

## VOJAŠKE DRUŽINE V ESTONIJI, NA ŠVEDSKEM IN V SLOVENIJI: PODOBNOSTI IN RAZLIKE

### MILITARY FAMILIES IN ESTONIA, SLOVENIA AND SWEDEN – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

**Povzetek** Koncept vojaške družine je prepoznan in preučevan v mednarodnem akademskem ter raziskovalnem okolju, ni pa primerljivo uporabljan v različnih državah. Namen članka je razpravljati in razvijati koncept »vojaških družin« ter analizirati situacije, s katerimi se te družine spoprijemajo v vsakodnevnem življenju v Estoniji, Sloveniji in na Švedskem. Osvetlili smo nekatere podobnosti in razlike, ki izhajajo iz kulturnih, družbenih in vojaških posebnosti posamezne države. Naštete vplivajo in sooblikujejo identifikacijo družine kot vojaške ter tudi prepoznavanje družine kot vojaške v širši družbi. Slednje vpliva tudi na razvoj in obliko podpore ter storitev, namenjenih vojaškim družinam v posamezni državi.

**Ključne besede** *Vojaška družina, socialna podpora in storitve, Estonija, Švedska, Slovenija.*

**Abstract** The concept “military family” is very well known in the international academic sphere, but is not a widely used term in many countries. The aim of this article is to elaborate the concept of the military family and the situation of these families in Estonia, Slovenia and Sweden. The similarities and differences between these three countries are highlighted by showing how the cultural, social and military context may influence and shape the recognition of military families, services and support provision.

**Key words** *Military family, services and social support, Estonia, Sweden, Slovenia.*

## Introduction

In recent years, many European countries have had to reconsider their militaries due to the events in Georgia and Ukraine. Besides the more insecure political situation and the new threats from terrorism and cyber-attacks, in general society and its institutions are continually transforming. In this rapidly changing context the question of the meaning and the stability of the institutions arises. Military sociologists have devoted extensive attention to the changes in military institutions and their associations with other institutions situated in the civilian sphere: the political system, the family, the labour market, the educational system. The well-known sociological concept of “greedy institutions” by Coser (1974) has given ground for military sociologists to emphasize the fact that the military and the family are institutions that put high demands on individuals’ commitment, time, loyalty and energy (Segal, 1986). Later, the third institution – civilian employment – was highlighted in the case of reservists (Edmunds, Dawes, Higate, Jenkins and Woodward, 2016). Following this differentiation of institutions, several theoretical and conceptual approaches have been developed. Beginning from a “military-civilian gap” approach, which emphasizes the division between the military and the civilian worlds (Rahbek-Clemmensen, Archer, Barr et al., 2012), the transmigration concept (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2007), transition theory (Castro and Dursun, 2019) and finally civil-military entanglements (Refslund Sørensen and Ben-Ari, 2019), are only a few examples to be highlighted.

Moelker, Andres and Ronés (2019) propose a triadic figuration approach to understanding modern military families. The triad of the ‘state’, the ‘armed forces’, and the ‘family’ are interdependent and can be elaborated at the societal, organizational and family levels. Due to their interdependence, a change in one sphere will cause changes in the other spheres. For instance, the shift from an institutional to an occupational approach to service in the armed forces (Moskos, 1977) could have influences on families, which are removed from the military community in situations where the military has progressed towards professions (Moelker, Andres and Ronés, 2019, p 11). Thus, the concept of the “military family” is constantly changing, and may have different connotations at different times and in different places. In the international academic sphere of military sociology, the concept of the “military family” is widely applied; however, recently scholars have begun to point out that the concept of a “military family” is not very common or used in every country (Gribble, Mahar, Godfrey and Muir, 2018; Truusa and Kasearu, 2019; Olsson and Olsson, 2019). In Estonia, the spouses and partners of military personnel do not identify themselves as a special type of family, and do not use a term like this (Truusa and Kasearu, 2019). Olsson and Olsson came to a similar conclusion in the case of Swedish families, stating, “*instead of being part of the military system, the families position themselves as outsiders*” (2019, p 263).

In this paper, we will explore how in European countries, particularly in Estonia, Sweden and Slovenia, the concept of “military families” is constructed, applied and elaborated within the framework of the triangle of the military, the state, and the family, and what kind of social programs families are entitled to. We follow

the assumption that the position of families with one or more members serving in the military, and whether this family is perceived to belong to the civilian or the military sphere, is shaped by the context of the welfare state, the development of the military system, and cultural and normative family ideology. As stated by Kasearu and Olsson (2019), the military and civilian spheres divide the obligation to support the wellbeing of children from military families, depending on the context of the welfare regime.

The idea of embeddedness is recently a widely used approach for different projects (e.g. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019) and theories (Fossey, Cooper and Raid, 2019). Fossey et al.'s (2019, p 193) *Military Family Systems Model* (MFSM) is analogous with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model – the military family is seen as a microsystem, the military as an exosystem, and society as Bronfenbrenner's cultural macrosystem. Based on two axes, external threat and internal stability, they differentiate between four types of systems: full conscription, a volunteer force, an army of occupation and civil war. Fossey et al. suggest that the first two are more widespread and characteristic of NATO countries. With regard to full conscription, "the military and, by default, the military family, are closely bound with society and there is an intimate mutuality of experiences and expectations" (Fossey et al., 2019, p 194); however, in volunteer militaries the bond between the military family and the military is partial, and comprises a smaller subset of society. In this paper, we will concentrate on the question of how society and defence forces construct military families and design and implement policy measures intended for these families. More precisely, we ask how the Estonian, Slovenian and Swedish military systems and position of military families is in accordance with the two types of Fossey et al.'s MFSM.

## 1 CHANGING FAMILY AND CHANGING MILITARY

Scholars have questioned the conceptualization of "the family" (Bernardes, 1999; Trost, 1990; Gubrium and Holstein, 1990) for more than 30 years, and we have witnessed how the family could no longer be equated only with heterosexual married couples who conceive children within wedlock. Unmarried cohabitation has spread (Kasearu and Kutsar, 2011; Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2014) and single-parent families, same-sex couples and reconstituted families are more visible and recognized than ever before (Scherpe, 2013; Oláh, 2015). The legal ground of defining "family" has thus been replaced by the individual construction and identification of the family unit, which means that the definition of "the family" is continually being deconstructed and newly created by individuals (Raid and Kasearu, 2017) on the one hand, and on the other by professionals in social service organizations (Gümüscü, Khoo and Nygren, 2014) and by different social and cultural expectations (Fossey, Cooper and Raid, 2019). These new forms of families are also encountered in the military, and highlight new aspects of reconciliation between military and family life (De Angelis, Smith and Segal, 2018; Eran-Jona and Aviram, 2019; Skomorovsky,

Bullock and Wan 2019). For this reason, focusing on the question of the relationship between the family and the military, the fluidity of the family must first be considered.

Against this background, the military institution is also changing. The classical approaches of military professionalism (Huntington, 1957), civilianization of the military (Janowitz, 1960) and the institutional/occupational thesis (Moskos, 1977) have highlighted the constant changes within the military and the military institution. These approaches assist in explaining the variance between different countries and their military systems. According to Nolte (2003), European military law systems vary greatly according to the civilianization of the armed forces; for instance, on the basis of whether military personnel are seen as regular employees whose contracts are very similar to the civil service, or as representatives of a very demanding profession. Moreover, military sociology follows the assumption that the military is a subset of society, and is primarily determined by the socio-political system (the welfare regime) in which the military is embedded (Callaghan and Kernic, 2003; Kasearu and Olsson, 2019). This embeddedness thus shapes how the state, the military and the family divide and combine the obligations and responsibilities to support their members' wellbeing. Mittelstadt (2015) claims that in the United States the transformation from conscription to an all-volunteer force was followed by an expansion of military benefits, which were boosted by the retrenchment of social welfare benefits in the civilian sector. Mark Olson (2016) questioned this conclusion by pointing out that in the military the system of provisions and entitlements of military members exists as a means of recruitment, retention, and compensation. Olson points out that support for military personnel is initiated by two premises: to help cope with the specific challenges of military life, and to demonstrate general societal support for those who are fighting for their country.

To conclude, these two ideas – the embeddedness of the military in a social system, and entitlements as means of compensation, create an analytical framework to elaborate the meaning, position of and provision for military families in Estonia, Slovenia and Sweden.

## 1.1 Estonia, Slovenia and Sweden – similar or different?

These three countries have some similarities but in many ways they are also quite different. We will briefly point out the main similarities and differences in three domains: the family, the military and the state. According to the demographic family profile, the countries are quite similar: in 2018, the crude marriage rate in Sweden was 5.2 and Estonia 4.9; Slovenia showed the lowest rate at 3.1. The mean age at marriage for men varied from 32.2 years in Estonia and 32.6 years in Slovenia to 36.3 years (2018) in Sweden. In contrast women marry a bit younger, from 30 years in Slovenia to 33.9 years in Sweden. In 2017, the total fertility rate was highest in Sweden – 1.78, followed by Slovenia (1.61) and Estonia (1.59). The proportion of live births outside marriage differs by only 4 percentage points across the countries; in Sweden it is 54% and both in Estonia and Slovenia around 58%. This suggests

that in all three countries, unmarried cohabitation is widespread, marriages are postponed, and replacement-level fertility is not being reached.

Women’s educational attainment is another variable that can be used to describe the sociocultural status of families in a given society. Of course there are no direct causal relationships between women’s educational attainment and demographic characteristics (e.g. nuptiality, birth rate, age at first birth, divorce rate etc.) but one could say that these processes are interrelated and the variable of educational attainment can be used to describe the position of the family in a society (Parvazian et al., 2017, p 10). As can be seen in Table 1, with regard to tertiary education attainment the three countries under observation are quite similar. Sweden has the highest proportion of both employed and unemployed, followed by Estonia and Slovenia. However, in all three countries the employment rate for women is above the average rate of the European Union; thus, the countries clearly represent the dual-earner family type.

**Table 1:**  
Population  
by tertiary  
educational  
attainment,  
employment and  
unemployment  
levels by gender  
(Eurostat 2020)

		Estonia	Sweden	Slovenia
Population by tertiary educational attainment level, gender and age group 30-34 in 2017	Women	57.5%	59%	56.3%
	Men	37.7%	45%	31.6%
Population in age group 15-64 by proportion of employed in 2018	Women	71.4%	75.9%	67.5%
	Men	78.1%	78.8%	74.5%
Active population by proportion of unemployed in 2018	Women	5.3%	6.2%	5.7%
	Men	5.4%	6.4%	4.6%

Although their demographic profiles are similar, the cultural and social context is rather different. Slovenian society is known for cross-generational cooperation and strong family ties, which places Slovenian families in the Mediterranean cultural model (Kuhar, 2011). The majority of Slovenian families live near their extended families and the third generation (grandparents) very actively support families on a daily basis (e.g., Kuhar, 2011; Renner et al., 2006, etc.). In Estonia, but even more in Sweden, the likelihood that mothers mainly rely on grandparents to provide childcare is low (Jappens and Bavel, 2012). At the same time, research results in Sweden indicate that grandparents at different life stages have an increased likelihood of retirement compared with non-grandparents, and the more complex the family situation, the greater the likelihood of grandparents’ retirement (Kridahl, 2017). Thus, help from grandparents depends on the needs of the family, and in this regard, military-connected families may have a greater need for support from their extended families.

Alongside informal support, there are several benefits in all three countries offering a positive environment for parents to develop a quality relationship with their children (e.g. maternity, parental, paternity leaves), and in comparison with other European countries, the time off and benefits are rather generous (Thévenon and Neyer, 2014). Moreover, in all three countries the dual-earner family model prevails, and the state provides a strong public network for childcare, which enables both mothers and fathers to go back to work relatively soon after the birth of a child<sup>1</sup>. The main differences in the family sphere are related to family values and gender equality. Sweden is far ahead according to the gender equality index and work-life balance; Slovenia is slightly above the European Union level and Estonia below it (EIGE, 2019). Likewise, previous studies have shown that, within the family, couples perceive their work-life balance and arrange their everyday lives differently in Sweden than in Slovenia and Estonia (Kasearu, 2009). The described societal context is in accordance with the military sphere – the proportion of women in the military is higher in Sweden and Slovenia than in Estonia. Furthermore, since 2018 Sweden has reintroduced conscription. It is a gender-neutral conscription; for the first time in the nation's history, both women and men are compulsorily enlisted in the military (Persson and Sundevall, 2019). Slovenia moved from a compulsory to a professional armed forces in 2003, and around 16% of the service members in the Slovenian Armed Forces are women. In Estonia, conscription is only compulsory for male citizens; the proportion of volunteer female conscripts depends on the year, between 1.5-3% of all conscripts, and the proportion of women in active service is around 9% (Siplane, 2017).

In addition, in all three countries there is a public educational system enabling people to acquire up to a university degree free of charge, and there is a public health system available to every person in the country. Thus, in these three countries the military as an institution is situated in the context of a universal welfare system, which may not leave many reasons for the military to develop their own social welfare system and social support programs.

## 1.2 The military family – an undefined concept?

The three countries have a very similar approach to the concept of the military family – it is not common or recognized in these countries. The family is mostly seen to belong to the civilian world, and the link with the military is made through the family member who is employed in the forces. In Slovenia, the project *Military Specific Risk and Protective Factors for Military Family Health Outcomes* used the United

<sup>1</sup> In Slovenia childcare is provided once the child is 11, in Sweden 12 and in Estonia 18 months old. However, there are some differences. In Estonia and Slovenia, all children have the right to a place in a kindergarten (European Commission: EURYDICE). [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-educationandcare-77\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-educationandcare-77_en).

In Sweden the amount of time is limited to 15 hours a week when the child's parent is out of work (jobless) or on leave for care of another child in the family. When the parents are working or studying, required childcare should be provided for the child and the family. All children, irrespective of the situation of their parents, are entitled to free preschool for at least 525 hours per year from the autumn term after they have turned three years old (2010b. The Education Act. SFS 2010:800 changed SFS 2019:410. Sweden).

Nations definition: a family comprises at least one or more adults taking care of a child/children (Švab, 2010). The military family is defined by adding the criterion that one of the parents/caregivers must be a member of the Slovenian Armed Forces to classify the family as a military family. The concept of the military family is not recognized in Sweden either (Olsson, 2018). The families neither talk nor recognize themselves as military, nor use an expression common in historical times: in Swedish the *soldatfamilj*, the soldier's family. In Estonia, the military family has a historical connotation; Soviet officers' families were a separate category, which still – 25 years after Soviet troops moved out of Estonia – sustains its influence in the mindset of older generations (Truusa and Kasearu, 2019).

Today, in all three countries, families usually have dual earners with dual careers trying to achieve equality between the grown-ups in the family (see Table 1). The profession of one (or several) of the family members does not automatically lead to a whole family's identification with any of the professions in question. When asked, the families talk about themselves as families with a family member employed in "the military" – the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF), the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) or the Slovenian Armed Forces (Slovenian AF).

However, due to the general changes in the understanding the "*What is the family*" and "*Who belongs to the family*" in society, the armed forces must reconsider the definitions and adapt to new situations (see also Fossey et al., 2019). Primarily, the need to draw borders arises in the case of the provision of support and services. In Sweden, everybody who identify themselves as having a close relationship with a deployed employee of the Swedish AF can have part of the available support (SAF, 2018a). In Swedish, an umbrella term for people in a close mutual relationship is *anhörig* (in Danish and Norwegian *pårørende*). This Nordic extended meaning in the use of the concept *anhörig/pårørende* seems to produce a more limited circle of family members or next of kin when translated to the English "family" or "kinship". In Estonia, the main responsibility for the identification of family members is granted to the person involved in the military. For example, before their deployment soldiers indicate the recipient who, in the event of service-related injury or death, will receive 50% of the compensation, while the other 50% will be shared between those who have legal (widow) or biological links (children, mother, father) (Estonian Military Service Act § 197 RT I, 10.07.2012, 1). In Slovenia the normative frame for the military family is limited to the spouse (either married or not, including registered same-sex partnerships) and children (biological, adopted or stepchildren) (Slovenian Military Service Act, article 76, 2007). The latter reveals that service members' parents are not defined as part of the military family; the law excludes the extended family from its definition.

These are clear examples of how the military has solved the problem of the looseness of the concept of "the family" and adapted to new forms of families (unmarried cohabitations, same-sex couples etc.) in their legislation.

## 2 SPECIAL SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES IN A SOCIETAL CONTEXT

Next, we will describe how the EDF and Slovenian and Swedish AF-s are approaching families with a member in the military, and how the support and services for these families have been developed. Thus, we follow the idea of embeddedness and describe the developments in a societal context.

### 2.1 The case of Slovenia: a deployment-centred approach

In Slovenia, the basic legal act is the Defence Act, originally adopted in 1994 and modified several times since, and the Military Service Act adopted in 2007<sup>2</sup>. Military families are mentioned when defining financial reimbursements, and funeral costs and a pension for a spouse and children in the event of the death of a service member while on duty. The Military Service Act was adopted after compulsory military service was abolished, and the provision of support was oriented towards professional service members and their families. The Act defines various types of support, but the following are relevant to military families:<sup>3</sup>

1. Health support, but only as an addition to the aforementioned Slovenian civilian public health system;
2. Psychological support for service members and their families during various phases of deployment to operations abroad;
3. Religious support<sup>4</sup> available to all family members (e.g. christening of children, Christian wedding, consoling, etc.);
4. Sports and free time activities available to the whole family (e.g. fitness centre available to family members in the military barracks, summer camps for children from military families, holiday facilities at various locations around Slovenia, etc.)
5. Low-cost military apartment rental for service members, if their post is more than 60 km from their current residence. However, since Slovenian service members would rather commute daily than relocate, this benefit is not widely used.

The Act also foresees financial support for family members of service personnel occupying peacetime posts abroad (e.g. a financial contribution for an unemployed spouse and children; employers must allow the spouse to join the service member when deployed on a peacetime post abroad, if the spouse's job is in the public sector, etc.).

Besides the official support foreseen in legal Acts, an important place is occupied by the extended family or community's emotional and practical support (Vuga et al.,

<sup>2</sup> *Afterwards certain additional documents for specific subfields were adopted within the military (e.g. psychological support, communication during deployment, etc.).*

<sup>3</sup> *See more on this in the article in this edition by Ljubica Jelušič, Julija Jelušič Južnič and Jelena Juvan.*

<sup>4</sup> *See more on this in the article in this edition by Matej Jakopič.*

2013b). Since Slovenian families tend to make their homes once and remain there for a lifetime, they make close and deep social ties in the community. This offers them various kinds of support when required (e.g. during deployment or in other stressful situations).

## 2.2 The case of Sweden: Non-profit voluntary organizations

It is only in recent years that the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) have recognized and developed social support for the families of military personnel. This grew in volume with the task of bringing the decision in 2010 by the Swedish parliament, the Act of Swedish Armed Forces Personnel in International Military Operations (2010a), into effect. The SAF must have coherent planning for their work with their families as a whole, and provide support in the form of information to families/next-of-kin of employees serving in an international military deployment. Notice that the Act specifies international military deployment, not national commissions or replacements. Long-distance commuting is rapidly increasing in Sweden, as well as other commuting flows (Andersson, Lavesson and Niedomysl, 2018).

To accomplish the development of appropriate actions of support, the SAF began to collaborate with and give financial support to idea-based non-profit organizations involved with the military, addressing families and individuals that are or have been deployed or are in the tangent of deployment. Through this the SAF provide support with a preventive and mobilizing orientation adapted to what is required, in time complementing what the Swedish welfare system offers to everybody in Sweden. The support of the soldier's family is an important part of ensuring soldiers manage to combine being a caring family member with being a deployed soldier with a focus on their commission.

The SAF organize family support with local military family support coordinators as a base; invite people to events such as family gatherings before, during and after international deployment; and publish web-based family information (SAF, 2019), involving families and/or individual family members giving support in different forms provided by non-profit and voluntary organizations (NPVO). These member organizations are run by and for soldiers and veterans (officers and servicemen – employees and previous employees of SAF) and their family members, making their voices heard, co-creating joint communities and providing preventive support, as well as stepping in to help.

For example, the Swedish Soldiers' Home Association provides professional therapeutic and social support as well as a "Preparation and Relationship Education/Enhancement Programme (PREP)", which offers educational and preventive measures for couples. PREP began to be adjusted to the Nordic context in Norway in 1998 by the Family Relations Centre (FRC) (Thuen & Tafjord Lærum 2005), and was later adapted to the Danish context (2010) and Sweden (2015) (Kildehuset kurs og kompetansesenter Modul Bad Gordon Johnsens Stiftelse, 2017). PREP has been evaluated in Denmark (Loft, 2014, Pollman, Hartmann-Madsen and Vedtofte, 2016).

In Sweden, in the context of international military deployments, the PREP has been found to be highly valued by participants<sup>5</sup> (Olsson, 2019).

Another example of an involved NPVO is the organization *Invidzonen*, mainly a web-based network of family members, offering flexible support to partners, children and parents of soldiers/officers/service personnel, including support for deployed family members in their role as family member (Invidzonen, 2018). Within “the Family Zone” of Invidzonen, family gatherings are arranged with a focus on the children, and, for instance, coaching support for parents and children is offered. Other examples are the Swedish Veteran Federation (SVF) (Svenska Veteranförbundet Fredsbaskrarna, 2019) and the Swedish Military Comrades’ Association (SMKR) (Sveriges Militära Kamratföreningars Riksförbund, 2017), both offering support to military employees and veterans, including in their role as family members. All these organizations collaborate, and family members are guided to get advised support from within this collaboration.

Soldiers/parents deployed abroad with young children (up to 18, and up to 20 years old if studying), have the right to compensation for additional costs at home (approximately 320 euros per month) and for children at home (425 euros per month). In recent years political initiatives in Sweden, such as tax deductions for household services, have created a private market for care services. This has made it possible for families to hire cheap care labour, such as domestic care work like cleaning or babysitting and childcare, including in the form of nannies and au pairs (Eldén & Anving, 2016). These opportunities are also available for families with a deployed family member, using the additional financial compensation to buy care and household services, which increases their independence (Olsson, 2019).

According to the Act of Swedish Armed Forces Personnel in International Military Operations (2010a), financial support for family members is also provided in the following circumstances: if a person serving in an international military deployment is injured and needs hospital care or dies or is killed, the SAF reimburses, at a family member’s application, a reasonable number of trips to the injured or dead person. Subsistence and the time taken on these trips are reimbursed on the same grounds as applications for reimbursement of witnesses by public funds. If a family member’s presence is of particular importance for the injured person’s rehabilitation, the SAF will, on application, give that family member reasonable reimbursement for the costs which such a presence entails. The SAF may also otherwise make such a contribution if there are special reasons for doing so; for example, a reasonable contribution to the costs of psychosocial support to families/next-of-kin relatives who need it, where it seems reasonable in view of other aspects of the circumstances.

<sup>5</sup> *Seventeen couples were interviewed about their participation in PREP. The participating couples found PREP helped to relieve pressure in the context of deployment, improving their mutual communication and awareness of how they interacted and their mutual responsiveness. They recommended that other couples approaching deployments participate.*

### 2.3 The case of Estonia: inclusiveness and exclusiveness

In Estonia, similar to Slovenia, the family of military personnel come on the scene in association with international deployments within the framework of international operations and missions. The families of deployed service members have access to a restricted website, which provides up-to-date information, counselling, feedback and a chat room (Siplane, 2015, p 22) and, after the deployment, the families have the option of a weekend stay at a wellness centre. The aim is to support the reunion of the family members after the deployment.

Besides deployments, according to the Estonian Military Service Act, the family is mentioned in the case of compensation for resettlement to a peacetime post in another local government department. However, most support for family members or an appointed person (usually an unmarried partner) is regulated in the situation of injury or death of the service member. Paragraph 9 in the Act of Regulation on Covering Expenses for Medical Treatment in Case of Service-related Injury speaks about situations where treatment abroad is required (for example, in the case of some specific surgery); then the expenses of a chaperon are covered by the EDF (RT I, 22.03.2013, 22). The chaperon is usually a family member. The same applies to compensation in the event of service-related injury or death, and in the medical treatment of a service member who is still in service.

To sum up, the Estonian approach to military families is quite structured and hierarchical. The system could be described as a welfare pyramid, which means that the largest group in the military sphere forms the bottom of the pyramid – the reserve forces and their families. At the top of the pyramid are the fallen soldiers and their families. These families are eligible for different psychological and material support, and this group is the smallest. In the middle of the pyramid are different types of veterans: deployment, service leavers, and retired veterans.

**Table 2:**  
Welfare  
pyramid of EDF  
members and  
their families

Group	Approx. number of people	Services and benefits for the families
Reservists	80,000	None (while in reserve)
Conscripts	3300	Conscript's child's benefit (300 EUR per month)
Professionals	3300	Social and psychological counselling, 24h helpline
Deployment veterans	3100	Social and psychological counselling, 24h helpline, family reunion programme, housing programme
Service leavers (veterans)	1600	Social and psychological counselling, 24h helpline, housing programme
Retired veterans	800	Social and psychological counselling, 24h helpline, housing programme
Wounded veterans	80	Social and psychological counselling, 24h helpline, housing programme, family support programme
Fallen soldiers	36	Social and psychological counselling, rehabilitation, survivors' pension, lump sum compensation, family support programme

Thus, in the case of Estonia, families with a member involved in the military are defined and entitled to services depending on the type of the involvement. As a rule, the bigger the group, the less generous the military-provided welfare package is. The family is seen to belong to the civilian sphere and the responsibility for the wellbeing of the family is granted by the general welfare system.

## Discussion and conclusion

The military family is not a widely used concept in the context of Swedish, Estonian and Slovenian society. Looking at the three countries, we can see both similarities and differences. First, due to the overall changes in the concept of “the family” and the spread of new family forms, the military has also had to face the new situation. In this regard, all three countries are in one way quite similar – unmarried cohabitations are widespread – but the legal context is different. In Sweden, the relationships of unmarried couples are regulated by a gender-neutral act – the Cohabitees Act (adopted in 2003, 376). In Estonia and Slovenia, the legal recognition of unmarried heterosexual couples is not so clearly defined<sup>6</sup>. In Estonia, the Family Act is mostly centred around the biological ties between children and parents, and cohabiting partners determine their relationship and union through everyday life practices, for example, taking out a bank loan together. The EDF has taken this approach and modified its legislation towards the idea that service members themselves define and identify who belongs to their families besides children and parents.

We can thus see how the military has accommodated the vagueness of the family, but on the other hand, we can also witness that the family is seen rather as belonging to the civilian realm, and the term “military family” is an imported concept. The first Swedish paper about military families was written after an educational (study) visit to Canada (Weibull, 2009). This was then the only Swedish publication about military families, and was a contribution to motivating the legislation in 2010. In Slovenia and Estonia, the idea of the military and the family as greedy institutions was introduced at around the same time (Juvan, 2009; Vuga and Juvan, 2013a; Kasearu, 2015). Thus, the concept of the military family is applied in academic spheres or for highlighting the peculiarity of families with a member in the military, rather than being a generally used term.

In all three countries the specific demands the military places on its service members and indirectly on their families are considered. However, the scope and extent of the support programmes and services varies. Swedish military family support has *a complementary and mobilizing orientation*. The support needs to be varied and in tune with the development of family life and the changes in post-modern families, as well as with what the Swedish welfare system offers. At family gatherings, the SAF finds it important to provide both information about the military context and about what to expect as a home-staying family member before, during and after

<sup>6</sup> In Estonia, Parliament passed the Cohabitation Act in 2014, but the implementing Acts are still missing, which means that the Act has not properly entered into force. In Slovenia, same-sex couples rights are regulated by the Registration of a Same-Sex Civil Partnership Act, but in the case of heterosexual couples, marriage is assumed.

deployment, including the family member's own responses and reactions, and how to act preventively and manage emerging situations. Joining these gatherings could be seen in the perspective of the invited participants as one way of showing/demonstrating the familial relationship to each other and other people, as well as "doing the military family" (Morgan, 2011).

The combination in which the SAF offers family support both under its own management with local family support coordinators as key people, and in collaboration with idea-based member organizations, run by soldiers, veterans and/or their families, means that the supply can be adapted to what is required at the time. A crucial and basic view is to see the soldier and the veteran also as family members, in mutual collaboration with the members of the soldier's extended primary family. This collaboration makes it possible for soldiers to participate and carry out military deployments far from home and to have a home to return to (Olsson, 2019). To conclude, Sweden's family support is characterized by an offer of support with a preventive and involving focus.

In Estonia and Slovenia, the involvement of family members is mostly highlighted and supported during and after international deployments. This approach relies on the premise that being deployed requires long-term separation, stress, high risk of injury or even death (much higher than in most other professions), and so on. These are risk factors for several family health outcomes (e.g. the child-parent relationship, marital dissatisfaction, misuse of psychoactive substances, etc.). Therefore, even if the families with a service member do not identify themselves as 'military' families, they are still subject to specific circumstances that can have particular consequences on the quality of their family life. However, in Estonia and Slovenia the scope of the programmes is smaller, and there are not as many services for families as is the case in Sweden. In Estonia and Slovenia, military psychologists, social workers and other experts cooperate with colleagues in the civilian sphere, and it is mostly civilian specialists who deal with the problems of the family.

Based on these three country cases we can describe the programmes and services for families in the context of the military on the axis of exclusiveness and inclusiveness. It seems that support for families with a member involved in the military sphere depends on the specific need for services and on the available resources. Firstly, all three cases showed that the military is most inclusive towards families in the event of deployments and their possible fatal consequences. Serving only at home in a safe environment, there is not much for loved ones to worry about. Nevertheless, if the service includes deployment in international operations and missions then naturally the military addresses the family separately and a variety of different services must be available for them. It means that first, inside the military system, military personnel are divided into specific groups with varying rights and support measures. This is in accordance with the assumption that the military helps to cope with the specific challenges of military life – deployments (Olson, 2016). Secondly, the principle of the allocation of resources should be taken into account. If there are

too many military families, the provision of generous services and benefits will be limited due to a shortage of resources. Hypothetically, we can claim that there is an inverse correlation between the two, at least based on the Estonian example. We can combine this assumption with whether the family is a separate unit belonging to the civilian world, a link between the civilian and military spheres (the entanglement approach), or whether it belongs wholly to the military world.

Moreover, other dimensions and aspects determine the concept of the military family and the services and programmes families are entitled to. Although we did not go into detail in the country cases, three dimensions should be considered: differences in the wartime and peacetime legal environments; the predicted length of the possible conflict; and the type of defence force – fully professional or based on reserve forces.

In observing different examples of policies on military families, we must always note whether the regulation is designed for peacetime or wartime, or whether there are any differences at all. Usually there is a switch in the legal environment when a country is officially at war. In this situation a country mobilizes its resources for the sake of a single goal – to finish the conflict as quickly as possible with as few casualties as possible. This would usually include a change in the policies concerning families. There is still another important factor – the length of the conflict. When a country defines its policies on military families, the overall risk assessment is considered, including the type of a possible conflict. For example, the Estonian regulation foresees withholding compensation for families in a wartime situation until the end of the conflict. Thirdly, depending on the size of the country and the risk assessment, the military defence is usually fully professional or based on reserves. Larger countries tend to be fully professional and smaller countries have reserve-based forces. With fully professional forces, society is divided between those directly affected by the military conflict (by having one of their family members participating directly in the combat), and those who are not. In this case a principle of social fairness and compensation is applied – those who are providing a higher contribution in the event of conflict are entitled to special treatment (Olson, 2016), and this also applies to the families of service members. However, in Slovenia, professionalization does not seem to affect the perception of families as part of the military. One of the reasons may be the structure and organization of the Slovenian Armed Forces, which enables service members to commute daily instead of demanding that the whole family moves near the barracks. This also intertwines with the small size of the country and its geography, both of which enable such daily commuting. The absence of military bases (as opposed to US ones, which play an integrating and socializing role) is probably another factor that influences the (non)existence of the military family identity in Slovenia.

When the country's defence is based on reserve forces, then it implies that in the extreme case all of its members (or sometimes only the male members of society) are recruited. It follows then that all the families in the society are military families, and you cannot separate them from civilian families. Therefore wartime regulations

concerning families can be observed as military family policies and civilian family policies at the same time.

To conclude, our analysis does not entirely support Fossey et al.'s (2019) theoretical military family systems model. Fossey et al. presupposed that in the case of full conscription, most people in society belong to or have experience of a military family. The relationship between society, the military and the family is intimate. However, our case studies do not support this ideal type. Although conscription is compulsory in Estonia, the proportion of male citizens who go through conscription is less than half of the corresponding birth cohort (Kasearu, 2018), and our analysis clearly shows that the state and the military do not see conscripts' families (mostly the family of origin) as military families. However, previous analysis has shown that the emotional support of the family plays a crucial role in a conscript's adjustment to military service (Raid, Kasearu and Truusa, 2019). Sweden has lately reintroduced conscription; however, it is still active service members who are mostly considered to have military families. Slovenia's case is most similar to Fossey et al.'s (2019) model. Slovenia represents the model of a volunteer force, and our analysis supports the idea that military families are not fully immersed in military culture.

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