body is responsible for administering alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors? To which Ministry does it pertain?*

The Federal Office for Civilian Service is responsible for civilian service issues. It is an entirely non-military authority pertaining to the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER).

Alternative civilian service is performed outside the Swiss Armed Forces in public and private civilian institutions of public utility recognized by the Federal Office for Civilian Service as official partner organizations. Conscientious objectors serve civilian purposes and are assigned to duties of public interest. They are mainly active in the following fields: health and social services, nature conservation and environmental protection, education, cultural heritage conservation, forestry and agriculture, development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

*6. What is the legal minimum age for conscription, and what is the legal minimum age for voluntary enlistment in peace time, in general/partial compulsory mobilisation, and in war time?*

According to the Federal Act on the Armed Forces (SR 510.10), the minimum legal age for both conscription and voluntary enlistment is 18 years (Article 7 of said Act). Concerning the legal minimum age for conscription, the Swiss Conscription system does not make any distinction between peace time and war time. However, the Swiss Government can extend the duration of conscripted service if the situation requires this.

*7. How is the human right to conscientious objection recognised for the professional members of the military? What are the procedures to allow the early release of a serving member of the military who develops conscientious objections? Please provide for the recent years the number of applications, the number of acceptances, the number of rejections, and, if relevant, the grounds of rejection.*

All conscientious objectors can apply for alternative civilian service at all times, even if they are actively serving in the Swiss Armed Forces. The application procedure remains the same as described above. However, conscripts who develop conscientious objections whilst actively serving continue their military service until they are formally admitted to civilian service.

The following table shows the number of applications to civilian service submitted by conscripts either during recruit school or after as well as the number of admissions. As mentioned above, applications to civilian service are not “rejected” and some conscripts apply for civilian service several times.

Year	during recruit school		after recruit school	
	applications	admissions	applications	admissions
2021	1'507	878	2'771	1'953
2020	1'355	731	2'199	1'596
2019	1'818	931	2'734	2'018
2018	1'740	904	2'877	2'264

8. *Are there any plans to suspend/abolish conscription in the near future?*

There are no plans to abolish or suspend conscription in the near future.