

Military Family Services and Personnel Support Programs Community Needs Assessment 2015 Report

Background and Aim

A key component of the Military Family Services (MFS (E)) and Personnel Support Programs (PSP) is the active and meaningful participation of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) families in the development, delivery and evaluation of their services.

Community Needs Assessments (CNAs) are one method to engage CAF families in a meaningful way. CNAs are effective in identifying and providing an understanding of the needs of communities, enabling MFS (E) and PSP to ensure that their programs and services respond effectively to the needs of the families they serve.

Further, CNAs are a mandated requirement for both MFS (E) and PSP. The survey is vetted through a vigorous approval process conducted by the Director General Military Personnel Research Agency. Every CNA requires the approval of the Social Services Research Review Board.

In fall 2015, MFS (E) and PSP undertook a joint CNA for Europe. The aim of the CNA was to evaluate quality of life for CAF families, Non Public Fund (NPF) employees, teachers, Military Police Security Service (MPSS), Canadian Defence Attachés (CDA), Canadian Defence Attaché Administrative Assistants (CDA AA) and the families of each who are posted to Europe. The MFS (E) questions were formatted so as to explore outcomes for families living in Europe, versus service outputs.

Methodology

The CNA was distributed in October 2015 to all 457 families in Europe who qualify for MFS (E) and PSP services. This includes CAF members, Non Public Fund (NPF) employees, teachers, Military Police Security Service (MPSS) personnel, Canadian Defence Attachés (CDA), Canadian Defence Attaché Administrative Assistants (CDA AA) and the families of each. For the purposes of this report, the term CAF families will be deemed to be inclusive of the above mentioned groups.

Three hundred and thirteen individuals visited the on-line survey and agreed to complete the survey but it was in fact only completed by 294 individuals. Many of the respondents, who did complete the survey, chose to skip some of the questions.

A copy of the full survey is included at Annex A.

Responses

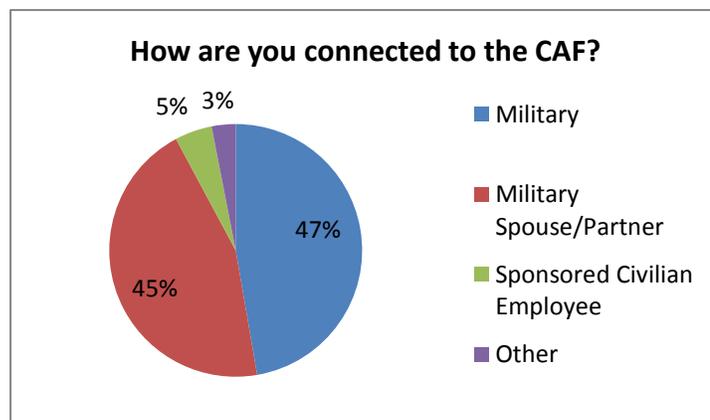
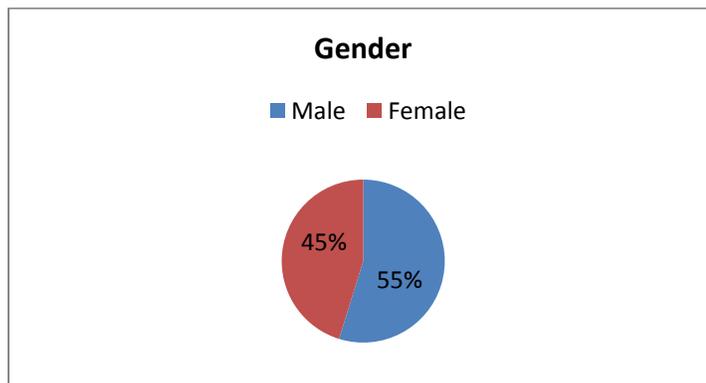
A copy of the full survey is included at Annex A.

All comments in this report are taken directly from the survey responses. Any errors, or apparent errors, in the transcribed material arise from being reproduced exactly as spelled or presented in the original source, with the following exceptions.

- In some cases, the name of the country was changed from the original submission in order to allow for consistent sorting of data. For example, England and Britain were changed to UK
- Comments that simply indicated "not applicable" or "not required" were removed from the data set unless it was a relevant answer to the question.

Additionally, where individuals provided no answer to a question or indicated "not applicable", the respondent was removed from data analysis for that question to prevent skewing of the results.

Respondent Demographics



Geographically, respondents were located as follows:

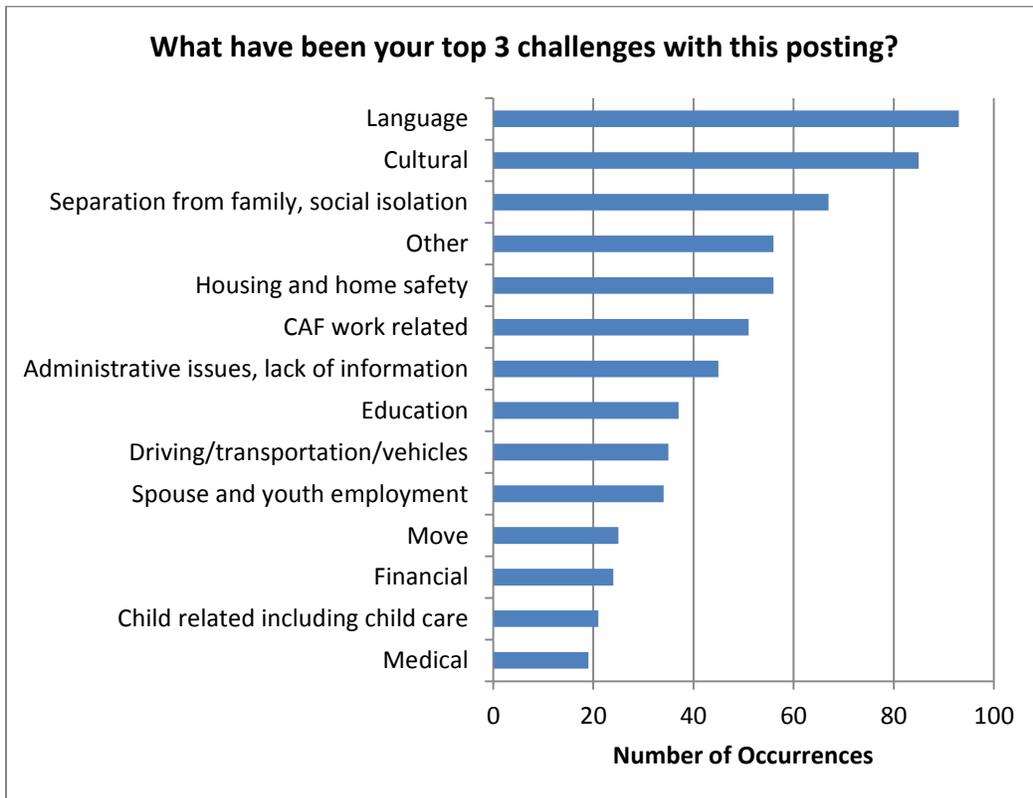
Germany/Netherlands	112
UK	52
Italy	39
SHAPE/Brussels	69
Remote/Non-Unit Fund mbr	71

Full demographics are found in Annex B.

Survey Results

Respondents were asked to identify their top three challenges, in an open-ended format. That is that MFS (E) did not pre-determine possible answers which had the potential to eliminate challenges of which MFS (E) was unaware. A total of 739 responses were received. These were manually reviewed and categorized into 15 broad categories. Based on this analysis, the top three challenges identified by families were:

1. Language
2. Culture
3. Separation from family, social isolation



Language

The ability to communicate is a key component of being able to adapt to a new country, particularly for those in remote areas who do not have a large Canadian community for support and socialization. The inability to speak the language results in isolation for the member and their family. It also creates significant difficulties in accessing medical and dental services and justified anxiety and uncertainty about one's ability to manage in an emergency.

While MFS language training is available to all dependents through Rosetta Stone licenses or the reimbursement of fees for class led training, only 62.7% of respondents indicated that they had access to language training. A further analysis of the data shows that 85% of those indicating that they did not have any access to language training were CAF members rather than family members.

Many families indicated that on-line language training (i.e. Rosetta Stone) was not an ideal language training method as it does not provide opportunities for interaction. However not all families have access to class-led language training. Comments from spouses indicated that child care presented an issue for language training and CAF members indicated an inability to access language training due to the fact that it was held during their work day.

Language Training Action Items

1. MFS (E) will promote available language training options and opportunities on the website.
2. MFS is currently exploring on-line training opportunities other than Rosetta Stone.
3. MFS (E) will enable Virtual sessions for family members wishing to practice their new language with each other.
4. Although not mandated or funded to provide language training to the CAF member, MFS (E) will explore opportunities to do so.

Culture

Responses that were related to cultural issues were often quite vague. However the themes that emerged, spoke to experiencing difficulty with the tasks of daily living including banking, shopping and accessing necessary services. They also expressed difficulties with driving and learning to use public transportation.

Cultural differences are a fact of life when moving to Europe and families, military or otherwise must be prepared to acclimatize to their new situation. However, it may be possible to reduce the culture shock by ensuring that families have adequate information prior to relocation.

Cultural Issues Action Items

1. MFS is actively working with CAF social workers to encourage families during their OUTCAN screening, to connect with MFS (E) Community Service Managers to provide information about day-to-day life in their new community.

2. MFS (E) has recently revised all Thriving In... guides. They will be posted on the website so that they will be available to all CAF families prior to their OUTCAN screening process. On-line, as opposed to hard copy, provision of this resource will allow MFS (E) to keep the information current.
3. MFS (E) will produce Thriving In...guides for additional remote communities such as Poggio and Cologne.

Social Isolation and Separation from Family

Separation from family is an expected component of the military lifestyle and something with which most CAF families are very familiar. However, postings to Europe create even further distances from their families and support networks. Couple that with the social isolation mentioned by many people due to difficulty in making friends in their new communities (often a result of language or cultural issues) and it translates into CAF families not having the support systems in place that they would expect to develop in Canada. Many families also mentioned separation from their children who have remained in Canada for various reasons, including educational pursuits as well as separation from elderly / ill family members.

Separation and Social Isolation Action Items

1. MFS (E) will explore options for virtual social groups that allow families to connect.
2. MFS (E) currently runs virtual Empty Nesters groups. They will be promoted more vigorously.
3. In locations where there are Military Family Service Centres, managers will undertake a review to determine if existing programs and social activities are a good fit for the current interests of their community members.

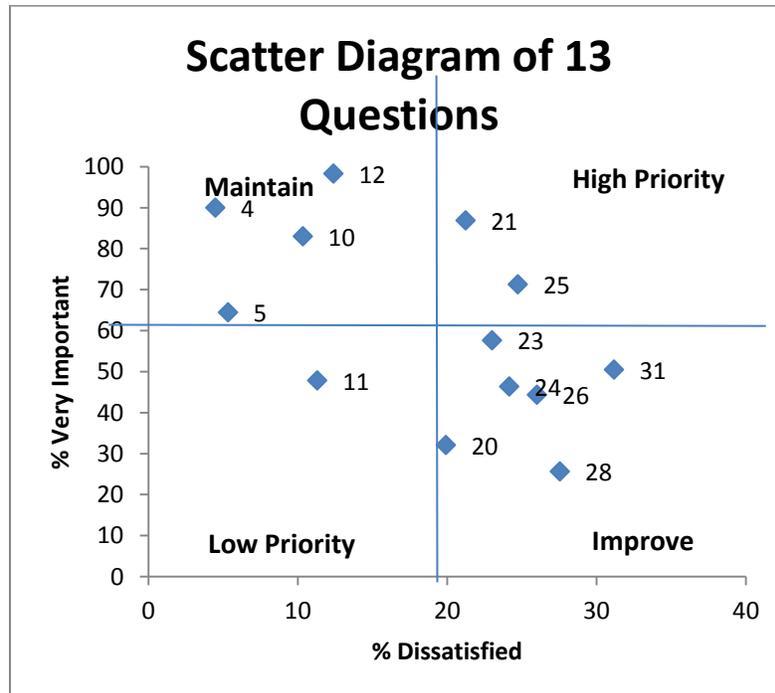
MFS (E) Analysis of Priority Areas

There were 14 survey questions that asked both “How satisfied are you with...?” and “How important is this to you?”. MFS (E) needs to prioritize areas where the community has indicated dissatisfaction and which they have also indicated are important to them.

To prioritize these questions they were plotted onto a scatter diagram of importance vs dissatisfaction, as shown in Chart 1. The questions are separated into 4 categories:

- High priority - Rated high in importance and also rated high in dissatisfaction. These become a priority in the action plan
- Medium priority (maintain) - Rated high in importance but also rated high in level of satisfaction. No action required other than to maintain.
- Medium priority (improve) - Rated low in importance but high in dissatisfaction. These are areas requiring work but will have less priority in the action plan.

- Low Priority - rated low in importance but high in satisfaction. No action required other than to maintain but need to maintain is less important than medium priority items.



The results are summarized in the table below.

Priority	Question
High Priority	Do you feel well equipped to manage child care needs in emergency situations?
High Priority	Do you have access to child care options?
High Priority	Do you have access to resources that enable you to pursue your future employment and career goals?
Maintain (Medium Priority)	Do you feel well equipped to manage your children's educational needs?
Maintain (Medium Priority)	Do your children under the age of 12 have opportunities for social interaction and learning, be it within the Canadian or international communities?
Maintain (Medium Priority)	Do your children aged 12-18 have opportunities for social interaction and learning, be it within the Canadian or international communities?
Maintain (Medium Priority)	Did you feel welcomed by the community when you arrived?
Improve (Medium Priority)	Do you have access to parent and caregiver education and resources?
Improve (Medium Priority)	Do you use a Military Family Services centre?

Priority	Question
Improve (Medium Priority)	Do you feel well equipped to pursue your educational goals?
Improve (Medium Priority)	Have you had an opportunity to be engaged in community development activities, for example, Advisory Committee membership, focus groups and/or volunteering?
Improve (Medium Priority)	Do you feel you have the opportunity to provide input into Military Family Services?
Low Priority	Do you feel you are a part of the Canadian community locally and/or across Europe?

The top three questions that rated high in importance and low in satisfaction, as identified by this exercise are:

1. Do you feel well equipped to manage child care needs in emergency situations?
2. Do you have access to child care options?
3. Do you have access to resources that enable you to pursue your future employment and career goals?

The top 2 priorities are in the area of child care. MFS (E) recently completed a study of its capacity to provide child care and determined that this was not a service that could be directly provided for 3 main reasons;

1. Funding - Child care is a provincial responsibility. Federal funding (as MFS (E) receives) may not be used for this service. Therefore child care would need to be self-sustaining, meaning that parents would need to pay the full cost of the service. Given the relatively small base of users in Europe, this would be cost prohibitive for families.
2. Staffing - Because we can only hire from the limited pool of CAF dependents who are interested in working, it is highly unlikely that there is a capacity to hire sufficient qualified staff.
3. Facilities - There are legislated requirements for child care facilities. Assuming that sufficient space is even available in the community or on a base, meeting these requirements to provide an appropriate environment would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Child Care Action Items

1. Promote activities that provide opportunities for families with young children to get together and facilitate the establishment of informal child care networks.
2. Where families demonstrate an interest, facilitate the development of child care cooperatives.
3. Continue to advocate with social workers to ensure that families are well informed about these challenges prior to accepting a posting to Europe.
4. Ensure that these challenges are highlighted in all MFS (E) materials and resources that are available to families pre-posting.

Employment was an area of dissatisfaction for CAF family members. Although families are advised prior to accepting an OUTCAN posting, that they will have very limited employment opportunities, it appears that some failed to recognize the significance of this in terms of future impact on careers, inability to maintain professional licences and accreditations, contribution to social isolation and loss of some feelings of satisfaction with their life.

Employment and Career Action Items

1. MFS (E)'s virtual Adult Employability program will be promoted more vigorously.
2. Work with MFS HQ to identify and develop partnerships with employers who may be able to provide remote employment opportunities.
3. Continue to advocate with social workers to ensure that families are well informed about these challenges prior to accepting a posting to Europe.
4. Ensure that these challenges are highlighted in all MFS (E) materials and resources that are available to families pre-posting.

Charts of responses to all questions can be found at Annex B. Comments made to questions can be found in Annex C.

European Advisory Committee Review

Data was further analyzed at a full day meeting of the European Advisory Committee, which included 7 family members, the NMR's representative and other service providers (PSP, Chaplain, and Children's Education Management). Two other group members, also family members, were unable to participate in the meeting, but did receive the opportunity to provide input. The members represented families living in various areas/countries within Europe with 5 representing remote postings.

The group identified the top 3 priorities as;

1. Communication
2. Remote services
3. Emergency preparedness and safety

Communication

Many of the concerns raised by respondents related directly to lack of communication. This was particularly highlighted by the questions around availability of and access to resources and supports. Many respondents indicated that they either did not have access to resources or did not know where to go to get help. Although these resources exist many respondents were unaware of this. Families are provided with this information on clearing in, but perhaps at a time when there is too much information being provided. MFS (E) will need to consider how it can better provide this information.

The area of support to families pre, during and post deployment also highlighted that MFS (E) must do a much better job at on-going communication with families. This will require the support of the Chain of Command to help identify planned periods of separation such as TD. Communication was also identified as an issue in the Chain of Command informal survey conducted by CO CFSU (E) in 2014. (See page 11)

Communication has been significantly hampered over the last 18 months due to website and website management issues. MFS (E) has taken corrective action to prevent problems, within its control, from occurring again.

Communication Action Items

1. The MFS (E)/PSP converged website is expected to launch in January 2017. MFS (E) and PSP staff will be trained. One of the staff to be trained is a permanent locally hired staff, to ensure retention of capacity beyond posting seasons.
2. The website and Facebook page will be more widely, vigorously and frequently promoted through various methods including enhancing its presence in welcome packages, providing families with fridge magnets, promoting it in every communication going to families.
3. Due to staffing issues, the current website did not always have up-to-date information. In fall 2016, MFS (E) enhanced staffing in the communications section, creating 2 part time positions to ensure that there is more than one staff with the training and capability to update the website.
4. MFS (E) Regional Manager will provide quarterly updates to the Chain of Command.
5. Additional Thriving In....books will be created for new locations. This will include Poggio and Cologne.
6. MFS (E) will ensure a comprehensive and current package of information on the website which includes direct links to information about services, supports, policies and procedures that fall under the mandate of the CAF and other service providers i.e. Medical, dental, emergency plans preparedness, CEM etc.
7. MFS (E) will develop a communication plan specifically for remote families.

Remote services

While remote CAF families probably have even more of a need for MFS (E) support and services than CAF families living within larger communities of Canadian families, it is at the same time much more challenging to meet the needs of families living remotely. This is due to several factors, including, isolation of the family, absence of other Canadian families to provide a natural support system, lack of MFS (E) awareness of TD of member and lack of information about supports and services available in these less well established and smaller communities. Remote communities are heavily dependent upon MFS (E) outreach and its provision of virtual services. However, accessing virtual services can sometimes be a challenge within itself due to lack of reliable internet.

Families were particularly concerned about availability and accessibility of medical and dental services in remote postings. Families particularly struggle in areas where they do not have

access to NATO or American services and where language issues make it difficult to access local services. Families are unclear of the role and responsibilities of medical and dental services located in Selfkant Kaserne. They would like to be provided with lists of doctors and dentists who speak English.

In addition, remote families have access to less information about their new community prior to their posting and when they arrive. They often feel very much on their own to manage in a strange country where they do not speak the language.

Remote Services Action Items

1. MFS(E) will expand the virtual program by adding programs for families with young children, for young children and for youth.
2. MFS (E) will meet with the Medical Officer at Selfkant Kaserne to clarify their role and ability to support remote families and ensure that this information is provided on the new website.
3. MFS (E) will attempt to connect families pre-posting to a family already living in that community.
4. Thriving In.... guides will be produced for expanding communities that currently do not have one.
5. MFS (E) will reassess needs of remote communities once they reach 10 families or more to determine if support being provided should be enhanced.
6. Resources available to remote families (i.e. Books, DVDs, virtual programs) will be more heavily promoted.
7. Regional Manager MFS (E) will submit a request for funding to expand services to include the provision of the full slate of MFS (E) services to CDA(A)s, and MPSSs.

Emergency preparedness and safety

Safety and security are increasingly becoming a concern for family members. Given recent and current events and level of activity in Europe, there is no doubt that families are, in fact, at greater risk than in previous years. Only 56% of respondents indicated that they felt well equipped to handle emergency situations in an OUTCAN environment. A further 37% indicated they felt somewhat prepared and 7% indicated that they did not feel well equipped. The point was made that military members are well trained to handle these types of events, but family members are not. Further, families are often unaware of who to contact or what to do in an emergency.

Emergency Preparedness and Safety Recommendations

1. The issues will be raised with the Chain of Command by the NMR rep on the Advisory Committee.
2. MFS (E) will include a link on its website to any emergency and safety information provided by the Chain of Command. This will include identifying a point of contact for each unit, detachment or area in case of emergency.
3. MFS (E) will facilitate virtual security briefings for families.

4. The next MFS (E)/PSP CNA will include a question specific to this concern to track progress made.
5. MFS (E) will explore options for staff training to support families experiencing crisis.

Personnel Support Programs (PSP)

The European Fund Working Group (EFWG), a committee subordinate to the European Fund Committee (EFC) made up of representatives from seven larger communities (Brunssum, Brussels, Naples, Germany, SHAPE, CFSU (E) and UK) as well as a Non-Unit Fund (NUF) Member Representative, met in September and discussed the results of the CNA that pertained to the European Fund (EF) and its PSP programs. The committee identified that for the most part members were satisfied with the PSP services provided in Europe; however, the number one priority was communication. In regards to some PSP programs (i.e. Spousal Deployment Support and the Academic Program) nearly 60% of respondents were unaware of these programs. The other two PSP programs funded by the EF (Chalet Program and European Fund Grant) are well known and are supported as “funds well spent” by 68% and 61% of respondents respectively. When asked what other programs the EF funds could be spent on there were many responses with the top six being fitness, language training, scholarship/bursary, child care, mail delivery and group travel.

Although the Chalet Program was well supported, there were comments in the CNA that indicated the program needed to be up-dated and more flexible. A request for a review of the program had also been brought forward at the November 2015 EFC meeting. As a result of the review and the CNA comments, the EFC approved and implemented in March 2016 a Full-Flex Getaway Voucher option to complement the existing program.

Only 40% of respondents felt they had opportunity to input into PSP programs and 50% or more of respondents felt this was very important. This would lead one to believe that leaders should seek input from the community for program funding priorities, however, with a 90% participation rate there is evidence that what is being provided is more than satisfactory. Up to 88% of respondents were either somewhat satisfied or completely satisfied with PSP services and a large percent (68%) felt they were aware of the programs in their area. This would indicate that for the most part communities are doing a good job at promoting their programs, meeting the morale and welfare needs of their community and getting their members involved.

The majority of Non-Unit Fund (NUF) members use their EF Grant on travel and cultural activities. Ninety percent of Unit Fund (UF) respondents participate in UF activities indicating they prefer to use the funds equally for various activities (i.e. cultural, outdoor, social and sport activities, special events, and group travel).

In regards to the improving awareness of EF/PSP programs, PSP will partner with MFS (E) and promote their programs via the MFS quarterly newsletter and FaceBook. Early 2017 the new PSP/MFS website will be launched and we will be better able to promote programs and services

via the internet. The majority of respondents prefer to receive information via email so we will continue to utilize this medium as well.

Formation Europe Commanders Survey

In November 2014, CO CFSU (E), with the concurrence of NMR, undertook an informal poll of Formation Europe Commanders to determine current status/perception of MFS (E) with the European context, from a Chain of Command perspective.

As a result of responses to this poll, CO CFSU (E) developed a report for NMR and put forward the recommendations below. As this report is now almost 18 months old, all concerns have been addressed and progress made in responding to these recommendations is noted in italics.

1. Needs Assessment: A joint MFS (E)/PSP community needs assessment should be developed and completed. *This has been completed.*
2. Communication: The MFS (E) Regional Manager should conduct outreach calls to the FE Chain of Command at each location on a recurring basis to ensure that the concerns of the community are addressed. *On further discussion, it was determined that a quarterly written report to the Chain of Command at each location with an invitation to contact the MFS (E) Regional Manager if there were concerns, would suffice.*
3. Information Availability: MFS (E) provides pre-recorded information which is available to new families as well as families considering an OUTCAN posting. MFS (E) will provide CO CFSU (E) with a date by which time information is required from the sub-units. *This was completed. Note; this is an on-going activity as information is updated annually.*
4. Provision of Posting Instructions: "The availability of family information to MFS (E) is paramount in order to ensure their ability to provide family related services and outreach. To date the provision of this data has proven problematic and disjointed across CFSU (E) and its Detachments. The distribution of the information has been based primarily on individual decisions and methodologies vice a coordinated action." *CO CFSU (E) has implemented a protocol for the safe and secure sharing of this information. This has greatly facilitated MFS (E) outreach and support provision.*
5. Information Security: CFMWS should be queried for their intent/plan to ensure information security questions are addressed in a manner that is conducive to the OUTCAN dispersion dynamic. *MFS (E) met with IS at CFMWS HQ in August 2015 to address this issue. CFMWS is committed to ensuring that appropriate safeguards are put into place that meet the needs of the OUTCAN environment, both in Europe and in the U.S. Meetings and work towards this goal are on-going.*

See Annex J for the full Formation Europe Commanders Survey briefing note.

Location Variances

It can be reasonably assumed that CAF families' experiences will differ from country to country and between larger communities and remote postings. An analysis of the data supported that

assumption but also sometimes challenged assumptions regarding which issues would be experienced more acutely in which countries.

There were eight MFS questions which had a variance between countries of 20% or greater. They were;

1. Were you satisfied with your transition from Canada to your current location?
The highest level of satisfaction was in Germany at 97% and the lowest was in the UK with 52%. This was somewhat surprising given the absence of language issues in the UK which is a major challenge to transitioning to some other European countries.
2. Did you feel welcomed by your community when you arrived?
Families in Belgium (Brussels & SHAPE) felt the most welcomed by their community at 87%. Families in the UK felt the least welcomed at 48%. Given the absence of a language issue in the UK, one might be surprised by this, however this can be attributed to the fact that there is no MFS Centre and the CAF population is very dispersed across the UK. However, comments to this question indicate that it may be partly due to the more reserved nature of UK citizens.
3. Do you feel you are part of the community locally or across Europe?
72% of families in Belgium (Brussels & SHAPE) feel part of their Canadian community while only 33% of those living in remote postings said the same thing.
4. Do you feel that you have the opportunity to provide input into Military Family Services?
79% of respondents from Belgium felt they had that opportunity, while in remote postings, only 33% felt that they had the opportunity. This was surprising, given that all respondents theoretically have an equal opportunity.
5. Do you have access to parent and caregiver information and resources?
48% of respondents from the UK felt they had access to this information and resources while only 12% of those living remotely felt the same. These resources exist and again are theoretically equally available to all CAF families in Europe. However, this question also highlights the lack of awareness these families have of these resources.
6. Do you feel well equipped to manage child care needs in emergency situations?
80% of respondents from Italy felt equipped to manage child care needs in emergency situations, which speaks to the closeness of the Naples community. Surprisingly, only 31% of respondents from Germany, a larger and relatively close knit community felt the same.
7. Do you have access to child care options?
58% of respondents from Italy indicated that they had access to child care options, while only 26% of respondents from Germany indicated such. This is somewhat surprising given the much larger pool of CAF families to which those living in Germany can look to for child care support, however may be attributable to the fact that there are approximately 50 families remotely located in Germany who would not have access to the larger pool.
8. Do you feel well equipped to manage your child's educational needs?
85% of UK respondents indicated that they feel well equipped to manage their child's educational needs. Only 35% of those in Italy felt equipped to manage their child's educational needs.

MFS (E) will analyze country differences to determine if there are some best practices in place that could be implemented at all locations. For full details on variances for these questions, please see Annex I

For a full breakdown of responses by countries/UF community, please see the following Annexes:

- Annex D – MFS Results - Belgium
- Annex E – MFS Results - Germany/Netherlands
- Annex F – MFS Results - Italy
- Annex G – MFS Results - Remote Personnel
- Annex H – MFS Results - United Kingdom
- Annex K – PSP Results – Brunssum
- Annex L – PSP Results – Brussels
- Annex M – PSP Results – Niederheid
- Annex N – PSP Results – Naples
- Annex O – PSP Results – Non-Unit Fund Members
- Annex P – PSP Results – Ramstein
- Annex Q – PSP Results – SHAPE
- Annex R – PSP Results – United Kingdom

Conclusion

The CNA confirmed that, while there are definitely many challenges to an OUTCAN posting, most CAF members are coping well. Some of the challenges reported are an expected result of living in a different country and culture. Others are the same challenges experienced by CAF families as they move from posting to posting in Canada, however exacerbated in an OUTCAN environment due to distance and lack of support from family, language issues, lack of child care and employment opportunities for spouses, among other factors. Although families are advised about these issues in their OUTCAN screening, living the experience is sometimes more difficult than families have anticipated.

Those challenges cannot be eliminated but strategies can be put in place to mitigate them. The most important tool in mitigating challenges is communication and this was very evident in the responses. MFS (E) and PSP must work harder and better to get information out to families, all families, in a manner that is effective for their community and situation. Although there has been significant improvement over the last 2 years, MFS (E) must also, with the support of the Chain of Command, become better at reaching out to each family individually. But communication must also start before a CAF family accepts a posting OUTCAN. MFS Ottawa will continue to work with CAF social workers to ensure that these families are receiving comprehensive information about the location for which they are screening and are connected to the responsible MFSC well before their arrival in their new community.