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# Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Military Families During Deployment: The Case of Lithuania

The current geopolitical changes and the dedication to regional safety have drawn researchers' attention towards discussion on the multiple aspects of new residents' integration. Ensuring that new members of society are welcomed has been of significant scientific and political interest in sustaining coherent and resilient communities. This discussion also extends to the well-being of soldiers and their families when relocating due to deployment. Since deployment locations vary, the state of scientific knowledge highlights the need to investigate the integration of soldiers and military-related families within the specific contexts of individual states. Accordingly, this study examines the case of Lithuania, with a focus on the socio-legal factors influencing the integration of military-related families. The research is based on a thematic analysis of international scientific literature, identifying the main challenges faced by families residing in foreign countries. It also outlines the conditions necessary for the successful integration of military-related families in the Lithuanian context. The findings indicate that: a) in addition to traditional integration programs, special attention must be given to the specific characteristics of military life; b) integration of military-related residents should adopt a family-centred approach that considers the past, present, and future experiences, needs, and aspirations of family members; and c) successful integration requires strong intersectoral cooperation. The practical implications highlight the need for practitioners to pay particular attention to monitoring and managing both the sequence and quality of the integration of foreign soldiers' families during their residence in the host country.

## **Keywords**

deployment, family, integration, society, resilience

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## Introduction

The geopolitical changes and dedication to ensure regional safety require addressing military deployment as an inevitable part of this process. It also includes the discussion about military personnel transition and addressing multiple layers of organization, including the effect on deployed soldiers' families' wellbeing. Taking into account the complexity and sensitivity of this topic, scholars directed their attention towards various social and legal aspects of soldiers' deployment and their families' comfort. Therefore, the current international research agenda includes but is not limited to the deployed soldiers' family members' physical and mental health (Cunitz et al., 2019a; Mahar et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2023, 2024), social integration (O'Neal et al., 2020), resilience (Ray et al., 2024) and other key aspects. Conceptual part of research narratives involve discussing challenges, that are an inevitable part of the deployed soldiers' family life. Therefore, the additional research has much to offer as the designated places and purposes for deployment vary and it is also admitted that specific circumstances might be a factor of influence as well. These and other aspects urge to address military deployment with a focus on the welcoming country, especially what concerns the social integration in the environment for military-related persons. The contextual layout of military-related family member integration plays an important role for multiple reasons. It could be mainly covered by the leading idea that it serves as a part of the overall picture in creating a regional security infrastructure, which could be considered involving tangible and soft-part layers.

While taking this into account, the following research is dedicated to investigating the factors for military-related families' integration in one of the Baltic region countries - Lithuania. The scientific enquiry derives from the theoretical background of integration literature (Ager & Strang, 2008; Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016) simultaneously addressing the specifics of military culture which is referred to as a key factor for this investigation (Atkins et al., 2023; Mancini et al., 2020).

While addressing the contextual background we find that Eastern and Central EU countries are highly prioritizing security at both - national and supranational levels. It is necessary to stress that the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine and the hybrid attacks near the Baltic States borders from Belarus border side (Hagelin, 2024) have

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evolved into a new wave of securitization policy in this region and made a shift in political and societal focus toward total defence (Rogulis, 2024). It has been followed by a set of certain activities, for example, the increased shares of GDP for military needs (Dudzevičiūtė, 2022) and political will to strengthen the joint action with NATO. In this paper, we will be focusing on the Baltic States region with particular attention to one of the countries – Lithuania. According to the NATO agreement and the doctrine, the military must be available for the defence on the NATO borders. As Lithuania has neighbouring countries such as Russia and Belarus, military availability has been considered to be a necessary aspect, which was also confirmed at the NATO summit in 2023 (North Atlantic Council, 2023).

Lithuania, being vocal in the international domain is framed to be one of the Baltic region countries, which is taking leadership. In the joint contract with Germany Lithuania has agreed to establish a permanent base of German troops and welcome soldiers with their family members. As a legal framework, Parliament has ratified the agreement between the governments of Lithuania and Germany on cooperation in the field of defence, signed in Berlin on September 13 in 2024. It set the legal grounds for the military needs and allocation of necessary resources for security and defence (Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on Cooperation in the Field of Defence, 2024). Following this agenda, Lithuania's military performance and the necessary resources for its successful work becomes also one of the main focuses for political interest at the national level. The important considerations have been identified to be the resources allocated to joint defence, infrastructure and professionalism. This is mainly the geopolitical and socio-legal context where the aspect of military deployment is being discussed.

As for related challenges, scientific research reveals that long-term soldiers' deployment affects their nearest surrounding people and this, in turn, might affect soldiers' performance. In the case of transnational deployment, we indicate that the process of military personnel transition might be even more complicated. It requires addressing multiple levels of transition, which affects not only soldiers but also a range of military-related people, as spouses children or dependents. The main difference between military personnel and military-related people is that subsequent might be more vulnerable

in the process of integration into the welcoming country.

The scientific literature has introduced the scope of multiple challenges which has been a part of the soldier's family dislocation portfolio. Although it may vary according to the situation, therefore, **the main aim** of this study is to consider the relevant framework for the integration of the deployed foreign soldiers' families in Lithuania. **The following objectives were set to** 1) indicate and discuss the challenges faced by the deployed foreign soldiers' families; 2) analyse the grounds for the integration of foreign nationals in Lithuania; 3) discuss the relevant framework for the integration of the deployed soldiers' families in Lithuania.

## 1. Addressing Deployment, Integration and the Military Domain

Deployment is generally defined as the "rotation of forces into and out of an operational area" (TRADOC, 2017). However, it should not be reduced to "the act of moving soldiers or weapons into a position where they are ready for military action" (Oxford University Press, 2025). Rather, it encompasses a broader range of military activities. Deployment may also be required in other contexts, such as humanitarian assistance, the restoration of legal order, or the maintenance of security during crises (Cook & Yogendran, 2019; Kalkman, 2021). Moreover, deployment contributes to enhancing soldiers' qualifications and capabilities, preparing them to address critical situations in the future (Rickovic, 2014). If there is common consent, soldiers may be deployed with their families to go to temporary military service abroad or go without them. Scientific literature reveals that both of the possibilities provide challenges to the family members. For example, family separation due to deployment might be challenging psychologically, therefore special attention is paid to the support in transitions from deployment to home. To ease this process, different post-deployment adaptation programmes are being employed to help both – soldiers and their families. M. Kennis and H. Brake (2022) analysis identified four types of post-deployment adaptation programmes as: 1) "Third location decompression" which focuses on time to rest and relax in a location that is not in the mission or at home alongside with combined psychoeducation; 2) "Battlemind" training system which provides

military personnel with training packages of pre-, during, and post-deployment; 3) "Psychological debriefing" which is using counselling techniques and aiming to potential traumatic events; 4) "Homecoming briefing" psychoeducation which is focusing on post-deployment functioning, reintegration, reunion with family and information about possible access for help (Kennis & te Brake, 2022, p. 4). The other segment which requires assistance is the military-related family, who travels to the new country of destination on the grounds of spouses' deployment. This equals new resident's integration into the new environment.

The literature suggests the key areas which has to be covered, for the successful integration process. A. Ager and A. Strang indicate particular aspects in their proposed conceptual framework of core domains of integration. It considers 1) "marker and means" (employment, housing, education, health), 2) social connection (social bridges, bonds, links); 3) facilitators (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability) and 4) foundation (rights and citizenship) (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 22). R. Penninx and B. Garcés-Mascareñas assert that "integration encompasses three analytically distinct dimensions in which people may (or may not) become an accepted part of society which are namely 1) the legal-political, 2) the socio-economic, and 3) the cultural-religious (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016, p. 14). In practice, OECD/European Commission monitors particular indicators of immigrant integration which are addressing multiple spheres in detail and mainly refers to: skills and the labour market, living conditions, civic engagement and social integration (OECD/European Commission, 2023, pp. 41–43).

Despite overall models for integration, it is important to take into the specifics of the military domain. There might be considerable differences between different migrant categories, non-mentioning institutionally predetermined residency in a foreign country. The integration-focused literature offers to address multiple factors, which are relevant but does not take into account internal factors for integration. Firstly, the primary focus of the deployed family might not be the integration itself but the safe and stable well-being during the specific period of time. Therefore it would not offer the same drivers for integration. This aspect provides second thoughts on the main integration idea of mutual movement of stakeholders towards integration. Secondly, the duration of stay may determine, that the "integration" itself might never be acquired as predictable outcome because," generally, integration outcomes improve when migrants stay

longer in the host country” (OECD/European Commission, 2023, p. 38).

Finally, it is scientifically agreed and visible in practice that the military pertains to its culture. For example, in the sphere of counselling Katherine M. Atkins, Toni R. Tollerud and others argue that “if counsellors are not aware that military culture is a culture with various subcultures, counsellors will not recognize the diversity of military-connected clients and may not understand the need to support clients within their historical, cultural, economic, political, and psychosocial contexts.” Therefore, researchers suggest infusion of military culture in counsellors’ preparation and training (Atkins et al., 2023, p. 1962). The other area of particular attention is social work. For example, the Council on Social Work Education in the United States published guidelines for advanced practice in military social work which is dedicated to addressing the core competencies central to specialized social work service to military, veterans, and their families (Alexandria, 2018).

The current scientific knowledge in the field of military deployment challenges and the integration of military-related families is considered to be a specific and profound area for a deeper further investigation.

## 2. Methodology

The process of integration requires exploration and evaluation of a complex set of factors. Accordingly, this study employs scientific literature analysis as a key research method, focusing on two main aspects: integration and deployment. First, it examines the theoretical background of the challenges faced by military-related families in the context of integration. Second, it analyses the specific features of deployment in a foreign country. The literature analysis was conducted using a systematic selection approach. Research articles were identified through the Web of Science Core Collection database, covering the period from 1990 to 2024. The search strategy employed the following keywords: deployment; military family (families), military spouse(s), military couple(s), military parent(s), parent(s) in military, family in military, military child(ren), military youth, military dependent(s), and military-connected. The refined search query included: *military famil\** (Abstract) AND *deployment* (Abstract) OR “*military spouse*” (Abstract) OR

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*“military spouses” (Abstract) OR “military couple” (Abstract) OR “military couples” (Abstract) OR “military parent” (Abstract) OR “military parents” (Abstract) OR “family in military” (Abstract) OR “military child” (Abstract) OR “military children” (Abstract) OR “military youth” (Abstract) OR “military dependent” (Abstract) OR “military dependents” (Abstract) OR “military connected” (Abstract).*

To ensure the analysis reflected recent developments, the dataset was narrowed to publications from 2020 to 2024 and limited to articles written in English, resulting in a total of 322 research articles. The material was analysed with a focus on:

a) the challenges faced by the families of deployed foreign soldiers, and

b) the approaches proposed to address these challenges.

The final stage of the analysis examines the specific context of Lithuania as a NATO border country and discusses the key aspects relevant to the integration of deployed soldiers’ families in Lithuania. This part of the study also draws on statistical data as well as secondary sources, including institutional reports.

### 3. Challenges of Military-Related Families’ and a Conceptual Framework for Support

Scientific literature firmly suggests that military families face higher risk factors and experience additional stressors because of relocation. The experienced challenges are revealed in both cases: when military-related personnel relocates with family or lives for a certain period without it. It might affect every family member as spouses, children or their interrelationship as well. Research reveals that in comparison to civilian counterparts, military service members with children encounter unique parental challenges, such as being gone for long periods during deployment (Olvera, 2024). Aikins and Aikins (2024) study indicates that military homefront mothers reflected higher rates of difficulty in terms of depressive affect than either single or two-parent families (Aikins & Aikins, 2024, p. 1590). Aleman-Tovar, Schraml-Block, DiPietro-Wells and Burke stress that, unlike civilian families, military families face added stressors and therefore parent advocacy may be critical in different circumstances, especially for military families of children with special needs (Aleman-Tovar et al.,

2022, p. 843). Furthermore, research also indicates that deployment might negatively affect family life, especially the relationship between spouses and children. The literature points out that military personnel partners experience a lot of pressure and it “may vary in the degree to which they understand and connect around historical experiences of combat and deployment” (Allen et al., 2020, p. 206).

Analysing in more of detail, we have to admit that military deployment might lead to a high level of stress for military-affiliated parents and their children. It is worth opening up that “parental military deployment was found to have a negative impact on children’s mental health” (Cunitz et al., 2019b, p. 8) and has an impact on the quality and nature of their parenting and parent-child relationships (Acker et al., 2020).

The scientific literature suggests that the military often offers multiple stressors that might lead to overcoming additional challenges in family life and need to be addressed accordingly. For example, in the cases where a service member mothers experiences the combined stressors of deployment separation, combat exposure, and adverse childhood experiences, she “may be at serious risk of posttraumatic stress and depressive symptomatology, which can negatively influence the quality and nature of their parenting and parent-child relationships” (Acker et al., 2020). And stating once again, research reveals that in comparison to civilian counterparts, military service members’ challenges may result in “adverse outcomes for children which manifest themselves as behavioural and emotional issues” (Olvera, 2024, p. 5). Mental health is impacted by frequent mobility, parental absence, and risk of parental injury (Williams et al., 2023). The research portrays evidence of specific impacts for children related to a combination of parental PTSD symptoms and service conditioning. These are instances of secondary trauma in children’s lives which “encompassed much general anxiety, separation anxiety and loss, a mirroring of parental emotion and behaviour, adoption of the parent’s worldview and attitudes, parentification and the associated feelings of needing to protect family members, feelings of shame and difference” (May et al., 2023, pp. 3822–3823).

Leaning on the current scientific knowledge we find that there is enough substantial literature to support the claim that deployment might affect military and affiliated people’s lives. However, there are also sophisticated insights on suggesting how to overcome experienced struggles. It could be addressed as a conceptual framework that

includes provision, awareness, assistance and advancement (PAAA).

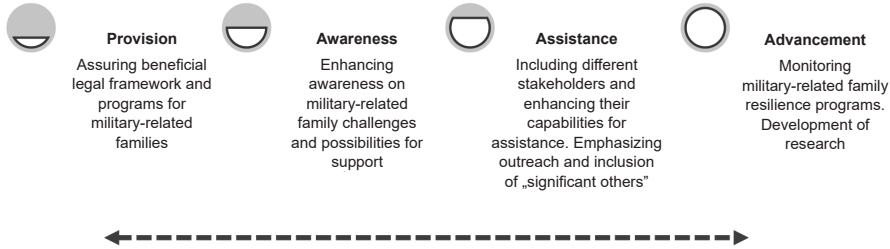


Figure 1. **A Conceptual Framework for Military-Related Families Support**

1. **PROVISION** – ensuring the establishment of a supportive legal framework and programs, as well as guaranteeing access to these resources.
2. **AWARENESS** – enhancing understanding of the challenges faced by military families, increasing knowledge of available support services, and promoting strategies for developing resilience.
3. **ASSISTANCE** – engaging multiple stakeholders, strengthening their capacity to provide support, and emphasizing outreach initiatives, including the involvement of “significant others”.
4. **ADVANCEMENT** – monitoring the outcomes of military family resilience programs and fostering further research and development in this area.

#### PROVISION.

Scientific literature highlights the value of meaningful support systems, which may be created within the military or provided through civil services. This primarily relates to substantive programs dedicated to military-related families, particularly those addressing mental health challenges through a variety of interventions, including military counselling (Atkins et al., 2023). For example, the Community Reinforcement Approach and Family Training (CRAFT) program was developed to equip concerned significant others (CSOs) with skills to promote family well-being (Croak et al., 2023). Other programs target specific family members. One scientifically validated example is the TSL (Thank You, Sorry, and Love) program, implemented in the Republic of Korea to enhance the adaptability of military children.

Research demonstrates that the TSL program effectively strengthens children's adaptive capacities across various domains over the long term. It has been shown to improve adaptability, reduce perceived stress and depression, and enhance both family functioning and school adjustment (Lee & Kim, 2025, pp. 22–28). Provision also entails ensuring access to cultural and religious resources. For example, research indicates that religious involvement plays an important role for some U.S. military families (primarily Christian adults in the military community) and may serve as a valuable resource for well-being and flourishing (Jang et al., 2024, p. 15). Religious participation, such as Bible reading, has been associated with improvements in mental, physical, and social well-being among military-related families (Bradshaw et al., 2023). Jang et al. (2024) conceptually expand this view of sacred-text-related behaviour, suggesting that not only reading but also listening to, watching, praying with, or otherwise engaging with the Bible—whether in private or public settings—can be positively related to human flourishing (pp. 15–16). The establishment of a multiple support systems serves a background for further action.

#### AWARENESS.

Another relevant aspect is the creation and maintenance of awareness regarding available resources, which itself requires dedicated support. For example, in the context of children and schooling, scholars have proposed the Inventory of School Supports – Parent Report (ISS-PR), a tool that enables parents to indicate both their awareness of available supports and the importance of these supports to their families. The full ISS-PR includes 26 distinct school supports, divided into sections focused on child-oriented support and parent-oriented support (Steggerda et al., 2024, p. 1318). This instrument was specifically designed for schools, allowing them to “use the inventory to determine which supports could potentially have the greatest impact for military-connected families and to what extent parents are aware of the supports schools offer” (Steggerda et al., 2024).

#### ASSISTANCE.

From a broader perspective, it is not sufficient to address only internal military resources, as military-related families are embedded in and depend on relationships beyond the military domain. Therefore,

researchers emphasize the need to extend assistance across various fields of social life. The nature of these challenges, however, may vary depending on the specific context, which requires the involvement of different stakeholders. For example, Steggerda, Cavell, Nicholson, and colleagues highlight the importance of developing a comprehensive support system for parenting, structured around three dimensions: school support, parent-focused support, and child-focused support (Steggerda et al., 2024).

If to address one of the critical areas for assistance it would concern the aspects of mental health. Scholars suggest that military families may require programs for emotional regulation—particularly addressing anger—as well as access to clinical assessment, targeted interventions, and psychoeducation. Importantly, these services should be easily accessible to family members (May et al., 2023, p. 3816). Yet, the effectiveness of such services depends on specialized knowledge and preparation. Atkins and colleagues underscore that military life is characterized by distinct “military cultural facets”—including implicit and explicit expectations, rules, and ways of being. Awareness of these facets is essential for professionals, as it enhances counsellors’ ability to provide contextually sensitive and effective support (Atkins et al., 2023b, p. 1956). Research findings increasingly suggest that there is a need to reconsider the importance of easily accessible mental health services, which can play a significant role in alleviating parenting stress (Aikins & Aikins, 2024). This also underscores the importance of intentionally integrating military culture into counsellor training and preparation programs, as counsellors hold an ethical obligation to understand the cultural context of military life (Atkins et al., 2023, p. 1956). Similarly, Williams, Richmond, Khalid-Khan, and colleagues (2024) emphasize the value of improving military cultural competence among healthcare providers and strengthening parental support, both of which may have a positive impact on child well-being.

#### ADVANCEMENT.

The current state of research can provide valuable insights while indicating the efficiency of different programs as well as indicating spheres of interest for military-related families. For example, Ray, Esquivel, Stander and others found indicators demonstrating a strong association with family resilience, which are a) “family functioning” (i.e. social support of family, marital quality, marital dissolution,

parenting alliance); b) individual-level resilience (i.e. self-mastery, positive outlook); c) well-being (i.e. mental functioning) (Ray et al., 2024, p. 311). Researchers also provided them in the scope of discussion of other relevant aspects as a) mental and physical functioning; b) self-mastery; c) positive outlook and spirituality; d) military-life impact; e) social support of family; f) marital quality; g) marital dissolution; h) parenting alliance; and i) military-life stress (Ray et al., 2024). The relevance of recent research lies in its capacity to provide an evidence-based foundation for the development of beneficial support programs. For example, Sullivan, Park, Richardson, Stander, and Jaccard (2024) highlight the central role of spouses in military-related families, demonstrating that psychological resources among spouses can buffer the negative effects of stress exposure on both their own and their partner's mental health (Sullivan et al., 2024, p. 1). These resources function in two complementary ways: protectively, by enabling effective problem-solving appraisals, and promotively, by offering problem-solving support, which has been shown to mitigate posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) (Sullivan et al., 2024, p. 1). These and other data driven research provide valuable insights while indicating the efficiency of different programs and their further development.

#### 4. The Relevant Aspects for the Integration of the Deployed Soldiers' Families in Lithuania

Lithuania's efforts and capacity to include new residents have significantly evolved over the past decade. These changes were directly influenced by geopolitical challenges, which opened the door to a greater influx of foreign residents. In a relatively short period, the proportion of foreign residents in Lithuania grew from 1% of the total population in 2010 to 7.69% in 2024 (Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior, 2024).

Over the last decade, several critical thresholds have served as turning points for both government policy and public discourse on immigration. At least three of them stand out.

The first threshold was the migration crisis near the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, which triggered Europe-wide debates about refugee acceptance. In Lithuania, this raised widespread doubts and scepticisms. Public opinion polls at the time indicated a strong

rejection of the idea accepting refugees (Blažytė, 2015; Blažytė et al., 2016).

The second threshold was the influx of migrants during the hybrid attack on Lithuania's border with Belarus in 2019–2021. This situation sparked political and societal debate over accommodating large numbers of foreigners identified as unlawfully crossing the border (Łubiński, 2022). The event contributed to more negative societal attitudes toward migrants (Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centro Etninių tyrimų institutas, 2020). It also prompted inter-institutional collaboration among public institutions to manage the crisis (Smaliukienė et al., 2023). However, during this period, integration policies did not undergo substantial change, except for amendments to migration law related to asylum procedures.

The third threshold was the mass displacement caused by the war in Ukraine. Lithuania received more than 86,000 Ukrainian refugees seeking safety (Migracijos departamentas prie VDM, 2023). By 2025, this number had risen to 92,000. Unlike earlier experiences, this migration wave fostered broad governmental and societal cooperation, resulting in a shift toward more inclusive integration policies. The government expanded its support mechanisms for newcomers, implementing a wider range of programs and services to ensure effective integration.

However, despite recent changes and integration efforts, several spheres continue to pose challenges for migrants' successful integration in Lithuania. These challenges may be particularly relevant for new residents relocating due to a family member's military deployment, as their well-being may be significantly affected.

A first reference point is Lithuania's Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). The index highlights critical weaknesses, such as migrant political participation policy, which is rated as highly unfavourable (5/100), and only slightly more favourable scores in access to nationality (22/100) and healthcare (31/100). Even in policy areas assessed as "halfway favourable" for immigrant well-being—such as education (43/100), labour market mobility (52/100), and anti-discrimination measures (51/100)—Lithuania remains below the European average, and even slightly below other Central and Eastern European countries. This situation has been described as "equality on paper" rather than in practice (Solano & Huddleston, 2021).

One particularly sphere of integration relates to employment opportunities, which are also closely tied to language skills. Research indicates a shortage of effective integration measures in this field

(Brazienė et al., 2023, p. 158). While official statistics from 2021 show that 76.5% of Lithuania's population spoke one or more foreign languages and nearly one-third of citizens could communicate in English, the job market still offers relatively limited opportunities for newcomers without Lithuanian language proficiency (Valstybės duomenų agentūra, 2022).

Scholarly findings support the idea that learning Lithuanian enhances integration into society (Ramonaitė, 2023). Yet, challenges remain in ensuring comprehensive access to language learning, particularly at the state level. As Juškevičienė (2023, p. 43) observes, there is a shortage of interactive programs and online learning resources, which could otherwise facilitate faster and more flexible acquisition of the language. However, Kubś and Michałowska-Kubś (2020) note that learning Lithuanian, as a "small" language, is "strongly connected with internal and integrative motivation, rather than external and instrumental factors" (p. 167). This means that learners require a strong personal or relational motivation to persist, making short-term relocated families particularly vulnerable, as their limited duration of stay may weaken both motivation and opportunities for sustained language acquisition.

Another important focus concerns education system and the well-being of deployed personnel's children within it. Research indicates that, despite the existence of formal procedures, the actual integration process of children requires close monitoring. Teachers in Lithuania frequently "face challenges related to language barriers and cultural differences" (Ciuladienė, 2024, p. 13). This highlights the need not only to enhance teachers' intercultural competence but also to expand access to language lessons and targeted training in the host country (Ciuladienė, 2024). Consequently, the educational environment must be systematically monitored to ensure it adequately supports the integration and well-being of military-related children. Research also highlights the need for a stronger NGO sector in facilitating migrants' integration according to their specific needs. NGOs are often described as "intermediaries between policymakers and migrant communities, yet their ability to effect policy change is challenged by legal frameworks, limited funding opportunities, and varying levels of governmental engagement" (Masiulytė, 2025, p. 85). Furthermore, gaps remain in the provision of legal mediation and representation, particularly in areas related to legal advice and access to information (Miežanskienė, 2023; Miežanskienė & Starodub, 2024).

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When addressing the environment that welcomes internationals, it is crucial to discuss the specifics of soldiers' family deployment within the framework of integration. As identified earlier, the residency of military families in a foreign country may involve multiple challenges that they must overcome. However, the status of deployment should not be equated with ordinary migration, as it carries distinctive features that shape how the integration process unfolds. A review of the scientific literature highlights at least two key aspects of soldiers' family integration: namely, the military specifics (MS) and their inherent complexity (C).

It is important to address these dimensions separately and in relation to the overall process of integration. If to unfold the aspects of complexity, we find that soldiers' deployment with families adds a feature of complexity of possible challenges. They might be related to different social life spheres such as housing, employment, health, education and other fields which should be covered for successful integration. They might be arising at the individual level like health, as well as affecting all family members, for example, stability of income via changes in the family member's employment. The military specifics highly reveals itself via such aspects as a) migration identity; b) duration of residency and c) belonging to a military community. It is worth discussing these aspects separately and in light of the process of integration. Firstly, it is necessary to recognize that military personnel's families may experience a diversified migration identity, shaped by the degree of consent within the family to the deployment decision. While deployment often assumes that all family members agree to relocate abroad, the literature highlights that this process cannot be equated with purposeful voluntary migration. This is particularly relevant in the case of children, whose relocation is determined by parental military obligations rather than personal choice. Such a mixed migration identity implies that conventional integration policies may be insufficient to ensure successful outcomes. Therefore, specific resources should be allocated to provide continuous and timely support for problem-solving, tailored to these unique circumstances.

The second aspect relates to the duration of residency, which has a direct impact on integration dynamics. Short-term or uncertain stays may reduce the family's level of intentionality in investing time and energy into building social connections, acquiring local language skills, or engaging with broader society. This limited timeframe distinguishes military-related families from other migrant groups, whose integration

pathways are typically shaped by longer-term settlement intentions.

The third aspect concerns belonging to a military community. Unlike civilians, who seek diverse forms of support through social networks, institutions, or community organizations, military families often rely primarily on the resources provided within the military structure. This institutional belonging can be both a source of resilience and a potential barrier, as it may limit opportunities for broader societal integration.

Taken together, these aspects—the diversified migration identity, the limited duration of residency, and the institutional belonging to the military community—underscore the need for a personnel-based approach. Such an approach should ensure that sufficient resources and tailored support mechanisms are provided to military families, enabling them to maintain resilience while navigating the complexities of integration during deployment.

The literature review indicates that not only soldiers but also their family members encounter multiple challenges throughout the period of deployment. The first relevant aspect for the integration of deployed soldiers' families in Lithuania is the recognition that challenges may arise incrementally over time. For instance, issues may initially concern the admission of children to kindergarten or school, and later involve support for spouses seeking new employment opportunities. This sequential emergence of challenges implies that once one issue is resolved, another may surface, requiring a continuous monitoring of the well-being of newly deployed personnel and their families.

In the Lithuanian context, particular attention should be given to the effective communication of the needs of deployed personnel's families, as these needs are likely to vary across different spheres of social life. Due to the limited availability of targeted integration support, it is suggested that institutional military engagement becomes a central mechanism for addressing these needs. Accordingly, the conceptual framework for military-related family support in Lithuania should be developed with explicit military involvement, ensuring that families are not left to rely solely on general migration and integration systems, which may not fully account for their specific circumstances.

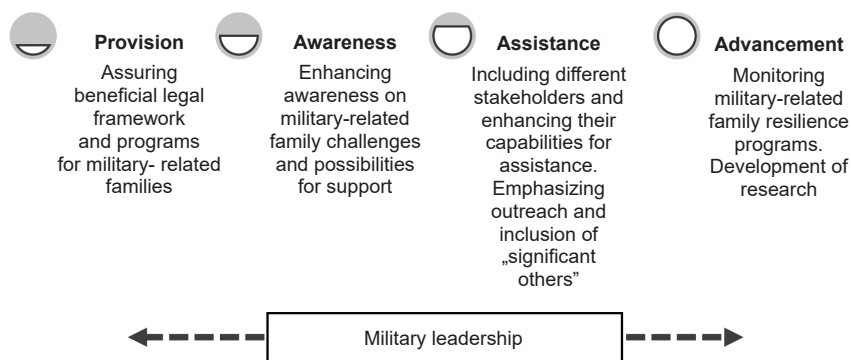


Figure 2. **Conceptual Framework for Military-Related Family Support in the Case of Lithuania.**

As demonstrated in Figure 2, military leadership functions as the guarantor of provision, awareness, and assistance, while advancement occurs at the right time, in the right place, and at the right pace, compensating for existing national shortcomings in the system of integration and support. The review of the few thresholds in Lithuania’s experiences welcoming new residents into the society has revealed that social acceptance might vary regards welcoming new residents. On one side, they might be rejected and the equality on the paper (MIPEX, 2020) will not provide the result of integration. On the other side, societal acceptance might be overwhelming and be of great help in the process of integration. The deployed military personnel portrays positive aspects and therefore it has a great perspective to be accepted and welcomed. Namely, because it is identified as a part of an important guarantee for regional safety. Unfortunately, the deployed personnel and their related family members might not be identified the same while they are not under their uniforms or are not introduced this way in society. This might lead to experience challenges of “unprivileged” new residents that relate to the same problem of employment, housing and overall integration process. In the researched area, the military should assume a leadership role in facilitating the integration of deployed soldiers’ families in Lithuania. This process requires continuous monitoring and timely interventions, supported by a dedicated policy framework and specific programs provided by the host state. To ensure coherence and efficiency, it is advisable to formalize and institutionalize the integration of deployed

soldiers' families in Lithuania. One possible measure would be the establishment of a Centre for Integration, designed to address the wide range of issues that may arise during the settlement of soldiers' families in the country.

## Conclusions

The analysis of scientific literature reveals that relocation can expose military families to additional stressors and challenges, affecting not only individual family members but also their interrelationships. To address these issues, a conceptual support framework for military-related families should be built on four key pillars: provision, awareness, assistance, and advancement (PAAA). Provision refers to the assurance of a supportive legal framework and the establishment of programs specifically dedicated to deployed soldiers' families. Awareness emphasizes a conscious focus on the unique challenges faced by military families, the preparation of support structures, and the promotion of knowledge aimed at building family resilience. Assistance involves engaging a wide range of stakeholders, enhancing their capacity to provide effective support, and encouraging outreach and the active involvement of significant others. Advancement is achieved through the monitoring of outcomes from resilience programs, coupled with the continuous development of research in this specific field.

The analysis of the foundations for the integration of foreign nationals in Lithuania indicates that the country's experience in welcoming newcomers has significantly evolved over the past decade, shaped by multiple interactions, including the hybrid attack and the large influx of foreign nationals resulting from the war in Ukraine. However, several areas of integration still remain challenging, although various tools and mechanisms have been introduced to facilitate the process of integrating new residents into Lithuanian society. Therefore, the relevant framework for the integration of deployed soldiers' families in Lithuania should encompass three core elements: a) the challenges that military life imposes on families during deployment; b) the conceptual framework for a military-related family support system; and c) the national features shaping migrant integration. It should be acknowledged that certain areas, such as societal integration, may require additional support or targeted intervention.

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