

Chapter 2 – RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF MILITARY PERSONNEL: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 BACKGROUND

In many countries, achieving recruitment goals has become increasingly challenging. At the same time, the Military is facing an important loss of often highly qualified personnel who choose to leave upon completion of their initial obligatory service. The recruiting and retention (R&R) problem faced by many of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries can be attributed to a variety of factors including:

- Low unemployment rates.
- Incongruence between prevailing social values and the Military organizational culture.
- Military operational and personnel tempo.
- Relatively higher private sector wages.
- Geographical location of military jobs.
- Promotions systems based on seniority vice merit.
- Mismatch between individual interests and job assignments.
- The management of the major processes of recruitment, selection and classification, turnover and retention.
- Shrinking of 18 – 24 year old target demographic.

The difficulty in recruiting sufficient numbers is aggravated by the fact that many military personnel attrite prior to the completion of their initial contracts. While attrition rates are country and time dependent, it is not unusual that 30% or more of the enlisted recruits do not complete their first term. In addition, many military personnel choose to return to civilian life later in their careers, attracted by more appealing private sector opportunities. This happens frequently in specific trades such as pilots and in the technical specialities; fields that are expensive to recruit and train.

Traditional recruiting, selection, classification and retention practices are no longer adequate to attract and retain the necessary military personnel to ensure the stability of readiness requirements. Countries such as Spain, who have relatively recently transitioned from a conscript to an all-volunteer force, are seeking alternatives to the traditional approaches of recruiting and retention of key personnel. Similarly conscript countries such as Turkey face the same problems as those faced by their all-volunteer counterparts.

Common reasons individuals have reported for either not considering a military career or deciding not to re-enlist include:

- External competition for labor supply pool;
- Military not 'top of mind' career;
- Recruit quality;
- Quality of life;

- Compensation; and
- Family considerations.

Solutions to the problems cited above are common across countries with one or more of the following programs having been implemented across the NATO countries:

- Increases in pay and benefits;
- Family care and quality of life programs;
- Improved selection and classification metrics to ensure better person-organization and person-job match;
- Guaranteed training programs;
- Targeted advertising;
- Lowering entry standards;
- Educational incentives;
- Retention bonus programs; and
- Varying contract length.

These practices while meeting short-term objectives can have negative long-term and costly consequences. Unquestionably recruiting and retention are very complex issues and there is no single solution. A key objective of the HFM-107/RTG-034 is to identify common recruiting and retention problems, barriers, research requirements and proposed solutions. In order to effectively do so, a general understanding of the individual country recruiting and retention practices is necessary. The proceeding documents provide a brief overview of the military recruiting and retention requirements and practices for each of the countries represented on the HFM-107/RTG-034 Task Group and specific initiatives that countries have implemented from the general list of solutions described above.