

WEBVTT

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<v SPEAKER\_1>In this episode of Defence Deconstructed, I'm talking to Charlotte Duval-Lantoine, our VP of Ottawa Operations here at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Today we're talking about the recently released reports from the Auditor General this week on Canadian Armed Forces recruiting as well as housing.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Talking about some of the restrictions that are affecting some of the current situation, how that's going to potentially impact both recruitment and retention in the Canadian Armed Forces and the status of housing, and how this helps shape the future of the Canadian military.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Charlotte, welcome back to the Defence Deconstructed.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Thanks for having me.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So there was an Auditor General released a couple of reports that are related to Defence this week, one on recruiting and the other one on housing.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Maybe we'll take the recruiting one first.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>I want you to tell us some of the findings and give us your take.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So, the quick, too long didn't read piece on the on the recruitment report is the fact that the military is not able to recruit as much as it says it wants to.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>On average, during the audit period, the military was able to recruit about 1 in 13 candidates, which is not great.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And before we get to the assumptions that it might be because Canadians do not meet the standards to join the military, in fact, only 6% of applications were rejected for because candidates did

not meet the criteria.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And over half, around 54% of the cases, the candidacies that did not make it through the system is because either applicants who withdrew their application voluntarily, or the applicants did not get back to the military within the 60 days delay that they asked the candidate to get back to them too.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Now the question of why remains, why do people withdraw their application?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>We don't know.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The military has not done any analysis of the surveys that they've done on the matter.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So a lot of questions still up in the air.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But the conclusion that the Auditor General made in 2016 about recruitment stance, the military is unable to recruit to the extent that it needs.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>It recruits based on its capacities, and its capacities are not up to a growth mindset for the military.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So it's going to take a while to get to the strong-seeker and engaged target of reaching 71,500 regular force members.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>By 2029, it's going to be very difficult.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>As you read the report, you've followed this issue for a while.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>It's not a secret in any way that the military has had difficulty recruiting.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>Although, I guess, to be pedantic.

00:02:53.680 --> 00:03:11.540

<v SPEAKER\_1>Is it a question of the inability to recruit or an ability to translate successful recruitment in terms of attracting people to apply to join the military, and then translating a recruit into an actual soldier, aviator, or sailor?

00:03:11.540 --> 00:03:12.120

<v SPEAKER\_2>Absolutely.

00:03:12.120 --> 00:03:14.140

<v SPEAKER\_2>It's a problem of translation.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And I like the fact that you're making that distinction because, and you and I have had this conversation many times when I ran to you about this.

00:03:26.720 --> 00:03:31.540

<v SPEAKER\_2>Applications to join the military almost doubled since 2019.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So, in 2019, we were at a re, we were hovering between 38,000 to 45,000.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Last year, 77,000 people applied to join the military.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And one thing interesting is that my assumption, because not, like I'm not free from assumption either, was that permanent residents would be driving that job.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Permanent residents only account for about half of that job.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So, we had a jump in, like, over 30,000 applicants.

00:04:08.860 --> 00:04:14.820

<v SPEAKER\_2>Permanent residents, on average, represent 15,000 of those numbers.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So, yeah, it's a problem of really translating and those applicant, applications into, into recruits.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And the way that I framed it to the CBC yesterday was

that the military is becoming victim of its own success here, where it's attracting people, but cannot turn them into recruits.

00:04:39.220 --> 00:04:52.020

<v SPEAKER\_2>And another thing that I'm going to add, since we're on the topic of pedantry, when we're seeing that the military is recruiting a certain amount of people, that's great.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Like, any growth that they're able to do, and any improvement that they're able to do is fantastic, and they've been able to increase recruitment by a thousand people year over year, so since 2023, so it's pretty good.

00:05:09.200 --> 00:05:17.320

<v SPEAKER\_2>The problem is that people assume that that translates immediately into trained service members ready to fight.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>No, one, that takes years, and two, basic training is actually where the military encounters the highest attrition, and that makes sense, right?

00:05:26.820 --> 00:05:30.640

<v SPEAKER\_2>Like, you get exposed to the military for the first time.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Basic training is very hard on purpose, because the military is kind of triaging who has the resilience to get into very difficult conditions.

00:05:39.420 --> 00:05:46.160

<v SPEAKER\_2>But that means that also sometimes you lose at least a thousand people by the time basic training ends.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so that creates complexity that I think is not fully understood by the larger public in the defence policy conversations that we have on the topic of recruitment.

00:06:00.000 --> 00:06:03.880

<v SPEAKER\_1>What struck out as most novel to you about this report?

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<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess, as you describe it, the fact that so few people are being screened out because they aren't fit for service.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess that there's been a bit of a narrative that kind of, you know, effectively the kids these days, they're not up for it

kind of dynamic.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess that data would really, I don't know if you have any historical comparison or there's any suggestion about how that number that's being screened as being not fit for service essentially.

00:06:28.640 --> 00:06:35.520

<v SPEAKER\_1>I don't know if that's the exact term they use, but basically ruling people out because they aren't up to the standard they're looking for.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>That seems pretty small.

00:06:36.640 --> 00:06:44.300

<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess the way I would read that, it'd be something like 70,000 people were deemed potentially eligible for service out of the 77,000.

00:06:44.300 --> 00:06:46.160

<v SPEAKER\_1>My math is a little fuzzy because it's a little late at night.

00:06:48.760 --> 00:06:53.220

<v SPEAKER\_2>Unfortunately, I do not have a historical comparison.

00:06:53.220 --> 00:07:02.340

<v SPEAKER\_2>Maybe as I'm chugging along in my PhD, I might encounter stuff like that.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Maybe 10 years from now, we can have that conversation again.

00:07:06.680 --> 00:07:12.320

<v SPEAKER\_2>What jumped out to me is actually not the piece about people not meeting the standards.

00:07:16.200 --> 00:07:21.020

<v SPEAKER\_2>Again, maybe my biases, but I had a hunch that that was us jumping to conclusion.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>We need to see because most of the applications were actually not processed, so we don't know.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But what really-

00:07:31.460 --> 00:07:32.380  
<v SPEAKER\_1>Sorry, just to jump in.

00:07:32.520 --> 00:07:33.600  
<v SPEAKER\_1>That is an important point.

00:07:33.600 --> 00:07:44.340  
<v SPEAKER\_1>That I guess you don't actually know how many of the total number would have met the qualifications because there's a very significant number of applications simply unprocessed.

00:07:44.340 --> 00:07:45.540  
<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah.

00:07:45.540 --> 00:08:10.660  
<v SPEAKER\_2>Not to give the military personnel research and analysis unit within military personnel command more work, but I would love for them to analyze those applications that were dropped out and gauge how many people will have made it at least to the interview rather than desk reject kind of thing.

00:08:10.660 --> 00:08:20.100  
<v SPEAKER\_2>But to go back to the thing that surprised me the most, it's actually the information management system of the recruitment process.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>I made a clip about this earlier today, but the recruitment process operates on eight different databases.

00:08:31.180 --> 00:08:36.780  
<v SPEAKER\_2>Just that piece, even before you get to basic training.

00:08:37.260 --> 00:08:42.580  
<v SPEAKER\_2>And I think that that's a piece that needs to be fixed ASAP.

00:08:42.760 --> 00:08:56.940  
<v SPEAKER\_2>I think that if you follow defence policy and defence culture, you know that the military and the Department of National Defence, or even the rest of the Government of Canada, has some issues with information management.

00:08:56.940 --> 00:09:02.240  
<v SPEAKER\_2>But to that point of silo-ization, I was expecting some of it.

00:09:02.240 --> 00:09:06.680  
<v SPEAKER\_2>To that point, I thought that that was quite shocking.

00:09:06.940 --> 00:09:17.420

<v SPEAKER\_2>From my point of view, especially with the creation of the portal that was so advertised a couple of years ago, that they keep on improving, you think that things would be a lot more centralized.

00:09:18.620 --> 00:09:28.060

<v SPEAKER\_2>I was completely shocked that within military personnel command, there's already so many silos.

00:09:29.380 --> 00:09:41.980

<v SPEAKER\_2>That's something that, thankfully, I got to say, the fact that Prime Minister Carney is very big on modernization, digitization, I think that there's going to be an impetus to fix that.

00:09:41.980 --> 00:10:07.680

<v SPEAKER\_2>But again, the military becomes victim of its own culture, where everything becomes so owned by very small units and the lack of, if not homogenization, like at least coordination at the information management level, that there's a lot of question to ask ourselves as to why this is the case.

00:10:08.300 --> 00:10:19.740

<v SPEAKER\_2>And I don't want to jump to the potential issue of incompetence and rather look at what are some structural and cultural factors that might have led to the civilization of the processes.

00:10:22.520 --> 00:10:28.780

<v SPEAKER\_1>That data was all captured, obviously, before the recent change to compensation.

00:10:30.020 --> 00:10:49.420

<v SPEAKER\_1>As you relay that, I wonder what's going to happen if the intent of that compensation change is successful and the military increases the number of people to be pedantic, to get recruited that are interested in joining the service, because you now got basically a 10 grand a year pay bump on the front end.

00:10:51.480 --> 00:10:56.660

<v SPEAKER\_1>Boy, you wonder if you attract X number thousand more people, what's going to happen to their applications?

00:10:58.080 --> 00:11:16.360

<v SPEAKER\_2>I think that right now at this stage, because even if the compensation package changes happened after the end of the audit, the audit happened quite recently, like finished on March 31st, 2025.

00:11:19.640 --> 00:11:44.280

<v SPEAKER\_2>The military has a massive mountain in front of itself, that at this stage, like if you apply to join the military, because

you saw that there's money coming in and it's very attractive, I suggest people to look at the new pay grades because the military is extremely attractive money-wise now.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>I think that there's going to be a stuck in limbo kind of situation.

00:11:50.880 --> 00:12:08.020

<v SPEAKER\_2>And I hear from people, well, now the military becomes a real career option for me, that I wouldn't hear as much actually, like on the contrary, before I would hear like, why would one join the military and I had to like do a pitch for the military.

00:12:08.500 --> 00:12:10.960

<v SPEAKER\_2>Now, it's like, oh, the money is nice.

00:12:10.960 --> 00:12:12.620

<v SPEAKER\_2>Now tell me more about it.

00:12:12.620 --> 00:12:18.460

<v SPEAKER\_2>So there has been a change of discourse that I've seen over the past couple of months.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So I had made this argument quite a few times that doing all of those measures, opening to permanent residence, increasing the compensation package, we'll talk about housing, but like thinking about new ways of doing housing or building new units, at least, it's good, but it's not fixing the core problem that none of the tools that the military has today, and I want to emphasize that even the strategic intake plan is not made to replenish the ranks of the military at the rate that it needs them.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>It is based on the capacity that the military has to absorb people and recruit them for them to go to basic training and then occupational training.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Right now, the military does not have the tool to help itself get the people that it needs in the ranks and trained as fast as it can.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So even if we hear we've met the strategic intake plan, great, this is unprecedented.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>I want to emphasize that meeting the SIP had not happened

in decades.

00:13:28.180 --> 00:13:32.300

<v SPEAKER\_2>Like for longer than I have been alive, they have been struggling meeting it.

00:13:32.920 --> 00:13:43.580

<v SPEAKER\_2>That being said, it still doesn't not meet the need of the military, it meets its capacity, and its capacity is too low to grow to its goals.

00:13:43.580 --> 00:13:45.140

<v SPEAKER\_2>And that's an issue.

00:13:46.300 --> 00:13:49.740

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00:13:49.740 --> 00:13:52.240

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00:14:01.640 --> 00:14:10.460

<v SPEAKER\_1>And one that has a couple of different applications, because in things that I pay attention to, capacity is limited in the ability to do a bunch of things.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>In the current context, there's an effort with extra money to try and change that.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>But for a long time, the management of spending on maintenance to the national procurement accounts has been managed to executable demand, which has basically been a function of capacity, both in government and the private sector, but uncorrelated with need.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>So it's essentially been a function of what was doable, not what was required or what was needed.

00:14:33.940 --> 00:14:41.180

<v SPEAKER\_1>So it sounds like a similar dynamic with the personnel world to what's happened in terms of another component of readiness.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>We're just looking at a different part of the same blob,

if I can put it in a very uniloquent way.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Yeah, I mean, you and I had those conversations in the past, and I wrote a report for CGAI in 2023 where I was arguing that when we're looking at a single organization, the problems end up being the same.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>They just have different symptoms, let's just say.

00:15:11.080 --> 00:15:18.820

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so when you look at processes, then the through lines and the common threads start emerging.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And this is the piece where I'm getting worried right now in the conversations that we have around increased defense spending.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And actually someone made a comment to me regarding that when on the post that I made about my latest sub-stack on recruitment, people want to see money going towards capabilities, right?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Or towards like increasing combat roles.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>I find that there is a deep misunderstanding of what money going towards administration and processes mean.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>We always assume that it's money being thrown in the trash.

00:16:04.260 --> 00:16:25.140

<v SPEAKER\_2>But even if you create more efficient systems, if you create automation in the processes, if you use AI, you're just going to change the nature of the labor that is going to be done, not how much labor that needs to get done.

00:16:25.140 --> 00:16:36.940

<v SPEAKER\_2>Because for those automation process, and those systems that rely on AI, you need excellent information management.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And so if you don't have excellent information management, then those systems do not have the intended effect.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And that takes time.

00:16:50.100 --> 00:16:53.180

<v SPEAKER\_2>That takes time out of people's work on a daily basis.

00:16:53.860 --> 00:17:03.480

<v SPEAKER\_2>And so we cannot just like reduce money on the tail of the military to increase it in the teeth.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Because a platform that cannot be used by personnel because it's not being maintained properly, the in-service support is not, we don't have the right capabilities or the right capacity and resources for it.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Or even like the right amount of people to do, to push the paperwork for the procurement system.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Obviously, there are inefficiencies in the system.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Don't get me wrong, but we will never get to zero or we will never get to a tooth-to-tail ratio that will be bigger with the teeth and smaller at the tail.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Because for every single pilot that you have for whatever jet we end up buying, you need a person that feeds them.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>You need a person that makes sure that they get paid.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>You need a person that manages their career.

00:17:55.220 --> 00:17:59.880

<v SPEAKER\_2>So then you start creating a trail that is quite significant.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>I think it is important that yeah, the Parliamentary Budget Officer put out a report a couple of years ago outlining that we don't spend that much on direct operational effect.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But we're not looking at anything else like the enablers that they are or the organs of the organization.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So when we're putting money into recruitment or in procurement for that matter, are we putting the money in the right place?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And are we enabling people to do the job that they need to do the best they can?

00:18:32.460 --> 00:18:39.760

<v SPEAKER\_1>So let's pivot and talk about something that's increasingly being focused as one of those enablers that you're talking about, and that's military housing.

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<v SPEAKER\_1>What did the OAG find on the report on housing?

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So to start, I want to say for people who are not that familiar with the way that military housing function, military housing is not your service member.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>You move around, tada, the military gives you housing.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>That's not how it works.

00:19:02.100 --> 00:19:22.360

<v SPEAKER\_2>Right now, it's about 10% of service members that receive housing, and who gets access to what kind of housing, whether it's a residential unit or a type of quarter, depends on where you are in the organization, what the needs for you are, and what the needs for housing are.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Here, we find ourselves in a very similar situation as we have in procurement or in recruitment, is that the capacity doesn't meet the needs.

00:19:33.100 --> 00:19:52.860

<v SPEAKER\_2>The Canadian Forces Housing Agency, which is a special operating agency within the department, keeps on losing units as its portfolio, as years go by, because its portfolio needs to be shed if it's not being used.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Units are not being maintained properly, and it's because inspections are not being done.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Also, right now, the assessment and the requirements that have been defined are based on outdated data.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The last set of requirements for the plans that the agency uses right now were made in 2019, so before the pandemic, when we know that that's really when the housing problem became very much an issue.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>But also, with local housing market availability dating back to 2011, it's a problem.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>And even right now, the investments that were announced by Minister Blair, I don't remember if it was like the spring of 2020, early spring of 2025 or like earlier than that, time is a social construct.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>It's not enough to fill the needs of the organization.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>So it's going to increase the number of units that we need, but it's going to increase the number of units and quarters by around 3,000 when we have over 6,000 people on the wait list to get access to military housing.

00:21:04.920 --> 00:21:09.080

<v SPEAKER\_2>So it's kind of same, same, but different right now.

00:21:09.660 --> 00:21:29.080

<v SPEAKER\_2>And given the situation with the housing market, but also the declining state of the units that need to be renovated, but not enough time and not enough money to renovate them, we find ourselves within what I would describe a military housing crisis within a Canadian housing crisis.

00:21:29.080 --> 00:21:43.300

<v SPEAKER\_1>I guess that this isn't something that the OAG got into in these reports, but do you have any kind of sense of what the expectation is of the impact, as we talked about a minute ago, on the compensation change, on the requirement for military housing?

00:21:43.640 --> 00:21:55.660

<v SPEAKER\_1>What, is there any anticipation of what that would actually do to change demand one way or the other in terms of the number of service persons that are looking to get access to this kind of housing?

00:21:55.660 --> 00:21:58.960

<v SPEAKER\_2>That's an excellent question, and that's something that I've been asking myself.

00:22:00.920 --> 00:22:19.820

<v SPEAKER\_2>The Auditor General knew, it seems that in the report, it seems that they knew that the compensation package will be changed because something about the housing differential, which is the financial support that service member will get, will be changing.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>Quickly, the way that the military charges service member who have access to a residential unit met or military housing, let's say.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The goal is for people not to pay over 25% of their gross compensation on housing, and that's also the goal of the housing differential.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>The compensation package means that people have more power of purchase, power of the purse.

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<v SPEAKER\_2>My brain only knows the term in French.

00:22:55.600 --> 00:23:11.400

<v SPEAKER\_2>I'm doing a gross translation, but that means that they will, they are more likely to want to go on the local market because they can afford it, and also on average, it's much better quality.

00:23:11.400 --> 00:23:34.760

<v SPEAKER\_2>Then where it becomes a little bit more tense, it's in places where housing is not available, and there might be some changes in that dynamic, but the report did not get into enough of the nitty-gritty of the housing availability, the military housing availability versus local market availability.

00:23:34.760 --> 00:23:49.600

<v SPEAKER\_2>And I had a good chat with the housing agency CEO at one of the roundtables that we did on defence infrastructure, but I gotta say I haven't looked that deeply to look at the market tendencies and how we could change.

00:23:50.660 --> 00:23:51.220

<v SPEAKER\_1>Okay.

00:23:51.220 --> 00:23:57.280

<v SPEAKER\_1>Well, Charlotte, thanks for taking the time to walk listeners through the two recent audits by the Auditor General.

00:23:57.280 --> 00:23:58.780

<v SPEAKER\_1>Last question to you.

00:23:58.780 --> 00:23:59.720

<v SPEAKER\_1>What are you reading?

00:23:59.720 --> 00:24:04.980

<v SPEAKER\_2>So right now I'm reading the archives of the Commission of Somalia Inquiry.

00:24:04.980 --> 00:24:12.920

<v SPEAKER\_2>So like the latest I was reading on the train is a report about racism in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1993.

00:24:12.920 --> 00:24:16.080

<v SPEAKER\_2>So as to not lose my mind, I crochet a lot.

00:24:16.200 --> 00:24:21.820

<v SPEAKER\_2>And right now I'm crocheting a scarf from yarn that a friend of mine brought me from Norway.

00:24:21.820 --> 00:24:24.340

<v SPEAKER\_2>So, you know, little things.

00:24:24.340 --> 00:24:27.620

<v SPEAKER\_1>Alright, thanks a lot for joining us again on Defence Deconstructed.

00:24:27.620 --> 00:24:29.460

<v SPEAKER\_2>My pleasure.

00:24:29.460 --> 00:24:31.660

<v SPEAKER\_1>Thanks for listening to Defence Deconstructed.

00:24:31.660 --> 00:24:37.120

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00:24:37.120 --> 00:24:43.140

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00:24:43.740 --> 00:24:46.320

<v SPEAKER\_1>Defence Deconstructed is brought to you by our team in Ottawa.

00:24:46.320 --> 00:24:49.980

<v SPEAKER\_1>Music credits go to Drew Phillips, and this episode was produced by Jordyn Carroll.