

Size and demographics of the UK serving and veteran Armed Forces community



Why does this matter?

The Royal British Legion (RBL) commissioned RAND Europe to produce first detailed forecasts of the size and demographics of the UK Armed Forces community to 2045. This work was designed to help RBL develop its strategy in a way that recognises and responds to change in the size and demographics of the community: the number of veterans is declining as World War II and National Service generations pass away, while the serving and veteran populations are becoming more demographically diverse and shaped by new patterns of service and family life.

By turning complex data into evidence-based insights, this research also supports policy makers and service providers across the wider sector to anticipate how the needs of the Armed Forces community will evolve, and ensure that policy, services, and support remain fit for purpose in the decades ahead.



Regulars



2025

2045

137,000



Serving personnel



130,000–
135,000

86,000



Partners



65,000–
78,000

8,000



Former partners



6,000–
18,000

85,000–
115,000



Children



84,000–
123,000

Despite recent declines, the size of the Regular Armed Forces is not likely to change substantially out to 2045, though this may change if new policies are introduced.

RAND Europe's forecasts suggest there may be:



Increasing numbers and proportion of female personnel in the workforce



Little change in the age profile of personnel, with a potentially small increase in the number of personnel aged 60+



Increase in number and proportion of ethnic minority UK personnel and slight increase in number and proportion of non-UK personnel



A decrease in the number of married personnel, but an increase in personnel with a long-term partner



Little change in the number of children of personnel



Volunteer Reserves



2025

2045

32,000



Serving personnel

26,000–
30,000

23,000



Partners

18,000–
20,000

2,000



Former partners

1,000–
2,000

20,000–
27,000



Children

19,000–
26,000

The size of the Volunteer Reserves is highly uncertain and dependent on policy decisions and sufficient recruitment.

RAND Europe's forecasts suggest there may be:



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Increase in number and proportion of ethnic minority UK personnel and slight increase in number and proportion of non-UK personnel



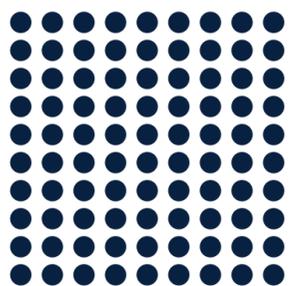
A decrease in the number of married personnel, but an increase in personnel with a long-term partner



Little change in the number of children of personnel.

2025

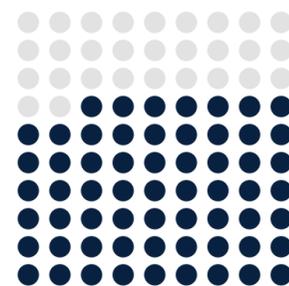
2045



1.73 million



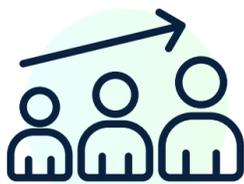
Veterans



1.06 million



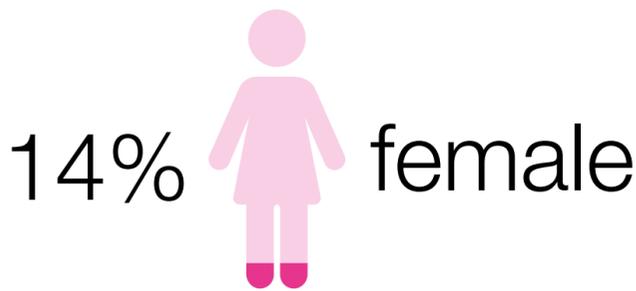
50% aged 65+



Age



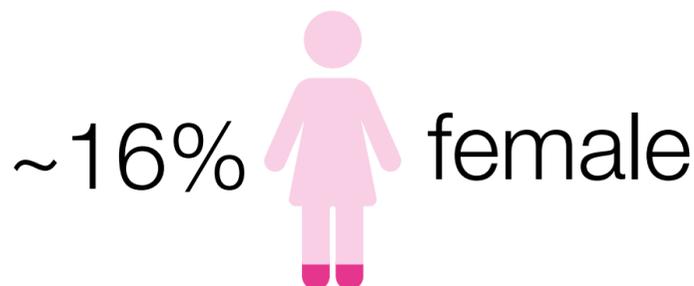
~45% aged 65+



14% female



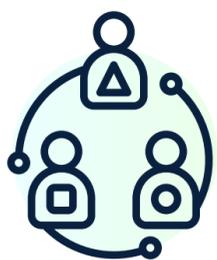
Gender



~16% female



from Ethnic Minority UK backgrounds



Background



from Ethnic Minority UK backgrounds

2025

2045

1.1 million



Partners

640,000–
670,000

332,000

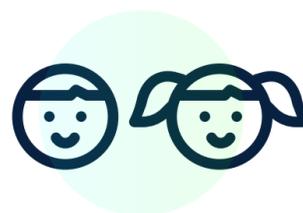


Former partners

190,000–
220,000

430,000

children aged 18 and under



Children

287,000–
309,000

children aged 18 and under

107,000

children aged 19-24

62,000–
67,000

children aged 19-24

In particular, the age demographic of the Veteran community will change substantially out to ~2030 as the number of veterans alive from the WWII and National Service generation decrease rapidly. From 2030 onwards, the age demographics will likely stabilise, with approximately 55% of the veteran population aged under 65.

