



Thinking the unthinkable: should you be preparing for conscription mandates?

By Luca Failla, Failla&Partners

Wednesday 08 January 2025



What if you had known three months beforehand that covid was going to strike? What if you knew six months before?

What would you have done to prepare your workforce – and thus your business?

It was all happening so far away... until it wasn't.

Almost overnight, covid-19 was on your doorstep: in your company, in your home, on the street – everywhere.

The first country in Europe to feel a real impact was Italy. First at a local level, then at a regional level and, in less than two months, the entire country shut down.

As the first public administration on the continent to confront such a situation, the Italian government installed what could be compared to as a type of State of Emergency medical martial law. No one could go further than 200 metres from their residence, and if you did go out you needed to complete a special form just to say you were going to the supermarket. Curfews were in place, and police checkpoints established.

The entire situation was absolutely awesome in its disruption of life and work.

And as we are all aware, workplace changes that happened at that time are still very much ingrained in business operations today: smart working is now the norm, and branching off from this we have even seen the rising trend of digital nomads.

But, with life now back to normal and companies back in business, tranquil like before, should companies be asking what they dared not ask before?

What if...

What if that thing that is happening so far away will one day suddenly, without warning, be on our doorstep?

A few months ago, as we sunned ourselves on our summer holidays, it was an impossible thing to think – that armed conflict could be seen in the EU. However, though the thought might seem alarmist, recent moves by a number of governments suggest it may not be so farfetched.

For example, in January 2024 Poland introduced a new law that would allow for a [six-hour notice](#) for conscripts to report for duty. Latvia has also introduced [a mandatory one-year military service](#) for men aged 18-27.

Some countries are examining plans to introduce “military education” in schools, and Denmark has announced plans to have [women considered for future conscription plans](#).

And this trend is set to continue. This year, Croatia will introduce a compulsory two-month military service, and Germany is also looking at implementing related policies.

Of course, many countries around the world (eg, Switzerland, South Korea, and Israel) have established military service requirements that are built into their social fabric (which also extends to the fabric of the workplace). But what about business operations elsewhere?

Time for strategic thinking

Has your business examined the potential impact on the workforce should mandatory conscription be suddenly introduced, and what the impact would be if a large percentage of your “fighting age” workforce was called up for military service?

This could this be a good time to look into a new strategy of introducing greater diversity into the workforce. For example, examining the possibility of further diversifying one’s workforce demographics in terms of age, sex, disability, etc to try and mitigate any impact on services or production a potential call up could create.

Another strategy could be new flexible working models, such as the four-day working week – which pilot trials have shown can [yield many benefits](#) both in an office environment and on the manufacturing floor.

However, what is of particular note about the four-day week is the change in mentality – for both employers and employees – as it shifts the focus from being paid for a 40 hour work week to results based on productivity.

In the end, the goal for all businesses is the output, not the hours worked. Starting to think about workplace productivity in an “out-of-the-box” way may be strategically prudent for businesses that may need to confront out-of-the-box situations in the future.

It is important to understand that the concept behind this written discussion is not to “do” or “implement” but rather (and more importantly) to think strategically.

In every office, production site, and public space there is always a sign indicating the fire exit. It sits there never being used or even looked at... but at least when there is a fire then you (and your employees) will know the path to safety.

A blueprint of a battle plan

Italy may perhaps be in a strong position to confront any future out-of-the-box" situations. This is owing to the government's demonstrated swift reaction to covid-19, and quick-thinking in considering what essential services needed to stay open to keep Italy running.

A blueprint for future emergencies impacting workforces nationwide was established.

An employer working in one of the sectors deemed then as an "essential service" (such as medical or agricultural workers) may, in a hypothetical future emergency scenario, see a lower impact on its Italian workforce (especially in terms of "fighting age" workers) than for those businesses deemed "unessential".

Of course, no one has a crystal ball to predict what the future will bring, but with more and more European states introducing military requirements this year, perhaps employers should start thinking less "what if..." and more "when".