

Should Canada make Youth Service Mandatory?

Discussion Prompt

Canada should make youth service mandatory.

General Background

Consider the following proposal: after completing high school or CEGEP, Canadian youth must dedicate a year of their lives to serving their country. Their labour would be paid, and youth would have several options: some might serve in the military, or do administrative work for community organizations, or spend their service year contributing to agriculture and reforestation initiatives, or do low-level jobs in the public health sector or international development.

A [2025 poll from Angus Reid](#) indicated that approximately 70% of Canadians are in favour of mandating that all Canadians under 30 complete a year of civilian service in the areas of public health, environmental support, youth services, and civil protection, while 43% of Canadians are in favour of mandating a year of military service. Most agree that the labour involved in mandatory service would be paid. Many other countries across the world already have this kind of policy enshrined in law, including Switzerland, France, and South Korea.

Should Canada also mandate this kind of policy? If so, what would it look like? Those in favour of mandated civilian service argue that it would help to strengthen a sense of national identity and build much-needed social cohesion, provide young people with professional development skills, and help address our country's labour shortage. On the other hand, mandated service interferes with people's freedom to choose how they spend their time, and whether and how they earn their money. Additionally, it costs tax payers a lot of money: some estimate that it would cost the government billions of dollars.

For More Information:

- [A Year of Service? Canadians – including young adults – embrace the idea of civilian service for those under 30](#) | Angus Reid
- [Poll: Seven in 10 Canadians support compulsory year of service](#) | Winnipeg Sun

Yes

*Here are some of the reasons why people might argue that Canada **should** make youth service mandatory.*

Building social cohesion through fostering a sense of national identity

We are a very diverse country, and we are also geographically very spread out. A year of mandatory service would help to build a sense of cohesion amongst Canadian youth from across the country: instead of simply serving their own respective local communities, this opportunity would be framed as service towards one's country as a whole. This opportunity for collaboration amongst a diverse population of youth could help to build bridges between youth with very different backgrounds.

Professional development for young people

A year of mandatory service serves as an opportunity for youth to build strong resumés. Mandatory youth service would provide every Canadian youth with the opportunity to gain employable skills, and have one year of work experience on their resumés before entering into Canada's competitive labour market. This opportunity could also give youth the experience necessary to make more informed career decisions.

Addressing the labour shortage

Right now, there is a labour shortage across our country. Through placing youth in jobs that are currently unfilled, mandatory youth service would be a good way to address Canada's labour shortage.

Read More:

- [Canadians like the idea of public service for young adults. Should it be mandatory? | CBC](#)
- [Canada Needs a Mandatory National Service | Macleans](#)
- [Listen: Should Canada Make Young People Do a Year of Service? | CBC](#)

No

*Here are some of the reasons why people might argue that Canada **should not** make youth service mandatory.*

Impeding people's personal freedom

We live in a liberal democracy, where we are supposed to be able to choose how we spend our time. Mandating service impedes people's freedom to choose how they spend their time, and what kind of employment they do or do not seek. While our rights do come with responsibilities, this kind of policy would constitute government overreach, especially when it concerns military service, which we should have a right to conscientiously object to.

Wasting taxpayer money

There are other ways to address shortage in the labour market. There are also other ways to build a sense of national identity. We should not be wasting billions of tax payer dollars on this program, without trying alternatives first.

Decreasing Quality of labour

In mandating a year of labour, many youth may not *want* to be working in the positions they are effectively forced to take on. A lack of enthusiasm would result in a decrease in the quality of labour within the sectors youth could serve in, and could also lead to worsening overall morale amongst employees, which might decrease the overall quality of labour further.

Read More:

- [Canadians should reject any suggestion of mandatory military service](#) | Fraser Institute
- [Canada's elite media wants you to serve in the military](#) | The Breach