



## Call for Papers: Military Labour History at the ELHN Conference, 2026

This is a call for abstracts for the Military Labour History Working Group (MLHWG) panels at the 6<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Labour History Network (ELHN), to be held at the University of Barcelona, Spain, **16-19 June 2026**. See the following link for further information on the conference: <https://socialhistoryportal.org/elhn/conference-2026>. A full website for the conference will be available soon. To find out more about the MLHWG, [visit our webpage](#).

Registration to the ELHN Conference is expected to open in February 2026. More details will follow. Costs of registration, travel and subsistence are at the expense of the participants. There will be a reduced registration fee for students and scholars without institutional affiliation. If you have an urgent request, please contact the ELHN at [elhn@iisg.nl](mailto:elhn@iisg.nl).

Before submitting an abstract for the MLHWG panels, please note the following:

- I. *This is an in-person conference only.* Please ensure you can travel to Barcelona for the conference.
- II. *We cannot offer funding support.* Please ensure you have access to other funding sources to support your attendance.
- III. *We have a limited number of positions available on the panels.* There are a large number of Working Group panels to be accommodated at the conference.
- IV. *The MLHWG coordinators reserve the right to make adjustments to the panels, including themes,* in response to the number and type of received submissions.

At the ELHN 2026 Conference, the MLHWG will run a series of panel sessions related to both planned projects on military labour history and several themes nominated by the coordinators and WG members. We plan the following five panel sessions with paper presentations:

### 1. Military Labour in the Early Modern Era

The military profession underwent drastic changes during the early modern era. Armies grew dramatically, war became increasingly commercialised, and a transnational military labour force emerged. Despite the pivotal nature of this period, much of the focus of historical studies of military labour have focused on developments after the French revolution, rather than the preceding centuries. Related to an ongoing WG project, this panel seeks to build upon the discussions at the ELHN Uppsala conference 2024, bring focus to this relatively neglected period, and investigate continuity and change in military labour during the early modern period. Topics to be discussed may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ❖ Socio-cultural changes in the military profession: from warriors to salaried soldiers.
- ❖ Aspects and concepts in the professionalisation of warfare.
- ❖ Emergence and functioning of the international military labour market.
- ❖ Employer-labour relations and proletarianisation of the work force.



## **2. Indigenous Military Labour (joint panel with Arctic and Indigenous Labour WG)**

First Nations people have been faced with the military invasion of their lands and have contributed towards the military labour of those settler nations. In response to the former, they adapted their own military strategies to face a new type of enemy. In relation to the latter, Indigenous men and women have contributed to imperial wars, world wars, and cold wars and more. Despite doing so, they have continued to face discrimination within settler nations' forces and in wider society. This panel proposes to examine Indigenous contributions to military labour and the ways military labour can intersect with rights activism, including but not limited to the following:

- ❖ Indigenous concepts of military labour.
- ❖ Recruitment, including prevention of acceptance into forces.
- ❖ Conscript and exclusion, including the right to self-determination.
- ❖ Roles and skills, including bringing Indigenous knowledges to military labour.
- ❖ Personal experiences, including gendered experiences of military labour.
- ❖ Protest, including rights activism during and after service.

## **3. Organising Soldiers: Unionisation, Collective Bargaining, and Activism**

This session explores the ways in which soldiers have collectively organised to influence their working conditions, reform the military from within, and drive broader social change. A key focus will be on situating soldiers' collective action within the broader framework of labour history. The session will explore how military service intersects with labour rights, industrial action, and workplace organising, highlighting the position of soldiers as both military workers and state agents. Through this lens, we seek to deepen our understanding of how soldiers have navigated the tensions between discipline, duty, and labour activism to shape their conditions of service and contribute to wider struggles for workers' rights and social justice.

Against this backdrop, we welcome papers examining diverse form of soldier organising and activism, including but not limited to unionisation efforts, collective bargaining initiatives, soldiers' councils, mutinies, strikes, informal resistance networks, and transnational dimensions of military labour. We also encourage papers that explore the intersections of gender, race, and class in shaping soldier activism, as well as the relationships between conscript associations and the broader labour movement.

## **4. Social Constructions and Divisions of Military Labour**

Military labour is highly organised by markers such as class, gender, service, age, and rank. In turn, this can affect social status and prestige in civil society. This panel aims to look at the different ways that military labour is socially constructed and mediated, especially in terms of social prestige. This may include, but is not limited to, the following:



- ❖ The status of conscripts and reservists vis-à-vis regular military forces.
- ❖ Relationships and differences between army, navy and air force.
- ❖ The status of civilian workers in the military.
- ❖ Gender, identity and military labour.
- ❖ Race, ethnicity and military labour.

## 5. Labour, Coercion and the Military (this is joint panel with Labour and Coercion WG and has a different submission deadline of 7 July 2025)

In recent years, the military has been firmly established as a site of labour, and military labour history thus claimed its place within labour history. However, even though work related to war and the military is widely known to have included a significant amount of coercion, the interplay between work, coercion and punishment when it comes to the military and its actors has limited systematic research. This panel therefore aims to bring together research highlighting the connection between these dynamics – that is, how coercion was practiced, experienced and resisted when it came to the military throughout history. We employ a broad definition of military labour, including military service itself, but also – among others – work in infrastructure, transport workers, care and medical labour, women’s work in the military, convict labour. At the same time, we want to highlight that coercion is not a characteristic only of specific forms of labour relations, but a dynamic inscribed into multiple social relations. We especially want to highlight the following aspects of the complex relationship between labour, coercion and the military:

- ❖ Entering the military: Coercion in processes of military recruitment (e.g. forced recruitment, the recruitment of marginalised groups such as beggars and vagrants, but also systems of slavery, and the dynamics of coercion underlying the “voluntary” recruitment).
- ❖ Being punished through the military: the entanglement of the military and systems of punishment, focusing on the legitimacy of power and the control of bodies deemed reformable by punitive justice enforced through the military institutions (e.g. galley service, penal battalions, war captivity, or other punishment forms).
- ❖ Leaving the military: soldiers’ agency and ways of leaving the military (e.g. desertion, escapes, strategies to get discharged, invalidity).
- ❖ Surviving after the military: practices of work, coercion and (im)mobilisation of former soldiers and their families (e.g. entanglements of military labour, poor relief and the criminalisation of begging or vagrancy).

Papers from any geographical area welcome.



Submit your **300-word abstract** to the MLHWG coordinators via [militarylabourhistory@gmail.com](mailto:militarylabourhistory@gmail.com) by **7 July for the Labour, Coercion and the Military panel only** and **1 September 2025 for the other panels**. We will advise you of the outcome by the end of October 2025.

Please send the following information to the WG coordinators:

1. **Your name** and any institutional affiliation, where relevant.
2. The **name of the panel** for which you are nominating your paper. (If your paper is relevant to more than one panel theme, you may nominate these in order of preference.)
3. The **title** of your presentation.
4. An **abstract** of 300 words.
5. A **short bio** of up to 200 words and, optionally, a web bio or ORCID link.
6. Confirmation that you understand this is an in-person conference only.

Regards,

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