



WAPES European Regional Conference

Defending the Future

-

Effective workforce development to deliver better recruitment, retention, and reintegration outcomes

for the defence and security services

Riga, October 13th – 15th 2025

Hosted by

The State Employment Agency Republic of Latvia



State
Employment Agency
Republic of Latvia

The WAPES European Regional Conference 2025, hosted by the State Employment Agency of Latvia ([NVA](#)), provides a timely opportunity to explore how effective collaboration between **Defence & Security Sectors**, the Public Employment Services and their partners can deliver **sustainable employment, health and social inclusion outcomes**.

Why Focus on Defence and Security Collaboration?

Behind the news headlines around increasing European defence capacity lies the very practical challenge of workforce development - how to recruit, develop and re-integrate armed forces and security personnel. Some of these challenges are common to other workforce sectors including demographic and technological change and growing recruitment and retention difficulties. Many others, however, are more specific to the world of defence and security including complex hiring procedures, demanding work conditions, and the post-career need to adapt back into civilian work and community life.

To address these workforce development challenges successfully, PES are increasingly developing more holistic, user-centric measures that we see emerging for other labour market groups which bring together capacity that links skills, employability, and health/wellness to provide a more holistic, tailored service offer.

This support can include measures like widening marketing channels, adopting innovative recruitment practices, enhancing workforce preparedness, aligning skills development with security sector-specific needs, and supporting labour market reintegration for service personnel, including those recovering from physical and mental health conditions.

The Conference is structured around **three** core themes that reflect the life cycle of workforce engagement within the defence and security sectors. These pillars will guide the agenda and are embedded across all sessions:

1. Recruitment

Focuses on attracting new talent into the defence and security sectors. What's the best way to identify potential candidates, facilitate outreach, support digital and inclusive recruitment strategies, and help fill critical skill gaps? Do PES and their partners need to nurture specialist work coaches or use those with 'lived experience' of the armed forces to better understand the sector's wider workforce needs?

2. Retention

Personnel turnover is not unique to the security services - on average firms can expect an annual churn of about 20%. How can workforce development services help improve retention by facilitating dual-track training, personal development pathways, and helping spouses find appropriate work?

3. Reintegration

In some countries veterans are nearly twice as likely to face unemployment than their civilian counterparts and can take over a year to fully adjust to civilian work life. What does the evidence show works best to support successful transitions? What lessons can be learned from targeted career services, tailored employer outreach, skills validation, integrated mental health support and help for the wider family?

Taken together, these pillars will help us refresh our thinking about, on the one hand, how we can improve the support we offer the defence and security services as **employers** and, on the other, how we can best tailor our service offer to **'workers'** as they begin their journeys into the defence

and security sectors and subsequently back into civilian work and their communities. What tools do we already have, what tools do we need to adapt, and what new tools do we need to co-design?

Target Audience

WAPES European region member countries and stakeholders.

Language

Working language of the conference will be English, interpretation will not be provided.

Monday, 13 October 2025

19:00 – Welcome Cocktail

Tuesday, 14 October 2025**Skills for Defence and Security – Strategic Workforce Development**

08:15 – 08:55 Registration and welcome coffee

09:00 – 09:45 Opening the Floor: Greetings & Conference Kick-off

09:45 – 10:10 Keynote speech

10:10 – 11:10 Plenary Session 1: Forecasting and Closing the Defence Skills Gap – Mapping, Mobilising, and Retaining Talent

11:10 – 11:40 Coffee Break

11:40 – 12:40 Plenary Session 2: PES–Defence and Security Strategic Collaboration

12:40 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 Interactive Parallel Sessions (Group A / Group B)

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break

15:30 – 16:30 Interactive Parallel Sessions (Group A / Group B)

16:30 – 17:00 Closing remarks for Day 1

18:30 – 22:00 Dinner

Wednesday, 15 October 2025**Innovation in Defence and Security Sector Support**

08:15 – 08:55 Registration and welcome coffee

09:00 – 09:15 Overview Day 1 and introduction to Day 2

09:15 – 10:30 Plenary Session 3: From Service to Civilian Life – Reintegration and Reskilling to Meet Labour Market Needs

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 – 11:30 Closing remarks and official end of conference

11:30 – 12:30 European meeting with WAPES VP (members only)

12:30 – 14:15 Lunch

14:30 – 15:30 Leisure activity – Guided tour of the National Library of Latvia

19:30 – 22:00 Dinner