THE POSITION OF THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN RELATION TO THE MILITARY SERVICE MODEL UNDER CONTRACT[1]

A POSIÇÃO DAS FORÇAS ARMADAS PORTUGUESAS NO MERCADO DE TRABALHO EM RELAÇÃO AO MODELO DE PRESTAÇÃO DE SERVIÇO MILITAR EM REGIME DE CONTRATO

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the current contract service model (CS) of the Portuguese Armed Forces (AAFF) from the perspective of three broad dimensions – recruitment, retention, and reintegration – by assessing the external factors that justify its evolution and the organisational shortcomings that affect its operationalization. The study, which follows a previous exploratory investigation that concluded by formulating several hypotheses (Santos & Sarmento, 2018), uses a qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2012) applied mainly in the context of proof (Guerra, 2006), as well as documentary data and open-ended questionnaires administered to a sample of 74 AAFF officers assigned to the Military University Institute during the 2016/2017 academic year. The results suggest that there are shortcomings in the military's ability to recruit and retain CS personnel due to the military's weak position in the labour market, with an impact on the organisation's activities.

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[1] This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled "The military contract service model of the Portuguese Armed Forces in the national labour market" [Portuguese version: "*Posição das Forças Armadas Portuguesas no mercado de trabalho nacional em relação ao modelo de prestação de serviço militar em regime de contrato*"] presented at XXVIII Portuguese-Hispanic Conference on Scientific Management, Guarda, Portugal, 9th February 2018.

Keywords: Military Contract Service Model; Portuguese Armed Forces; Labour Market; Recruitment; Retention; Social and Occupational Reintegration.

Resumo

*O objetivo deste artigo é discutir, a partir de três grandes dimensões – **recrutar, reter e reintegrar** –, o atual modelo de prestação de serviço militar em regime de contrato (RC) nas Forças Armadas (FFAA) portuguesas, centrando-se na avaliação de fatores externos, que justificam a sua evolução, e nas disfunções organizacionais, que condicionam a operacionalização. O estudo, que é subsequente a uma investigação prévia, exploratória, no final da qual foram formuladas hipóteses (Santos, & Sarmento, 2018), apoia-se numa estratégia qualitativa de pesquisa (Bryman, 2012) e recorre, sobretudo, ao contexto da prova (Guerra, 2006), utilizando dados documentais e inquéritos de perguntas abertas aplicados a uma amostra de 74 oficiais das FFAA colocados no Instituto Universitário Militar durante o ano letivo de 2016/17. Os resultados sugerem uma situação disfuncional em relação à capacidade de captação e de retenção de efetivos em RC, decorrente de alguma fragilidade das FFAA no mercado de trabalho, com reflexos no funcionamento organizacional.*

Palavras-chave: Modelo do Serviço Militar Contratado; Forças Armadas Portuguesas; Mercado de Trabalho; Recrutamento; Retenção; Reinserção Socioprofissional.

Introduction and Research Problem

The military reforms that took place in Portugal over recent years and the subsequent reduction of military personnel were initially the result of operational changes at the geostrategic, political, technological, and military levels, which came in response to the new types of missions (e.g. peacekeeping and humanitarian operations), risks, and threats (Santos, 2012). More recently, economic and financial restrictions have led the government to increase its reformist policies for the Armed Forces (AAFF), resulting in an increasingly weakened military, similarly to what has been happening in other western countries.

Furthermore, the changing structure of the Portuguese age pyramid has progressively decreased the military recruitment pool, reducing the universe of available recruits in absolute numbers. This universe is composed of Portuguese citizens from 18 to 25 years of age and, judging by the results of the classification and selection tests, there has been a significant decline in quality in relation to the selection profile of contract service (CS) personnel. This is one of the main reasons for the high rates of attrition during recruitment and selection (CPAE, 2016, DGRDN, 2017; Santos, 2015).

The difficulty recruiting military contract personnel is compounded by the difficulty retaining staff for a suitable length of time to ensure the return on the investment made in training. Although the average term of service is between three and four years (Santos, 2015) and the total length of service allowed by law is six years (Law No. 174/99 of 21 September), many citizens drop out during the first or second year of contract (CPAE, 2016; DGPRM,

2012; DGRDN, 2017; Santos, 2015; Santos, & Sarmento, 2018).

After completing their service term, military contract personnel return to the external social and occupational environment. This "reintegration" is believed to be facilitated by the skills they acquired and / or developed during active duty and by the fact that those skills are certified and accredited by entities outside the military.

Based on a set of hypotheses formulated in a previous exploratory investigation (Santos, & Sarmento, 2018), which analysed the main shortcomings of the military CS model of the Portuguese AAFF, this study's **general goal** is to provide a more consistent discussion of the model and the incentive scheme that supports it by making a critical assessment of the external and internal factors that justify the changes to the model, which affect its operationalization. The following research question provides the starting point for the investigation: **"How can the Portuguese AAFF improve their position in the national labour market in terms of the military CS model?"**

To accomplish the study's general goal and to answer the research question, three major dimensions were selected – recruitment, retention, and reintegration. These dimensions, which form the basis for the study, will be used to diagnose the main problems and shortcomings and to design possible solutions and intervention measures.

The article is divided into five sections. After the introduction, which contextualises the research and describes the research goal, the second section briefly summarises the legal and theoretical framework of military CS. The third section defines the methodology that was used to answer the research questions. In the fourth section, the main results are discussed and compared to the research hypotheses, with special emphasis on the recruitment, retention, and reintegration dimensions. Finally, the fifth section provides the main results and some practical final considerations, and makes suggestions for future research.

1. The Portuguese Legal and Theoretical Framework of Military Contract Service

1.1. Legal Framework for the Provision of Military Contract Service

The research conducted in the preparation of this article focused on the **military CS model** and its **legal framework**, as defined in the following laws that regulate the provision of military service in the Portuguese AAFF:

– The Statute of the Armed Forces Military Personnel issued in 1990 (Decree-Law No. 34-A/90) and subsequent amendments (e.g. Decree-Law No. 236/99, Decree-Law No. 90/2015) – Book III of the 2015 diploma;

– The Military Service Law (Law No. 174/99 of 21 September), which establishes the different forms of military service, the circumstances under which it takes place, and the requirements and procedures for its implementation;

– The Regulation of the Law on Military Service (Decree-Law No. 289/2000 of 14 November), which sets out, in its Article 1, the rules to implement the MSL and the rules and procedures to recruit military personnel;

– The Incentive Scheme for Military Contract Service and Voluntary Service (Decree-Law No. 320-A/2000 of 15 December and subsequent amendments, such as those introduced

by Decree-Law No. 118/2004 of 21 May and Decree-Law No. 320/07 of 27 September), which sets out the incentive scheme for **contract (CS)** and **voluntary (VS)** military personnel.

Currently, the total length of military service under contract is six years but citizens can join the AAFF for a period of one year on a voluntary basis before committing to a military service contract, adding up to a total of seven years (Law No. 174/1999; Decree-Law No. 289/2000).

Each AAFF category (officers, sergeants, and enlisted ranks) includes voluntary service and / or CS, and there is also the possibility of **internal mobility** across categories: CS personnel can apply for a transfer to a higher category, enlisted personnel can transfer to the sergeants or officers category, and sergeants can transfer only to the officers category, as shown in Figure 1, along with the service terms for each level and the modalities of promotion.
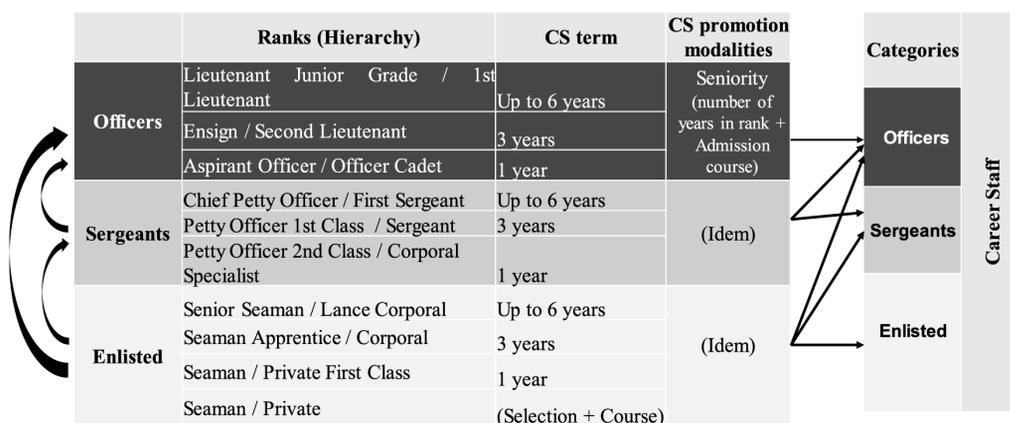
	Ranks (Hierarchy)	CS term	CS promotion modalities	Categories	
Officers	Lieutenant Junior Grade / 1st Lieutenant	Up to 6 years	Seniority (number of years in rank + Admission course)	**Officers**	
	Ensign / Second Lieutenant	3 years			
	Aspirant Officer / Officer Cadet	1 year			
Sergeants	Chief Petty Officer / First Sergeant	Up to 6 years	(Idem)	**Sergeants**	
	Petty Officer 1st Class / Sergeant	3 years			
	Petty Officer 2nd Class / Corporal Specialist	1 year			
Enlisted	Senior Seaman / Lance Corporal	Up to 6 years	(Idem)	**Enlisted**	
	Seaman Apprentice / Corporal	3 years			
	Seaman / Private First Class	1 year			
	Seaman / Private	(Selection + Course)			

Career Staff (vertical label at right)

Figure 1 – Career progression of contract military personnel – Portuguese AAFF.
Source: Summarised from Decree-Law No. 320-A/2000; Law No. 174/99.

In addition to the possibility of internal mobility, both across and within categories, CS personnel can apply to the AAFF career staff, as provided for in Article 3 of Decree-Law No. 90/2015.

The study also addresses three structuring concepts in the legal framework – recruitment, retention and, social and occupational reintegration –, which will be analysed next.

1.2. Structuring Concepts: Recruitment, Retention and Social and Occupational Reintegration

The Military Service Law defines **military recruitment** as "[…] the set of operations required to recruit human resources into the AAFF" (Law No. 174/1999, art. 7). This law also establishes the modality of recruitment of CS (or voluntary service) personnel, referred to as "normal recruitment" (art. 7.2), which aims to enlist, from the "national recruitment base", "[...] citizens who are at least 18 years of age and who wish to serve in the AAFF on a voluntary basis" (art. 13).

Several agencies conduct **military recruitment**. Recruitment planning, direction, and coordination are generally managed by a central body of the Ministry of National Defence

(the Directorate General for National Defence Resources – DGRDN) that is in charge of recruitment campaigns to attract applicants, whereas the actual recruitment process is conducted by the branches of the AAFF through recruitment centres and other similar services (Law No. 174/99, art. 12).

Another structuring concept is **retention**. In military contexts, retention refers to the organisation's ability to retain a given number of military staff for a suitable length of time. Thus, in 2007, a NATO working group issued a technical report defining the concept of retention as "the process of keeping adequate numbers of suitable personnel in the Military, in order to meet the needs of the organization" (RTO/NATO, 2007, pp. D-2).

The concept of **reintegration**, the third major dimension of this study, is generally associated with the transition to civilian life after leaving the military and entering or returning to the workforce. Therefore, it has a strong social and occupational component, which makes it the responsibility of the Portuguese state under the terms of the Military Service Law and the Incentive Regulation (Law No. 174/1999; Decree-Law No. 320-A / 2000; Decree-Law No. 320/07; Decree-Law No. 76/2018).

In 2008, a state service was created under the Incentives and Occupational Reintegration Division of the DGRDN, the Information and Orientation Centre for Occupational Training [Centro de Informação e Orientação para a Formação Profissional] (CIOFE). Its overarching mission is to "support service members and former service members in the transition to civilian life by providing a range of services such as appropriate training and effective employment guidelines" (Ministry of National Defence, 2017).

CIOFE's role is similar to that of the System to Harness the Professional Skills of Military Personnel [*Sistema de Aprovechamiento de Capacidades Profesionales de Personal Militar*] (SAPROMIL), a body that operates under the Spanish Ministry of Defence. Defined in Article 32 of Organic Law 9/2011 of 27 July (Law on the Rights and Duties of AAFF personnel [*Ley de derechos y deberes de los miembros de las FFAA*]), it is a complementary support programme for the staff of the Spanish Armed Forces. The SAPROMIL programme accompanies and advises military personnel who have completed their contract with the armed forces, providing job orientation and counselling to facilitate their reintegration into the civilian labour market.

The programme[2] matches the CV, professional profile, and specific training of service members who apply to the programme to job offers from public and private employers with whom agreements have been established. SAPROMIL's activities are based on three main pillars: (i) providing the means to integrate military personnel into the civilian job market according to the training, experience, and skills they acquired while on active duty; ii) creating a labour exchange to boost continuous mobility flows between the Armed Forces and the Spanish state's government or business sector; and iii) to harmonise the rapprochement between the AAFF and civil society by ensuring that the training, experience, and skills acquired during active duty are certified and recognised by entities outside the military (*Ministerio de Defensa*, 2013).

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[2] SAPROMIL's mission is to: "[…] facilitate the transition to the labour market of AAFF personnel who applies to the programme, the General Goal of which is to **provide career reorientation to service members who request it and to adopt the appropriate measures to do so**."] (http://www.sapromil.es/sapromil/#sub3) (The authors underline).

Like Portugal's CIOFE and Spain's SAPROMIL, the French model supports the reintegration of military personnel into the civilian market through the Agency to Retrain Defence Personnel [*Agence de Reconversion de la Défense*] (ARD), also known as Mobility Defence [*Défense Mobilité*]. Created in 2009, the agency is also a state service that operates under the French Ministry of Defence [*Ministère de la Défense*], and its goal is to support the external mobility of defence personnel (both military and civilian) by providing a set of professional services to facilitate the transition to the labour market, in articulation with the human resources management bodies of the branches of the French Armed Forces. Its main activities are information, orientation, vocational training, and assignment of positions[3] (Ministère de la Défense, 2017).

A more in-depth analysis of the Spanish and French models could provide benchmarking data for the Portuguese AAFF, which could be used to mitigate the main shortcomings in the national military contract service system, especially regarding the social reintegration of former military personnel.

The three structuring concepts of the study – **recruitment** (which includes advertising), **retention** (keeping staff in the ranks), and **reintegration** (social and occupational) –, when coordinated and associated with the respective AAFF career mobility flows, make up a continuum that describes and explains how citizens experience their service term as contract military personnel (Figure 2).
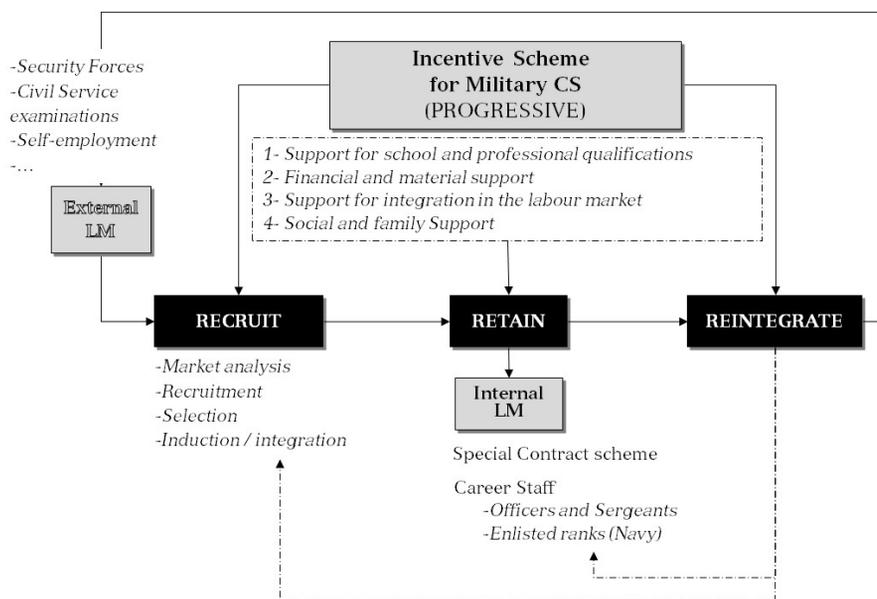

Figure 2 – Dimensions of contract service in the Portuguese AAFF.
Source: Prepared from Law No. 174/1999; Decree-Law No. 320-A/2000; Decree-Law No. 118/2004; Decree-Law No. 320/2007; Organic Law No. n.º 1/08; Decree-Law No. 76/2018.

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[3] In addition to a strong emphasis on vocational training to facilitate reintegration into civilian life (external mobility), the French incentive model allows military personnel to renew their contracts multiple times (internal mobility), thereby strengthening their ties to the military career.

This continuum is supported by the "**Incentive Scheme**", which acts as a variable that mediates the successful operationalization of the three dimensions: recruitment, retention, and social and occupational reintegration.

The results of the previous exploratory study (Santos, & Sarmento, 2018), which this study confirms, as will be addressed further on, indicate that in order to increase the Armed Forces' ability to recruit and retain CS personnel, the three dimensions should be more interdependent.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Figure 3 depicts the **theoretical framework** and the three levels of analysis, macro, meso, and micro, which relate both to the model's structure (legal component), which results from the laws passed by the Assembly of the Republic, the government, and the Ministry of National Defence, and to its management by the AAFF. The model can be conditioned at any given time by measures issued by the government or by the Ministry of National Defence.
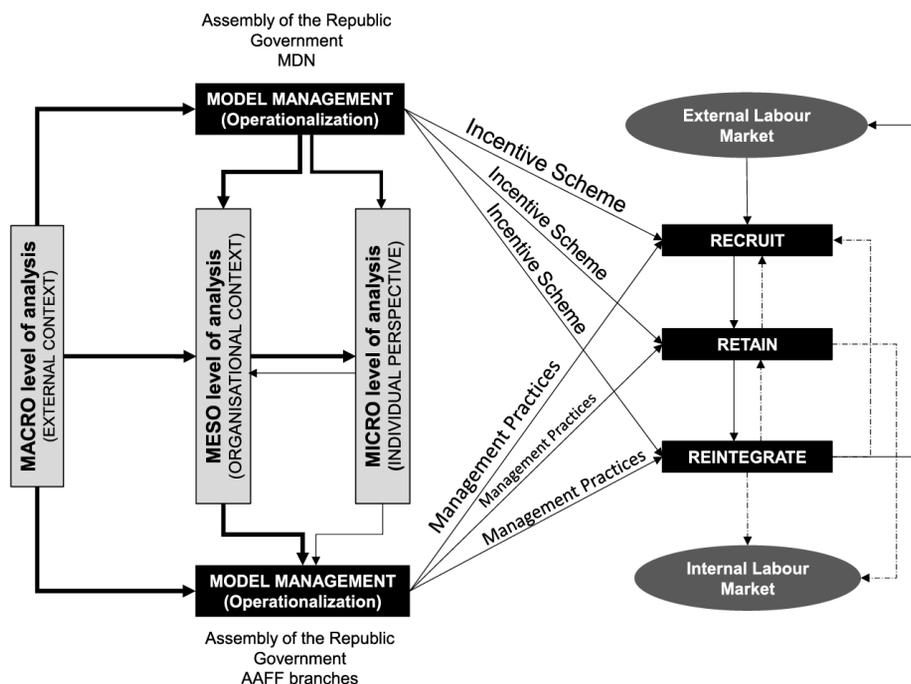

Figure 3 – Theoretical framework: levels of analysis and structuring dimensions.

The model's structure and management intersect with the three central dimensions of the study – recruitment, retention, and social and occupational reintegration – in a dynamic process that is continuously being built and adapted. The AAFF's "incentive scheme" for contract personnel and its "management practices" constitute crucial links and components that ensure the model's operationalization and proper functioning, which is the shared responsibility of the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of the Armed Forces.

The literature review addresses some theories on careers, as well as the concepts of "career anchor" (Schein, 1965, 1978, 1990) and "psychological contract" (Rousseau, 1995, 1989), and compares them with the military reality.

Military careers are "a hierarchy of ranks that unfold into categories that are occupied by specialised staff and that correspond to the performance of specific positions and functions" (Decree-Law No. 90/2015, Art. 27), and the Portuguese legal system includes them in the "special regime" career classification, which in turn is part of the Portuguese public administration "career system", as opposed to the "employment system" (Rocha, 2005).

Military careers are conceptually close to **organisational careers** (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1996) because military career paths are outlined in a specific law (Decree-Law No. 90/2015) and are managed almost exclusively by the organisation. This model contrasts with less traditional career concepts such as protean careers (Arthur, 1996; Currie et al., 2006; Hall, 1996, 2002) and boundaryless careers (Arthur 1994; Arthur, & Rousseau 1996; Dutra, 2010; Peiperl et al., 2000).

Organisational careers define a path within the organisational structure, which is usually a hierarchy, and are associated with vertical career progression. In this career model, the organisation controls most of the variables, leaving little room for individual choice. On the other hand, this leads to a certain degree of career stability until the moment individuals exit the organisation (Dutra, 2010; Martins, 2010; Van Maanen, 1977).

In contrast, **protean careers**, which are often seen as opposite to organisational careers, are defined as a sequence of decisions taken throughout a person's professional life, which lead to specific attitudes, behaviours and experiences, with individuals holding control over their own careers and organisations having little influence in career decisions (Dutra, 2012; Hall, 1976).

Boundaryless careers, a concept introduced by Defillipi and Arthur (1994), refer to the dissolution of traditional boundaries, especially within organisations, and to the creation of career paths that are even less structured and more flexible in terms of personal choice than protean careers (Dutra, 2012; Hall, 1976).

Moskos' **institutional / occupational model** (1977, 1986) was also reviewed as it has proved useful in categorising and explaining the types of motives that lead citizens to serve in the AAFF under contract, as well as the reasons why they exit the military before the full service term allowed by law. The empirical review suggests that the motives for joining the AAFF are mostly institutional and the reasons for dropout are mainly occupational (Cardoso, 2008; CPAE, 2016; DGRDN, 2017; Santos, 2015).

Two other concepts relevant to this study are the "**career anchors**" introduced by Schein (1990) and the **psychological contract** first addressed systematically by Rousseau (1989). These are crucial concepts to understand and categorise, from a qualitative perspective, the motives that lead citizens to serve in the AAFF under contract and the reasons why they exit the military before the maximum service term allowed by law. As in Moskos's institutional / occupational model, and although they are not deeply explored empirically in this study (they will be assessed quantitatively in a future study), these concepts are considered essential to explain and categorise, in qualitative terms, the motives that lead citizens to join the Armed

Forces under contract (the case of career anchors) and the reasons why they choose to drop out before the service term allowed by law. According to the previous exploratory study (empirical review of several studies conducted by the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of the Armed Forces), these reasons appear to be largely related to the dissolution / breakdown of the psychological contract.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The exploratory study conducted prior to this investigation (Santos, & Sarmento, 2018) and the subsequent theoretical and empirical review of several studies and reports issued by the branches of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of National Defence, as mentioned above, led to the formulation of research questions, and, subsequently, to general guiding hypotheses that were adjusted based on the content analysis.

Table 1 lists the final version of the study's research questions and corresponding hypotheses.

Table 1 – Subsidiary Questions and General Research Hypotheses.

SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS (SQ)	GENERAL RESEARCH HYPOTHESES (H)
SQ 1: What are the prevailing social representations of the AAFF among the Portuguese youth?	H 1.1: The prevailing social representations of the Portuguese AAFF among young people suggest increasing "detachment" (estrangement); H 1.2: A military career is not attractive to Portuguese youth.
SQ 2: What are the external factors that most affect the ability of the Portuguese AAFF to recruit and retain contract personnel?	H 2: The political and legal framework and the demographic, geographic, and sociocultural dimensions are the main external factors that affect the recruitment and retention of military contract personnel.
SQ 3: What are the main organisational problems and / or shortcomings (internal / organisational context) that hinder the ability of the Portuguese AAFF to recruit and retain contract personnel?	H 3.1 The relationship and communication strategies between the MDN and the AAFF and the labour market are not articulated and do not effectively advertise the institutional offer or attract volunteers; H 3.2. The characteristics of the military environment and the type of reception and induction into the military have a negative impact on the retention rate, especially in areas in high demand in the labour market and those that require greater geographical mobility and / or deployments.
SQ 4: What are the main reasons for early dropout among citizens serving in the Portuguese AAFF under contract?	H 4.1: The main reasons for early dropout among military contract personnel relate to occupational factors; H 4.2: The main reasons for early dropout among military contract personnel relate to unmet expectations (breakdown of the psychological contract).
SQ 5: Are the Ministry of National Defence and the Portuguese Armed Forces capable of providing support to the social and occupational reintegration of former military contract personnel?	H 5: The Ministry of National Defence and the Portuguese Armed Forces have proved to have limited ability to facilitate and / or support the social and occupational reintegration of former contract personnel, a situation that is aggravated by the recent financial and economic constraints.

2. Research Methodology and Method

The **methodology** used in this study includes a qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2012) and a case study research design with a longitudinal time horizon for the documentary analysis (period between 1999 and 2016) and a cross sectional time horizon for the empirical

study conducted at a later date (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009; Vilelas, 2009; Yin, 2014).

A **qualitative** research strategy was chosen to obtain a richer and deeper understanding of the observed phenomena (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2013, p.9) by emphasising "quality" and "meanings", which cannot be observed or measured in terms of quantity, intensity, or simple frequency (p.17).

Hypotheses were formulated to answer the research questions, relying mainly on **hypothetical and deductive** reasoning (Carvalho, 2009). Therefore, the research mainly applied the context of proof, although inductive reasoning and the context of discovery were also used where necessary (Guerra, 2006), depending on the possibility of (and need for) emerging categories in the content analysis (Bardin, 1977).

From the **ontological** perspective, which concerns the nature of reality or observed phenomena, the researchers adopted a **constructivist** paradigm (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Denzin, & Lincoln, 2013), while maintaining the required "detachment" and "no influence position" (Flick, 2005) during the study.

From the **epistemological** perspective, which concerns the process of knowledge production (Almeida, 2007), the researchers opted for an **interpretative** position, given that the study addresses a social object – people and their institutions –, relying on procedural logic to capture the objective meaning of the actors' social performance (Bryman, 2012, pp. 29, 30).

The non-probabilistic **sample** obtained in 2017 is composed of 74 officers from the three branches of the Portuguese AAFF – Navy, Army, and Air Force – assigned to the Military University Institute. These officers answered a questionnaire survey with open-ended questions that generated 69 valid answers.

Sociodemographic characteristics of the 69 respondents:

– **Sex:** Male (n=56; 81.2%); Female (n=13; 18.8%);

– **Rank:** First Lieutenant (1LT) / Captain (CPT) (n=32; 46.4%), Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) / Major (MAJ) (n=18; 26.1%), Commander (CDR) / Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) (n=3; 4.3%), and Captain (CPT) / Colonel (COL) (n=16; 23.2%);

– **AAFF branch:** Navy (n=18; 26.1%), Army (n=30; 43.5%), and Air Force (n=21; 30.4%);

– **Professional experience:** from 10 years (1LT / CPT) to 30 years (CPT / COL); 100% of responders have command / leadership experience;

– **Role at the Military University Institute:** 55 students (79.7%) and 14 lecturers (20.3%).

As suggested by Bardin (1977) and Guerra (2006), the **methodological procedures followed during the field research** were based on a thematic or categorical content analysis of the survey responses to identify the representations of the military CS model among participants from a double perspective: making a diagnosis and presenting a solution.

After the survey was validated by four specialists with in-depth knowledge of human resource management in military contexts, the final version was prepared and sent by email to the sample members. The responses were fed into a database, which was open for data entry for six months (between February and July 2017). Initially, respondents were given 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which were extended to 90 minutes after direct requests for more time were received.

3. Data presentation and discussion of the results

This section presents the main results of the categorical content analysis (Bardin, 1977; Guerra, 2006) according to the dimensions, categories, and subcategories that were drawn from the responses to the questionnaire survey.

Before the "administration of proof", an "exploratory" reading was carried out and the answers to the survey questions were assessed (Bardin, 2000). The participants whose answers were so incomplete as to not add anything of value to the study were excluded. The subsidiary questions and research hypotheses that had been outlined earlier were determined and, subsequently, the indices and indicators were defined, as presented in the following subsections.

The materials for analysis were organised and the recording units, techniques, and criteria for the study were defined. The information was systematised by preparing analysis grids in the form of multiple entry tables for each theme / question. As suggested by Bardin (2000), the **primary recording unit** for the purposes of categorisation and counting (frequencies) was the keyword or theme word, and **sentences (in vivo)** were used to provide context.

The thematic clusters were based on a set of a priori categories and subcategories drawn from the theoretical framework and empirical review (studies developed by the branches of the AAFF and the MDN) and the research hypotheses that were formulated in a previous exploratory study, in addition to other categories that emerged from the content analysis.

Assuming that the frequency with which the themes appear (in the answers) relates to their importance to the interviewed officers, in the first phase, the regularity of occurrences (frequency analysis) was considered significant and, initially, all items were given the same weight.

The study hypotheses were tested by interpreting the partial results within each theme (sets of questions) and the final integrated results. The following themes were obtained from a first aggregation:

1. The prevailing **social representations** of the AAFF and the **attractiveness of the military career** (H1)
2. **Recruitment and retention**, which were assessed in an integrated manner, including external factors, organisational problems / shortcomings, and reasons for early dropout (H2, H3 e H4);
3. The **social and occupational reintegration of former military contract personnel**, which included an assessment of the initiatives carried out by the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of the Armed Forces and the ability to support the transition to the labour market (H1).

3.1. Social Representations and the Attractiveness of the Military Career

Due to their affinity, the first thematic cluster aggregated the "social representations of the Portuguese AAFF among young people" and the "attractiveness of the military career" when serving under contract. To that end, the following questions were posed: (i) "How can the general image of AAFF among young people be assessed"; and (ii) "How can the

attractiveness of the military career for the majority of Portuguese young people be assessed".

The content analysis of the answers to the first question revealed **79 significant occurrences**, distributed according to three main categories: (i) "**Overall image**" of the AAFF, (ii) "**Activity of the AAFF**", and (iii), "**Military career**" in the AAFF, which are listed in Figure 4. Each category corresponds to subcategories that aggregate several "recording units", the most relevant of which were selected.
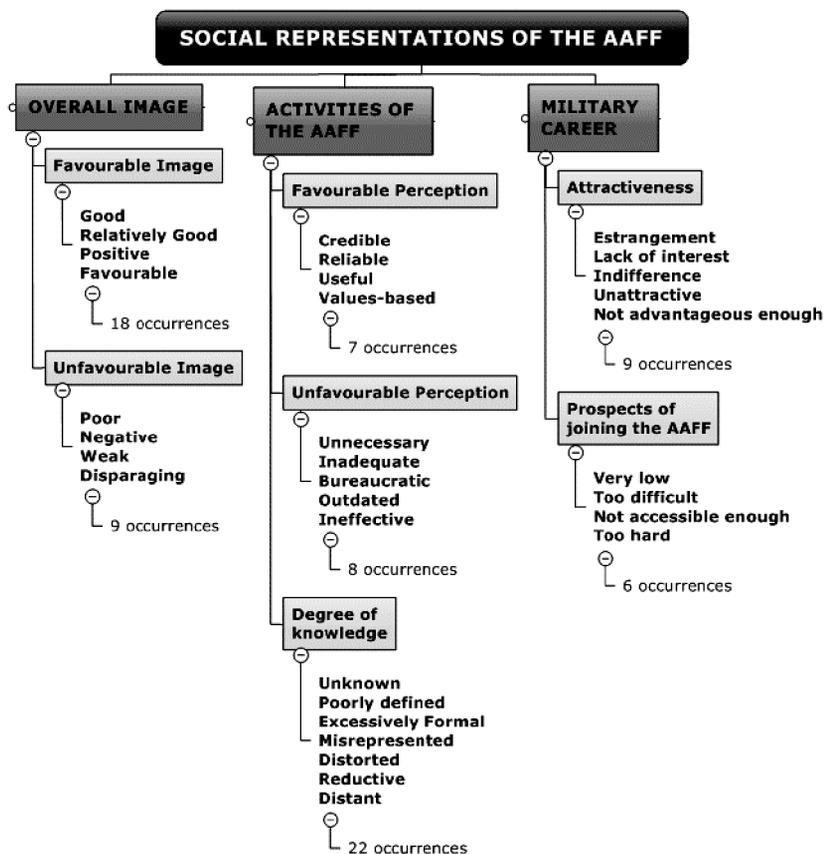

Figure 4 – Social representations of the AAFF.

The aggregated results of the first two categories suggest that respondents believe the **overall image** of the AAFF among military contract personnel to be "positive" and "favourable" (18 occurrences vs. 9 occurrences), however, and somewhat paradoxically, it also appears that they are largely uninformed about the **activity** of the Armed Forces (22 occurrences).

Although the results are rather balanced regarding the perception of the value of the activity of the AAFF (favourable versus unfavourable), the need for that activity and its usefulness are also called into question. Respondents underlined military contract personnel's **lack of awareness** and their **growing "estrangement"** from the "military organisation", which

result in a **"poorly defined"** or **"misrepresented" social representation**, attributing the somewhat negative trend of the remaining results (image and usefulness of the AAFF) partly to that lack of awareness and estrangement from military issues.

The content analysis of the category **career in the AAFF** (third category) obtained two subcategories: (i) "attractiveness" (9 occurrences) and (ii) "prospects" of joining the AAFF (6 occurrences), with the main occurrences showing a negative trend represented by "low attractiveness" and the perception that the military career is "not accessible enough" (prospects of joining the military).

The answers to the second question, which concerned the "**attractiveness of the military career**" provided more detailed perceptions about the military career. The content analysis showed a negative trend regarding the position of military CS personnel, which was obtained from the perceptions of respondents (46 unfavourable occurrences against only 8 favourable ones), as depicted in Figure 5.
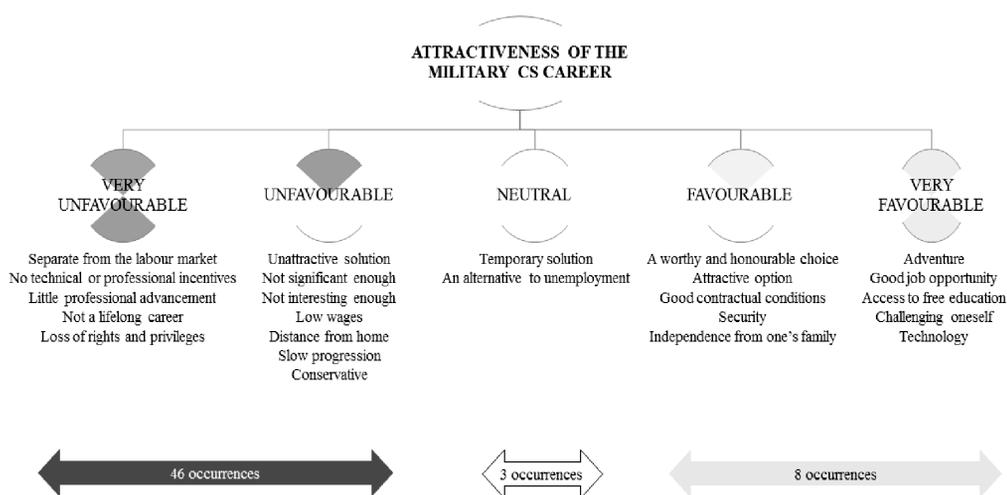

Figure 5 – Attractiveness of the military contract service career.

Once again, respondents feel that this markedly unfavourable trend could be influenced by some lack of awareness about the military's activities, which is partly caused by the fact that the image of the AAFF is not appropriately promoted.

The following context units provide the basis for the recording units listed in Figure 5 under the three corresponding outlooks:

Favourable outlook (includes the subcategories "favourable" and "very favourable"):

"[…] the contractual conditions are excellent and unmatched in the job market for the target audience in question…";

Young people who join the Armed Forces, "[…] will essentially have two outlooks […]: one more pragmatic, related to job opportunities; the other more idealised, linked to adventure, challenges, the possibility of travelling";

"With the exception of cases of unemployment and economic difficulties, the attractiveness lies in having access to an education."

Neutral outlook:

> "The attractiveness of the military career is greatly influenced by the employment situation in the country's job market […]. If the job market is struggling, young people look to a career in the military. When there are opportunities in the labour market, young people prefer another type of career."

Unfavourable outlook (includes the subcategories "unfavourable" and "very unfavourable":

> "The military career is not appealing to citizens in general, who perceive it as "something" separate from the labour market";
>
> "[…] its attractiveness is low, which is clearly reflected in the recruitment difficulties felt by all the branches";
>
> "It is not a lifelong career choice. Globalisation has opened up new horizons for them, which are proportional to the size of our territory";
>
> "[…] there are no relevant mid- / long-term technical and professional incentives";
>
> "Its attractiveness is low due to determinants such as wages, being away from home, slow career progression".

The study's claims regarding the **representations of the AAFF** and the **attractiveness of the military career** confirm the results of the research conducted by the Ministry of National Defence and by the branches of the AAFF: Navy, Army, and Air Force (e.g., CPAE, 2016; DGRDN, 2017).

3.2. Recruitment and Retention of Contract Service Personnel

The second group of themes that was discussed refers to **subsidiary questions 2, 3 and 4** and their respective research hypotheses, which served to assess two of the study's major dimensions: the **recruitment** and **retention** of CS personnel. The content analysis addressed the following topics, among others:

– External factors that most affect the ability to recruit and retain personnel;

– Organisational problems and shortcomings that affect the ability to recruit and retain personnel;

– The reasons for early dropout among CS personnel.

These topics were later combined into two major sub-themes: problems that affect recruitment; and problems that affect the retention of CS personnel.

3.2.1. Main problems that affect recruitment

The initial preliminary study (Santos, & Sarmento, 2018) and the content analysis of the participants' responses revealed five major categories: (i) relations and communication strategies and mechanisms; (ii) external factors; (iii) internal organisational factors; (iv) incentive scheme; (v) career anchors. These categories correspond to several subcategories, as explained in Figure 6.
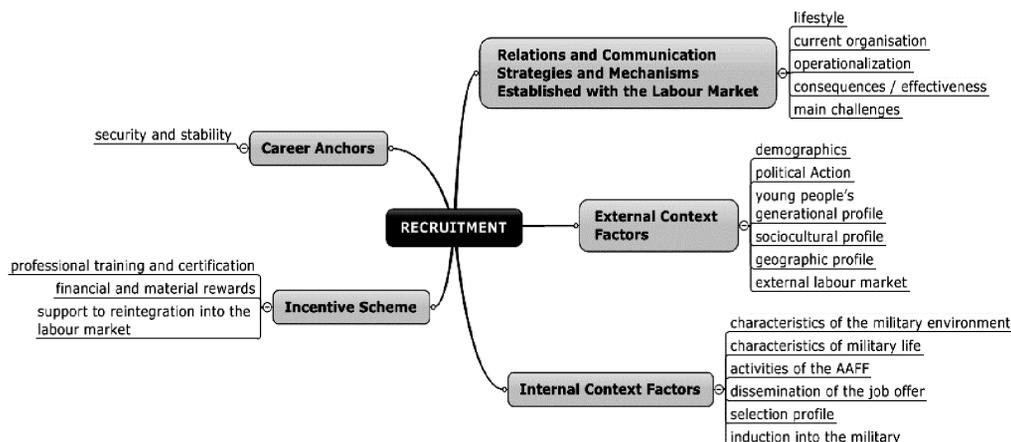
Figure 6 – Factors that affect recruitment.

The role of the "**relations and communication strategies and mechanisms**" established between the AAFF and the job market should be emphasised for their potential to jeopardise the quality of the adverts that convey the military's image and institutional offer and the ability to attract volunteers. This category comprises five subcategories: (i) general perceptions about the strategy; (ii) current organisation; (iii) operationalization; (iv) consequences / effectiveness; (v) main challenges.

Respondents' general perceptions about the strategy (first subcategory) point to a largely unfavourable assessment (26 unfavourable occurrences against 10 favourable ones). Unfavourable respondents argued that the strategy is "poorly defined and poorly structured", "unprofessional", "not innovative enough" and "not aggressive and ambitious enough". In contrast, the 10 positive occurrences refer to a "well-designed", "positive", "appropriate", "attractive" and "interesting" strategy.

Regarding the current **organisational structure** that supports this strategy (second subcategory), respondents consider that, because it is a separate structure that is not articulated between the branches and the Ministry of National Defence or coordinated at the central level, there are important gaps in its operationalization, specifically at the level of the target audience, the timings, and the types of media and formats used, with relevant **consequences** for efficiency and effectiveness. Three basic categories were obtained from the analysis of the **organisational structure**: (i) support structure; (ii) degree of articulation; (iii) joint responsibilities, with 13 occurrences overall. The main recording units refer to "a separate organisational support structure" disconnected from the branches, "fragmented", "not articulated", "implemented separately", "not centrally coordinated", which "accumulates functions", and which suffers from "insufficient commitment from the leadership".

The **operationalization** subcategory comprises four basic categories: (i) expertise; (ii) timings; (iii) target audience; (iv) media / advertising, with 19 occurrences overall. The main recording units were: the use of "home-grown" human resources and their "low specialisation" (expertise); the fact that target audiences have not been suitably defined as of yet, that there is a need for "earlier action" / at a younger age and for the "involvement

of parents" and of the general "population" (timings and target audience); the fact that "the message is not consistent", which also applies to the type of "media used" by the branches of the AAFF, from "traditional media" to the use of "social networks" and "information and communication technologies" (media / forms of advertising).

The **consequences / effectiveness** subcategory of the "relations and communication strategies and mechanisms" category comprises three basic categories: (i) message; (ii) execution; and (iii) results. There were 15 occurrences, most of which were negative, such as the following recording units: "poor advertising" and a "limited offer" that "misses the target audience", "does not reach its recipients", and does not reflect the "essence of the AAFF" (message); there are "failures in execution" and "inadequate media" are used (execution); it is insufficient, "inefficient", and has "dire consequences" because it is "not effective enough" (results).

The last subcategory of the "relations and communication strategies and mechanisms" category is represented by institutional, governmental, and national **challenges** (12 occurrences), especially regarding the use of non-traditional "media" such as social networks, YouTube, and smartphone apps, the attribution of responsibilities and "duties", both at individual and team level, the "courses of action" to be taken, the "specialisation" of participants, and the need for "training for citizenship".

In addition to the relations and communication strategies and mechanisms mentioned above, respondents pointed out other factors that can affect the ability to recruit military contract personnel. The content analysis highlighted the following categories, which, combined, correspond to 99.1% of occurrences: the **external context** (38 occurrences: 27.1%), the **organisational context** (51 occurrences: 36.4 %), the **incentive scheme** (39 occurrences: 27.9%), and **career anchors** (8 occurrences: 5.7%).

The main subcategories of the **external context** category are: (i) demographics; (ii) political action; (iii) the generational profile of young people (of enlistment age); (iv) the applicants' sociocultural profile; (v) the applicants' geographic profile; (vi) the competition from the external labour market.

Only 4 occurrences were obtained in the **demographics** category, the main recording units being the "age pyramid", the "aging population" and the "recruitment pool".

The **political action** subcategory, with 7 occurrences, appears in several recording units, such as: "the political and legal framework is outdated", "low awareness of the policy within the AAFF", "the real problem is not stated" (with regard to CS), and the need to "add value to the AAFF".

The **generational profile** and **sociocultural profile** subcategories, which obtained a total 14 occurrences that correspond to several recording units, underline the "generational characteristics" of young people, a common "lack of conviction" and consistency in their choices, "trouble accepting hardship and difficulties" and the lack of a "defence culture", and a certain "clash of ideals" regarding the military environment.

The **geographic profile**, with 6 occurrences, has a negative effect on recruitment after induction into the military because of the "geographic distance" and the "distance to the place of residence", sometimes combined with "low wages" that are not enough to cover

service members' travelling expenses.

Finally, the last subcategory of the "external context" category, **competition of the external labour market**, with 7 occurrences, is a consequence of its attractiveness when compared to the opportunities offered by the military. It is represented by the following recording units, among others: "competition with the more attractive civilian labour market"; the FFAA as a "second choice" of employment; the fact that the military offers less "incentives" and less "economic and social advantages".

When addressing the **internal (organisational) context**, the main subcategories that emerged were: (i) the characteristics of the military environment; (ii) the characteristics of military life; (iii) the activities of the AAFF; (iv) the dissemination of the job offer; (v) the selection profile; (vi) induction into the military, with 51 occurrences overall (36.4% of the factors that affect recruitment).

Of these subcategories, the **characteristics of the military environment** and the **characteristics of military life** were mentioned in 9 occurrences, and the main recording units were the "cultural position of the AAFF" and the sacrifices and rules inherent to the "military career", which discourage many citizens from pursuing a career in the military.

The **dissemination of the job offer** is the most relevant subcategory in the **internal / organisational context** category, with 21 occurrences, appearing in recording units such as: "poor, vague, poorly targeted, not objective enough, inconsistently advertised"; "not articulated"; "difficulty communicating"; "separate from the labour market", and "ineffective".

The **selection profile** subcategory stands as a warning of the need to change / adapt the classification and selection tests, especially the "medical fitness tables" and the "physical requirements", because of the high attrition rates during recruitment.

Over recent years, service members' **induction into the military** has been one of the most frequently discussed issues in military contexts. This subcategory, which obtained 10 occurrences, refers to the "first contact" citizens have with the military, the "first impression", or even the "living conditions" and "wellbeing" in the barracks during basic training, which have a major impact on the decision to join the military on a permanent basis.

The **incentive scheme** category obtained a total 39 occurrences (27.9% of the organisational context factors), and its subcategories coincide with the five principles defined in the corresponding legislation (Decree-Law No. 320-A / Decree-Law No. 118/2004 of 21 May, Decree-Law No. 320/2007 of 27 September): (i) **professional training and certification** (8 occurrences: 20.5%); (ii) **financial and material rewards** (13 occurrences: 33.3%); and (iii) **support to the reintegration into the labour market** (15 occurrences: 38.5%), represented by the recording and context units listed in Figure 7.
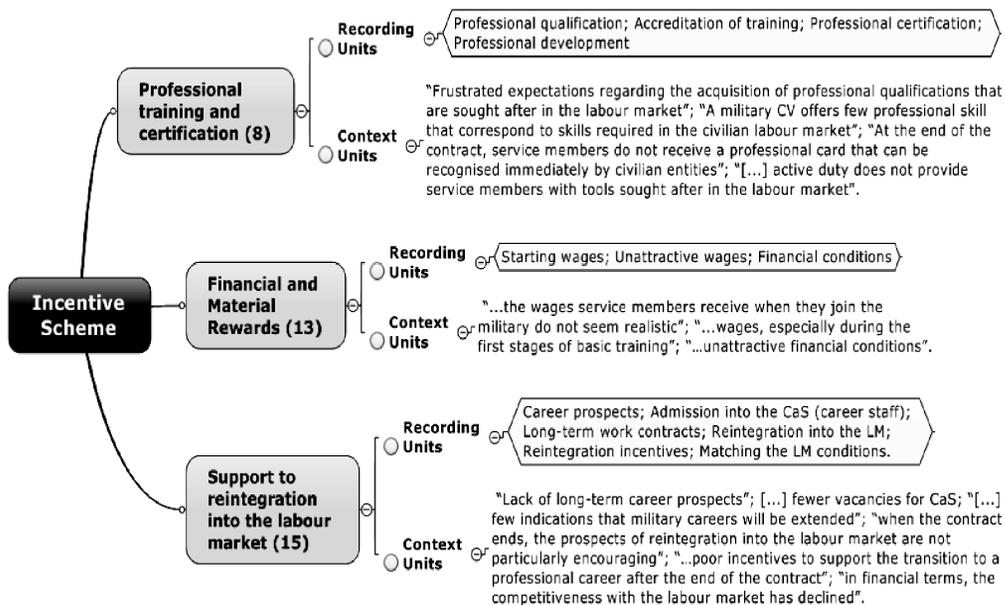
Figure 7 – Main subcategories of the CS "incentive scheme" category.

The respondents' general assessment of the attractiveness and effectiveness of the current **incentive scheme** and the need for a revision seems to confirm the weaknesses identified in several studies conducted by the MDN and the AAFF branches (CEPEC, 2016; DGRDN, 2017; Santos, 2015; Santos, & Sarmento, 2018).

Finally, the **career anchors** category, as defined by Schein (1990), corresponds to a single subcategory of some importance to citizens who choose to join the Portuguese AAFF: "security and stability", represented by the following recording units: "guaranteed employment", "professional stability", and "family stability", which are issues that citizens who join the AAFF must deal with during their term of service.

The main **challenges** are the changes that must be made to the "communication strategy" with the labour market, strengthening the "training offer", creating "integration mechanisms" between the ministries and the branches, and creating and consolidating a "defence culture". These measures must designed and implemented in a coordinated way at the institutional, governmental, and national levels.

3.2.2. Main problems that affect the retention of contract personnel

Regarding the shortcomings that affect the military's ability to retain military CS personnel, the study places particular emphasis on the reasons why citizens drop out during recruitment and selection and, later, during the first two years of service in the AAFF.

Eight categories were defined for **dropouts during recruitment and selection**: (i) applicant profile; (ii) career anchors; (iii) characteristics of the recruitment and selection process; (iv) characteristics of the military environment; (v) initial conditions provided to citizens; (vi) management of expectations; (vii) incentive scheme; (viii) external labour

market, with 151 occurrences overall. These categories correspond to several subcategories, as shown in Figure 8 and explained below.
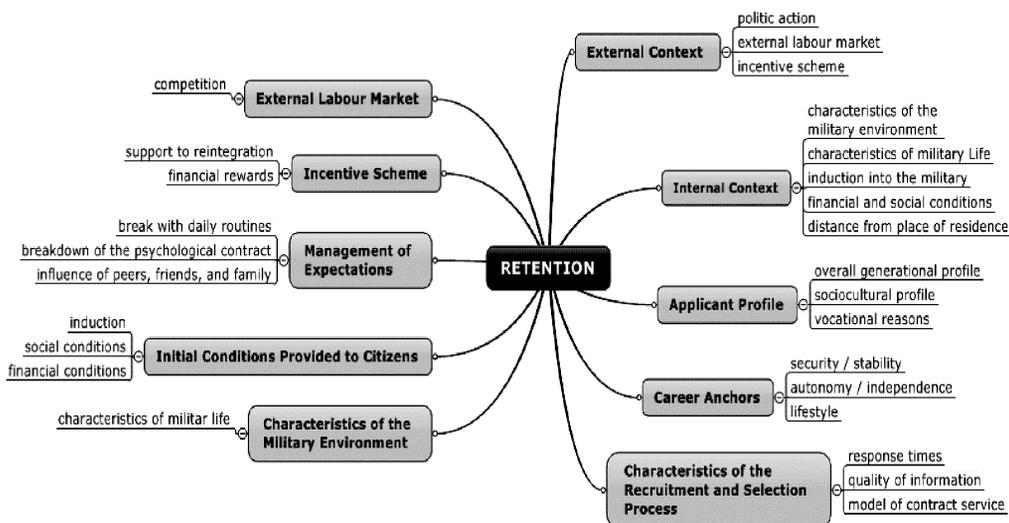
Figure 8 – Factors that affect retention.

The **applicant profile** category obtained 28 occurrences (18.6%), distributed across several subcategories, of which the following three are examples:

– **Overall generational profile** (19 occurrences: 67.9%), which includes: young people's "lack of conviction", the "frivolousness with which they face challenges", the lack of a "mind-set of sacrifice", and the difficulty dealing with "hearing 'no'/ "that is not possible'";

– **Sociocultural profile** (4 occurrences: 14.3%), which is influenced by young people's "values" and by their low "citizenship awareness";

– **Vocational reasons** (also 4 occurrences: 14.3%), as in the following recording units: "lack of vocation", "general lack of interest", and "lack of attractiveness of the military career", which, combined, provide a more detailed picture of the above perceptions.

The **career anchors** category (16 occurrences: 10.6%) suggests that there has been an estrangement from the activities of the AAFF, reinforcing the perceptions described above regarding the importance of "security / stability", which do not exist in the context of military CS. "Autonomy / independence" are stronger career anchors (the result of lack of interest in "discipline" and "duties, restrictions, and rules") and "lifestyle" (given the growing importance of the social groups with which they identify and the time they devote to them, which will have to be shared with their professional life).

One of the most important categories refers to the **characteristics of the recruitment and selection process**, which obtained a total 31 occurrences (20.5%) distributed across several subcategories, such as:

– The **response time** between the application and the call for the selection tests (15 occurrences: 48.4%). The slow pace of this phase, combined with any delays that may occur, often leads to some applicants dropping out, which confirms the results of several studies

conducted by the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of the AAFF;

– The **quality of the information available** (6 occurrences: 19.4%), which is referred to in the "lack of initial clarification" or lack of awareness of the "military contract service conditions", which are reflected in a mismatch between "expectations" and "reality";

– The design and operationalization of the **contract service model** in the initial phase (9 occurrences: 29.0%), which respondents feel is "ill adjusted to the current labour market" because it allows "only six years" of contract and because the recruitment and selection process is "over bureaucratised".

The category **characteristics of the military environment** (15 occurrences: 9.9%) further highlights the generational profile of young people, who find it hard to adapt to a different reality when confronted with the **characteristics of military life**. The main recording units include the "physical demands", the "sacrifices and restrictions" of the "military condition", as well as the other requirements and restrictions that relate to the "rules" that must be followed.

The **initial conditions** provided to citizens who join the AAFF, which obtained 22 occurrences (14.6%), are divided into five subcategories, which include the following three:

– **Induction** (5 occurrences: 22.7%), which is referred to in the units "reception during the first contact" and "during basic training" and in a rather bemusing "change in attitude" from the formal application to the moment of selection in the officers responsible for receiving applicants;

– **Social conditions** (10 occurrences: 45.5%), which are influenced by the "living conditions" and "wellbeing" rate, as well as by the frequent "distance" from the place of residence / family;

– **Financial conditions** (4 occurrences: 18.2%), which stem from the low wages received at the beginning of the contract, although those wages increase considerably over time;

The category **management of expectations** (16 occurrences: 10.6%) generated three subcategories: (i) **break with ordinary life** (11 occurrences: 68.7%); (ii) **breakdown of the psychological contract** (2 occurrences: 12.5%); (iii) **influence of peers, friends, and family** (3 occurrences: 18.8%). When combined, these subcategories express the difficulty common citizens have in adapting to a military environment with very different characteristics from young people's daily routines. The closer their initial perceptions (which are influenced by the information obtained / made available) are to reality, the easier it will be to manage their expectations.

The **incentive scheme** is again associated with the theme of "retention", obtaining 10 occurrences (6.6%), and its subcategories are the five legally defined principles, of which respondents highlighted two: (i) **support to social and occupational reintegration and (ii) financial rewards**, which account for 90% of occurrences overall.

The last category of the theme "dropouts during recruitment and selection" is the **external labour market**, with 13 occurrences (8.6% of all occurrences), distributed across three subcategories, one of which is **competition**, with 9 occurrences (69.2%), represented by "other opportunities in civilian life" and "joining a security force" (National Republican

Guard and Public Security Police). Competition is compounded by other factors in the military environment, leading many citizens to drop out during recruitment.

Finally, the **challenges** to **retention** during the procedural stages of recruitment and selection are: developing a better definition of the "target audience", "dematerialising / debureaucratising the recruitment process", substantially improving the "information available", "increasing the wages" during basic training (this aspect is currently being addressed), and "improving the induction process".

The **organisational problems and shortcomings** that affect the ability to retain personnel during recruitment and selection are largely confirmed **after service members are inducted and during their term of service**, although most occurrences refer to the working conditions and, in contrast, to the prospects of continuity in the military in face of the lack of mid- to long-term prospects.

The perceived "**breakdown of the psychological contract**" by the military, caused by the sometimes significant differences between the expectations that were created and the reality encountered, is another often mentioned reason for early dropout (e.g., being assigned duties that do not match one's expectations; being stationed in units far from one's place of residence, which entails overwhelming traveling expenses; insufficient numbers of staff, which results in service members remaining in their units for longer periods to guarantee daily services).

The "type of induction and general reception" during the service term and "rigid" or "excessively formal" interpersonal relationships, combined with the difficulty in "adapting to military life" and the estrangement from "military values" (difficulty dealing with rules and authority, lack of vocation) are other **reasons for dropout** before the maximum service term allowed by law (one year as a volunteer and six years under contract).

Being "away from one's family" and "circle of friends" and "restrictions on the use of information and communication technologies" are also mentioned as reasons for early separation.

The fact that it is a "short-term career" with "limited progression", with low wages / remuneration (especially in the enlisted ranks), often associated with the fact that service members are not assigned "duties according to their training" leads to early dropouts. The "few vacancies available for career staff" and the as-of-yet lack of "longer-term contracts", combined with "poor reintegration into the labour market after leaving the AAFF" complete the list of most relevant reasons to drop out given by respondents.

This analysis of the main reasons for the early dropout of CS personnel from the Portuguese AAFF largely defines them as "instrumental" and mainly occupational, according to Moskos' classification (1977, 1998), offering a complementary perspective.

3.3. Social and Occupational Reintegration of Former Contract Military Personnel

The third dimension of the study is the social and occupational reintegration of former military CS personnel, which, together with recruitment and retention, constitutes a cycle of phases / stages that describes the experiences of citizens who serve in the AAFF. The results

of the content analysis suggest that increasing the ability to recruit and retain personnel could depend on successful reintegration. This section will analyse the ability of the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of the AAFF to support the social and occupational reintegration of former military CS personnel.

The content analysis of the answers to the questions that correspond to this dimension revealed five main categories: (i) general assessment; (ii) bodies involved; (iii) support model (design); (iv) operationalization of the support model; (v) incentive scheme, with a 76 occurrences overall.

The results showed that respondents' **general assessment** is mostly unfavourable, with 30 negative occurrences vs. 7 positive ones. This negative trend is expressed in the units "limited ability", "zero influence", or simply in the "lack" of support to the social and occupational reintegration of former service members.

Of the 69 respondents, only three explicitly recognised the **CIOFE**, a structure that operates under the Ministry of National Defence, as the main body that provides support to service members when they return to the workforce. On the other hand, of the 69 respondents, 16 (23.2%) were unaware of or did not know enough about the incentive scheme, specifically regarding the social and occupational reintegration resources at their disposal, to give a "definitive" and "relevant" answer. Of the officers interviewed who were unaware of the support mechanisms, 14 (87.5%) have the rank of 1LT / CPT or LCDR / MAJ and 2 (12.5%) are CDR / LTC or CPT / COL, which raises a critical issue: those who know the least about the issue are the ones who deal directly with CS personnel, and are therefore unable to provide them with support in this matter.

The survey participants describe the **reintegration support model** (which was part of the overall incentive scheme) as a "transitional scheme" that provides "advantages" in the access to the job market. However, most respondents who directly mention the model consider it "outdated" (21 negative occurrences vs. 4 positive ones), "unappealing", noting that it has "become less advantageous" to service members (13 negative occurrences vs. 4 positive ones); therefore, they feel that it should be "adjusted to the reality of the labour market" and the mind-set [that is, the "generational and cultural profile"] of the applicants".

The **operationalization of the model**, with 17 occurrences overall, is conditioned by "external factors" (e.g., political action, competition from the labour market), the degree of "articulation" between the bodies involved, the "quality of advertising", the differences in who has "access" to this support, which especially benefits those who live close to major cities.

The references to the **incentive scheme**, with 19 occurrences, reinforced the above trend, emphasising "support to reintegration" and "vocational training and certification".

Still regarding the overall **incentive scheme**, the results of the content analysis confirm a general lack of awareness of the legal framework that supports military CS, underlining the following critical aspect: **44% of respondents** (30 out of 69) **explicitly stated that were unaware of or did not know enough about the incentive scheme**. Of the officers who were unaware of the scheme, 80% (24 out of 69) are younger low-ranking officers (LT / MAJ and LT / CPT), and it is precisely these officers who contact with contract personnel. The distribution does not vary significantly across the branches of the AAFF.

The **challenges that must be met to improve social and occupational reintegration**, with 18 occurrences, suggest that there should be more investment on "advertising", on "following-up" with service members, on establishing "agreements and protocols" with state agencies and with the business community, on "funding" occupational integration actions, on increasing "certified training", and on improving the "articulation" with the government, with state agencies, and with other ministries.

3.4. Discussion of the Research Hypotheses

The results of the study generally confirm the hypotheses that were formulated and listed in Table 1, which correspond to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, as described below.

Regarding young people's **social representations** of the Portuguese AAFF, the results suggest that, overall, CS personnel tend to see the military institution in a "positive" and "favourable" light, although its "attractiveness" in the labour market is mostly referred to as "unfavourable". This may be partly due to the increasing "estrangement" of young people from the "military organisation" and to a general lack of awareness about the military's activities, which is partly attributed to the fact that the "image" and "job offer" of the AAFF are not properly advertised. This confirms **hypotheses H1.1 and H1.2**, which correspond to **subsidiary question 1**.

With regard to the **external factors** and **internal (organisational) factors** that most affect recruitment and retention, the results seem to confirm hypotheses H2, H3.1 and H3.2, in line with the studies conducted by the Ministry of Defence and by the branches of the AAFF. The a priori and emerging categories and subcategories drawn from the content analysis are somewhat "diffuse" regarding recruitment and retention, and it proved difficult to relate their influence exclusively to one dimension.

The most relevant aspects of the **external context** are the successive changes to the "political and legal framework", the "demographic", "sociocultural" and "geographic" dimensions, and the "competition" of the external labour market, **confirming H2, which corresponds to subsidiary question 2**. "Demographics" adversely affects recruitment due to an aging population and the reduction of the AAFF recruitment base. The "sociocultural" and "geographic" dimensions each have a specific effect on recruitment and retention. The "sociocultural profile", combined with the "generational profile" of young people, has had a negative effect on recruitment and retention due to young people's lack of interest in and progressive estrangement from defence matters (which increases in proportion to literacy) and from activities that require sacrifices and compliance with rules, which are characteristic of the military environment. The "geographic profile", which influences the predisposition to join the AAFF, with most applicants coming from the northern interior of the country, seems to have the opposite effect on retention in this case because of the greater distance to their place of residence and their families when compared to citizens who live in large urban centres, where the majority of military units are stationed. The "competition" of the external labour market stems from its attractiveness to citizens when compared to the military job offer in terms of "other opportunities" and more "economic and social advantages".

The following are some aspects of the main **problems and shortcomings in the**

internal (organisational) context that affect the ability to recruit and retain personnel. Together, they confirm **hypotheses H3.1 and H3.2, which correspond to subsidiary question 3**:

– The "relations and communication strategies and mechanisms" established with the labour market, which also relate to the "dissemination of the job offer" are factors that respondents describe as "inadequate" and "not effective enough" and which have a negative impact on the recruitment capacity of the AAFF;

– The following are some negative aspects of the "relations and communication strategies and mechanisms" established with the labour market, mentioned here due to their prevalence in the responses: (i) the low overall quality of the dissemination of the military's image and institutional offer; (ii) the separate "organisational structure" that supports this strategy in the branches of the Armed Forces; (iii) the inadequate "articulation" of initiatives by the branches and the Ministry of National Defence; (iv) the somewhat vague definition of "target audiences, timings, media, and formats"; (v) the fact that "communication specialists" are not involved; and (vi) the still tentative use of "social networks" and "information and communication technologies" to attract applicants.

– The "characteristics of the military environment" and the "characteristics of military life", combined with the "initial conditions" provided by the AAFF during induction (overall reception, social and financial conditions) are closely linked to the "management of expectations" of citizens who are in the process of joining the military: they are generally perceived to have a negative impact on both recruitment and retention, as they constitute a very different reality from the daily routines of the average citizen and as such are often seen as reasons for early dropout;

– The "characteristics of the recruitment and selection process", in which the "selection profile" is compared to the "applicant profile": the "bureaucratisation" and general "slow pace" of the process, as well as the "response time" between the application and the call for selection tests, combined with the low "quality of information" provided to citizens are perceived by respondents as evidence of an outdated model that is "ill adjusted to the current labour market", often leading many applicants to drop out when they are confronted with the military reality, confirming the results of several of the studies carried out by the Ministry of National Defence and the branches of AAFF mentioned above;

– The "external labour market": in addition to providing "competition" and to the fact that its appeal hinders recruitment into the FFAA, it also has a negative effect on retention due to "opportunities in the civilian market" that are almost always perceived as "more advantageous", which explains why it is harder to retain staff in areas with advanced technical requirements.

The main **reasons that lead to the early dropout** of citizens who joined the Portuguese AAFF under contract are classified as "instrumental", confirming H4.1: most of the reasons appear to be of an occupational nature, according to Charles Moskos' classification, and are also linked to unmet expectations that, although they can be seen as resulting from a breakdown of the psychological contract (H4.2), mainly relate to a "break with daily routine" and with the habits acquired over years by ordinary citizens.

Regarding the **social and occupational reintegration of military CS personnel**, respondents' perceptions confirm H5, highlighting the shortcomings in the support provided by the Ministry of National Defence and the Portuguese Armed Forces in the transition to the labour market. The respondents' general assessment is therefore markedly unfavourable regarding the ability to support the social and occupational reintegration of former military contract personnel, although it is possible that this perception is currently being aggravated by economic and financial restrictions. Therefore, respondents call into question the support model (currentness and attractiveness) and its operationalization (the bodies involved and the degree of articulation between them).

The results also show that the **incentive scheme** is considered instrumental to the harmonious functioning of the three dimensions – recruitment, retention, and reintegration –, and that there is a concerning lack of awareness about its provisions and potential application. This lack of awareness is more profound, and therefore more critical, in low-ranking officers who have daily contact with contract personnel.

Conclusions

The last section summarises the main results of this investigation and presents some final considerations regarding its usefulness and the need for further research on CS in the Portuguese AAFF, with some questions remaining unanswered.

This study, which is part of a broader investigation that follows a previous exploratory study, aimed to provide a critical discussion of the model of military CS in the Portuguese AAFF and the incentive scheme that supports it, as well as to assess the external factors and organisational factors that, combined, justify the changes introduced to the design (structure) of the model, which condition its operationalization during three main phases: recruitment, retention, and social and occupational reintegration after leaving the military.

The study attempted to assess, from the perspective of career staff, the main problems and constraints that occur during recruitment and during the contract service term, with special emphasis on the difficulty retaining personnel in the ranks, as well as in their reintegration into society and the external labour market after they separate from the military. The study attempted to identify the main challenges for each set of shortcomings, in the form of changes that can be implemented to overcome or mitigate the diagnosed problems and shortcomings.

To achieve the research goals and answer the research questions, the study used a qualitative research strategy and a case study research design with a longitudinal (documentary analysis) and cross-sectional (empirical study) time horizon. The study mainly relied on hypothetical and deductive reasoning combined with inductive reasoning, situating the investigation between the context of proof and the context of discovery (Guerra, 2016). Some hypotheses drawn from previous research were tested to confirm the previously defined categories and to find other emerging categories and subcategories that could help better understand the object of study across the three major dimensions: recruit, retain, and reintegrate.

The tool of data collection and analysis used in the study was a documentary analysis of the main regulations that shape the Portuguese legal framework of military CS and of studies

and reports issued by the branches of the AAFF and by the Ministry of National Defence, combined with a questionnaire survey composed of open-ended questions administered to a sample of 74 officers assigned to the Military University Institute during the 2016/2017 academic year, whose answers were subject to content analysis.

In addition to the methodological assertions already presented in the global assessment of the hypotheses, the study must now answer the research question: "**How can the Portuguese AAFF improve their position in the national labour market in terms of the military CS model?**"

There is a real problem in the AAFF regarding the recruitment and retention of military contract personnel, which this study helped clarify, justifying a synchronised intervention on the three dimensions addressed in the study – recruitment, retention, and reintegration. These measures should be implemented simultaneously at the institutional, governmental, and national levels to rapidly improve the position of the AAFF in the labour market and to address more general issues concerning national defence and society.

Although this research complements the topics investigated by the branches of the AAFF and the MDN, it introduces an innovative element in terms of the sample it used: the study focuses on the perceptions of career staff who deal with CS personnel on a daily basis, as opposed to other samples composed of citizens who participate annually in National Defence Day and of military personnel serving under the volunteer and contract systems. Although it is not probabilistic, the sample is considered to be close to the characteristics of the universe of junior officers / captains, and senior officers of the branches of the AAFF. The qualitative dimension of the study provided a richer and deeper understanding of the observed phenomenon, complementing earlier studies.

The results suggest, however, that a more in-depth investigation should be carried out among the Portuguese young people who participate in the annual National Defence Day, as well as among the universe of military contract personnel to determine the main "career anchors" that influence the decision to join the AAFF and the most relevant reasons that could lead to the perception of a "breakdown of the psychological contract" by the military. Thus, suggestions for further research include the administration of surveys to the two above universes. A more profound reflection should also be carried out about the relations and communication strategies and mechanisms established between the AAFF and the external labour market, both with regard to the recruitment process and the social and occupational reintegration of CS personnel after leaving the military.

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