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Support for the non-military system by the territorial defense forces in the fight against COVID-19

Udział wojsk obrony terytorialnej we wsparciu układu pozamilitarnego w walce z pandemią COVID-19

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Abstract. Soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) (Polish name: Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej – WOT) have been supporting medical services and local government entities in the fight against COVID-19 for over 2 years. More than 1,000 TDF soldiers are deployed every day to carry out the tasks in the fight against the pandemic, providing support in dozens of hospitals and sanitary stations, vaccination points, as well as blood donation and transfusion centers. During the pandemic period, as the number of cases increased, so did the number of operations carried out by TDF soldiers. “WOT Pomoc” application implemented in the TDF Command was developed to facilitate submission, without physical contact, of support requests for TDF soldiers. Through its use, each of the state’s non-military system entities eligible to receive military support has the ability to log into the application and submit a request for support. This eliminated the need for multi-level approval of requests, from the voivode up to the Minister of Defense. Since the launch of the application, all the activities related to submitting requests are done automatically, without the need to perform additional actions, and information about the approval of the request is transferred directly to the appropriate brigade commander of the Territorial Defense Forces. **Keywords:** crisis management, support for the non-military system, information system, The Territorial Defense Forces, Covid-19

Abstrakt. Żołnierze WOT od ponad 2 lat wspierają służby medyczne i jednostki samorządu terytorialnego w walce z koronawirusem COVID-19. Do realizacji zadań w walce z pandemią każdego dnia zaangażowanych jest ponad 1000 żołnierzy wojsk obrony terytorialnej (WOT), udzielających wsparcia w kilkudziesięciu szpitalach i stacjach sanitarnych, punktach szczepień, a także w centrach krwiodawstwa i krwiolecznictwa. W okresie pandemii wraz ze wzrostem zachorowań rosła również liczba przedsięwzięć realizowanych przez żołnierzy WOT. Wdrożona w dowództwie WOT aplikacja „Pomoc WOT” powstała w celu ułatwienia i bezkontaktowego składania zapotrzebowań na wsparcie żołnierzy WOT. Poprzez jej wykorzystanie każdy z podmiotów układu pozamilitarnego państwa, uprawnionych do otrzymania wsparcia wojskowego, ma możliwość zalogowania się w aplikacji i złożenia zapotrzebowania na wsparcie. Wyeliminowało to konieczność wieloszczeblowego zatwierdzania wniosków poprzez wojewodę do Ministra Obrony Narodowej. Z chwilą powstania aplikacji wszystkie czynności związane ze składaniem wniosku realizowane są automatycznie, bez konieczności wykonywania dodatkowych czynności, a informacja o zatwierdzeniu wniosku trafia bezpośrednio do właściwego dowódcy brygady Obrony Terytorialnej.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie kryzysowe, wsparcie układu pozamilitarnego, system informatyczny, Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej, COVID-19

Introduction

An important objective of the activities of the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) (Polish name: Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej – WOT) is to support the protective subsystems of the state in ensuring internal security and assisting the public in the event of non-military threats. One of the roles of territorial defense is to support public administration and sanitation services in civil protection and emergency response with regard to certain non-military threats. This includes the preparation and use of forces and resources at the disposal of the WOT in the form of human and material resources as well as infrastructure in supporting the non-military system in the fight against pandemic threats.

The considerations presented in the article are related to the territorial defense forces, and the subject of research is to check, verify, and evaluate the status of involvement of TDF in supporting public administration, sanitation and emergency services in the fight against the Sars-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. Due to the author's research interests, lack of knowledge on this subject has become a kind of problem situation, causing the need to analyze and evaluate the computer program (application), in the form of a specially designed support platform for local governments, sanitary authorities and medical entities. It has been developed by the cadets from the Cybernetics Department of the Military University of Technology, assigned to serve in the TDF during the first phase of the pandemic, who came up with the idea that the creation of the application would streamline the process of requests submission by entities seeking TDF assistance in the fight against COVID-19.

The problem situation is subordinated to the general objective of this publication, which is to examine and evaluate the functioning of the platform supporting the activities of the TDF, which allows universal access of non-military system entities requesting TDF support.

Accomplishing the objectives of the article thus outlined required answering the following research questions: *What were the drivers behind the implementation of the “Pomoc WOT” application supporting the management of the system for requesting TDF assistance by local government institutions and health care entities? What experience have the TDF gained in dealing with a pandemic, based on the needs of those responsible for countering and eradicating the effects of the pandemic? To what extent has the Pomoc WOT platform assisted public administration, sanitary and emergency services in the fight against the pandemic?*

In view of such formulated research problems, the following empirical research methods were applied: the method of analysis and criticism of the literature of the research subject and statistical methods concerning non-military actors, to which the soldiers of the TDF provided support in the fight against COVID-19. From among theoretical methods, the following were used: analysis, synthesis, and inference methods.

Tasks of territorial defense forces in the implementation of crisis management tasks in the fight against Covid-19

The Territorial Defense Forces have been operating as a separate type of armed forces since 2017. There are currently 32,000 soldiers serving in their ranks, the majority of whom are volunteer soldiers. Organizational documents show that the target number of TDF soldiers in 2025 is to reach 53,000 [13]. Territorial Defense Forces, as the fifth military branch in the Polish Armed Forces, carry out tasks within two out of three missions that have been imposed on the Polish Armed Forces (Table 1.).

Table 1. Missions of the Polish Armed Forces

Mission number	Mission description	TDF participation
1st mission	Guaranteeing the defense of the state and resisting armed aggression	Yes
2nd mission	Supporting protective subsystems for homeland security and assistance to the public	Yes
3rd mission	Participation in the process of stabilizing the international situation	No

Source: Own study based on [8] p. 16

The first mission assumes that the aim of the Polish Armed Forces is to guarantee the defense of the state and to maintain the borders by resisting armed aggression. The second relates to the Polish Armed Forces support for protective subsystems in the area of internal security and assistance to the public [3]. Taking into account the missions of the Polish Armed Forces presented above, the tasks of TD forces in times of peace and crisis mainly boil down to supporting the non-military system, including public administration, emergency and sanitary services in providing assistance to the public in emergency situations. Based on the above tasks, the following motto of the TDF was forged: "Always ready, always close."

The tasks faced by territorial defense soldiers include, among others [14]:

- maintaining general readiness to defend the Republic of Poland;
- protection of the population from the effects of natural disasters, elimination of their consequences, protection of property, search and rescue operations and protection of human health and life, as well as participation in the implementation of crisis management tasks [7];
- cooperation with state defense system entities, especially with voivodes and local government bodies [2];
- shaping patriotic and civic attitudes and values in society.

The Homeland Defense Act [9], which came into force on 23 April 2022, entrusted TD forces with the non-military part of crisis management tasks in the national defense ministry. On the day the act came into force, the commander of the TDF became the head of the Crisis Management Center in the Ministry of National Defense, while commanders of the TD Brigades replaced, in the described scope, previous heads of Voivodeship Military Headquarters and became the right hand of voivodes in the coordination and implementation of support that can be provided by the army [14]. In crisis situations, the tasks of the TDF have been formulated, among others, in the form of counteracting and combating the effects of natural disasters and conducting rescue operations in case of threats to the life or health of the population [10]. Therefore, for the duration of the fight against the Sars-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, the TD forces changed the formation's operating model from training to counter-crisis.

It follows from the tasks presented above that in a crisis situation the Polish Armed Forces, including the Territorial Defense Forces, are obliged to act to prevent or remove the effects of natural disasters. However, it must be emphasized that in order to deploy military forces and resources, it is required to implement the procedures indicated in the law. The procedures are related to operational planning activities concerning the assessment of the crisis situation, variants of actions and identification of forces and resources that will be necessary to perform tasks in the field of crisis management. This situation occurs when it is impossible or may not be sufficient to use other forces of the state's non-military system. At that point, the armed forces are activated. The use of the military therefore depends on whether and when the capabilities of other services are "exhausted".

It should be clearly noted that in peacetime, the TDF do not replace, but only complement and support the existing non-military “crisis response” system [4]. Thus, the support of TDF soldiers and their presence in the social space during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic became a natural phenomenon, necessitated by the need to counteract the pandemic, in connection with the implementation of crisis management tasks in providing assistance to the public.

Support for health service by the TDF in the fight against Covid-19 - findings

The Territorial Defense Forces were actively supporting sanitation services in the fight against the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus from 2020 to 2022. Soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces became engaged in activities to limit the transmission of the virus almost as soon as the first case of the disease was detected, i.e. on 6 March, two days after the first case of infection was detected in Poland. Initially, the TDF's actions were called Operation “Odporna Wiosna” [*Resilient Spring*], with the goal of mitigating the effects of the crisis and strengthening the resilience of local communities to the crisis. At that time, the operation's mission focused on providing support, at the request of the competent health authority or local government authority, for the provision of food, medicine, medical equipment and other items to people in need, including those in quarantine, due to suspected Sars-CoV-2 infection.

Due to a change in the nature of the Soldiers' efforts, on 23 June 2020, the mission, code-named “Odporna Wiosna” was renamed to “Trwała Odporność” [*Enduring Resilience*], focused on five types of actions: prevention, identification, isolation, support and restoration. Unlike the first, large-scale Operation “Odporna Wiosna”, the second one – “Trwała Odporność” – focused mainly on extinguishing outbreaks of coronavirus, with efforts focused on supporting health care, sanitation services, local governments, and voivodes in such a way as to slow the transmission of Sars-CoV-2. The nature of the efforts was more of a hands-on approach, geared toward providing assistance in areas that had lost the ability to effectively deal with coronavirus, including through support to health care and other institutions and maintaining readiness to support State Fire Service and local governments in the area of non-military crisis response.

At the peak of operations, each day up to 5,500 TDF soldiers were involved in the operation with the support of the Armed Forces General Command, Military Police, Inspectorate of Support for the Armed Forces and military academies. A total of 20,347 staff members of the Ministry of Defense were involved in the execution of tasks under Operation “Odporna Wiosna”, including: TDF professional soldiers, TDF volunteer soldiers, as well as Ministry of Defense employees and military

academy cadets. The personnel involved in the implementation of the “Trwała Odporność” tasks include professional soldiers, TDF volunteer soldiers, military personnel and cadets from military academies for a total of 19,546 people [5]. The major undertakings carried out by the TDF to support the health care service are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Support for health care facilities by the TDF in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic

No.	Name of the undertaking	Facility name	Number of facilities supported
1.	Support for care facilities covered by direct support	Care Homes Residential Medical Care Facilities Old People's Homes	1.011
2.	Support for medical facilities	Hospitals, blood donation centers	1,332
3.	Support for facilities serving as isolation units	Closed hotels/boarding houses	103
4.	Support for sanitary-epidemiological facilities	Sanitary-Epidemiological Stations	256
5.	Erection of inflatable tents	Field hospital emergency rooms	6,620 (tents)
6.	Swabbing	Mobile and stationary swab collection points	1,204,050

Source: Own study based on [15]

One of the main areas of support provided by TDF, both under Operation “Odporna Wiosna” and “Trwała Odporność”, was support for the health care system. The Coronavirus pandemic put the Polish health care system through one of its toughest tests, which is why TDF soldiers were deployed to support 1,332 medical facilities [6]. The most important tasks completed during this period included: swabbing, supporting the operation of the ELC hospital bed reservation system, collection of oxygen cylinders as part of the creation of “oxygen circuits”, distribution of oxygen cylinders not owned by the Polish Armed Forces, setting up field emergency rooms, supporting Regional Blood Donation and Transfusion Centers, supporting the vaccination program.

Swabbing

Soldiers from the Territorial Defense Forces supported medical and sanitation personnel in the fight against coronavirus in the form of swabbing for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Soldiers with paramedic competencies and specialized training were delegated to collect swabs. Since the beginning of their

involvement in support, TDF soldiers took 1,204,050 swabs, including: 741,822 swabs from people in quarantine, 242,907 swabs taken in care homes, residential medical care facilities and other facilities. 215,317 swabs were taken under the DRIVE-THRU procedure and 4,004 swabs were collected under the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund [1].

Collection and distribution of oxygen cylinders

At the beginning of November 2020, TDF began operations to transport oxygen cylinders. TD soldiers' competencies in hazardous materials transportation and earned licenses enabled soldiers to engage in this type of task. Drivers delegated to transport oxygen cylinders transported a total of 5,922 oxygen cylinders not owned by the Polish Armed Forces and collected 819 cylinders as part of the creation of "oxygen circuits" [1].

Setting up field emergency rooms

The TDF erected 6,620 inflatable tents that served as a field emergency room for patients with suspected coronavirus. In the tents, medical services, in situations of a larger influx of patients with suspected coronavirus, were able to pre-diagnose patients. Patients with the most severe symptoms, after an initial medical evaluation, were immediately taken to the ward. In addition, in field emergency rooms, patients who did not require immediate hospitalization could wait for a coronavirus test result [1].

Support for regional blood donation and transfusion centers

During the pandemic, blood demand was even greater than usual due to the disqualification of a certain number of donors. Soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces actively participated in blood donation events. Under the operations, TDF professional soldiers and TD soldiers donated 6,847 liters of blood, in 15,410 donations. During the pandemic, there was a particular need for the valuable plasma of the recovered patients. Individuals who had previously been diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 virus by PCR or antigen test were considered recovered. It did not matter whether the course of the disease was asymptomatic or symptomatic and with what degree of severity – the plasma from these individuals was of invaluable importance. Equally invaluable was plasma from individuals who did not have a known infection but were found to have SARS-CoV-2 virus antibodies present. Under the operations, 125 recovered soldiers donated plasma (total TDF soldiers donated 81.8 liters of plasma).

Support in the vaccination program

Since the announcement and implementation of the national COVID-19 vaccination program, i.e. since 5 December 2020, a new obligation related to support in the administration of vaccinations was imposed on, among others, soldiers of the Polish Army, including soldiers of the TDF. The activities of the Territorial Defense Forces in this regard were carried out in three main areas: operating a hotline at the TDF Command, transportation to the vaccination site, and organization of mobile vaccination teams. Activities were geared toward helping seniors, including combatants, veterans and their families.

Launching and operating a helpline to support seniors in arranging vaccinations

A senior support hotline was launched on 18 January 2021. It was a support tool for seniors wishing to receive the Sars-CoV-2 immunization. The hotline was operated by soldiers at phone no. 800 100 115 seven days a week, from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. The hotline was called more than 22,000 times [5]. More than 6,500 people benefited from real assistance, and transportation was secured for more than 1,000 dependents. The TDF staff manning the hotline provided real assistance to seniors with such issues as arranging transportation for seniors to the vaccination site, assistance with registering for the vaccination, and other issues including assistance with computer equipment (for those who wanted to register for the vaccination but had difficulty operating the equipment). Other problems reported through the hotline were resolved over the phone, including counseling or information on the nearest vaccination location.

Organization of mobile vaccination teams

The mobile teams supplemented a network of teams from population vaccination points that according to the National Immunization Program were to provide home vaccination opportunities for patients. The mobile vaccination teams were tasked with assisting patients whose medical conditions did not allow them to be vaccinated at a stationary vaccination center. This was especially true for bedridden patients, including seniors and veterans, unable to travel to in-patient vaccination centers on their own or for health reasons. As part of the support provided to seniors by the TF brigades, 6 vaccination teams were created as required implementing the COVID-19 vaccination program for seniors including combatants, veterans and their families [5]. Ultimately, a mobile immunization team will be established in each brigade if the need for this type of activity is reported.

Support for isolation units

Since the establishment of isolation units, i.e. designated places for coronavirus patients, TDF soldiers were involved in supporting them. In the isolation units, doctors and nurses monitored the health status of the individuals staying there, while soldiers' support involved swabbing and systematic disinfection of the rooms. TDF soldiers provided such support in 101 isolation units.

Support for public administration and NGOs by the TDF in the fight against Covid-19 - findings

Joint activities of the TDF and local government agencies under Operation "Odporna Wiosna" and "Resilient Spring" include:

- support for care centers and homes,
- support for residential medical care facilities,
- support for kindergartens, nurseries and other educational institutions,
- assistance in transporting food resources to day care centers,
- support for isolation and sanitary-epidemiological stations.

Table 3 presents the most important undertakings carried out by TDF soldiers in supporting local administration and non-governmental organizations in the fight against COVID-19.

Table 3. Support for the state's non-military system by the TDF in the fight against COVID-19

No.	Name of the undertaking	Supported institution	Number of institutions supported
1.	Support for NGO activities	Supported NGOs	266
2.	Provision of transport services	Support for the Government Strategic Reserve Agency	1,863
3.	Direct deliveries to destinations	Support for the Government Strategic Reserve Agency	8,132
4.	Visiting given addresses under quarantine compliance verification	Supporting activities of the Police	4,562,637
5.	Preventive patrols	Supporting activities of the Police	35,874
6.	Number of airports supported	Support for the Civil Aviation Authority	29
7.	Number of aircrafts inspected	Support for the Civil Aviation Authority	2.319
8.	Number of passengers checked	Support for the Civil Aviation Authority	165.857
9.	Number of patrols and checkpoints under state border surveillance	Support for Border Guard	122
10.	Number of TDF soldiers involved	Support for Border Guard	1.365

Source: Own study based on [15]

In total, since 6 March 2020, TDF soldiers have provided direct support to 993 facilities [5]: care homes, old people's homes, residential medical care facilities and other health care facilities. The soldiers' efforts consisted mainly in assistance with food and personal protective equipment supplies, sanitary control, logistical support, and swabbing. The assistance of TDF soldiers did in fact unburden care homes employees and often made up for staff shortages. With the launch of Operation "Trwała Odporność", this assistance expanded to include direct care tasks for care homes residents. Tasks performed by the volunteer soldiers included cleaning rooms, feeding and dressing people unable to do so themselves.

Support for the Police

One of the main tasks of the TDF is to protect the health and life of the population and to participate in crisis management tasks. While performing tasks in support of the police, the soldiers were monitoring home quarantined individuals and assessing their needs under Operations "Odporna Wiosna" and "Trwała Odporność". Supporting the Police, 2,831,790 addresses were checked during this period as part of 35,389 preventive patrols [5].

Support for the Civil Aviation Authority

Following the request of the president of the Civil Aviation Authority, soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces were deployed to Polish airports to perform tasks in limiting the spread of the coronavirus. During that time 165,857 passengers from 2,319 aircrafts at 29 airports were checked [5]. TDF soldiers took temperature measurements and collected and sorted location cards of all passengers arriving in Poland.

Support for combatants, the elderly and the disabled

Currently there are 824 care homes in Poland, offering 80,800 places for residents. The execution of the tasks of municipal, county and voivodeship governments concerning the operation of social welfare institutions is supervised by voivodes. Due to the epidemiological emergency, the Ministry of Health prepared guidelines, instructions and recommendations for voivodes on how to deal with COVID-19. On this basis, recommendations and instructions were issued through the voivodes to the authorities running 24-hour care facilities, concerning people staying there, i.e.: the elderly, children, the disabled and the sick requiring round-the-clock care.

On 13 March 2020, the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy prepared and disseminated instructions to voivodes concerning, among other things, support for people in care homes in connection with the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Instructions include, but are not limited to, the following guidance:

- absolute adherence to the principles of personal hygiene of residents and staff using disinfectants and personal protective equipment;

- monitoring the health of staff and strictly not allowing staff who show symptoms of cold or flu to come to work;
- guaranteeing continuity of services at the level of the applicable standard taking into account Chief Sanitary Inspector recommendations;

In case of problems with ensuring continuity in the provision of care due to the lack of staff to provide services, assigning, at the request of the leading authority of the local government unit, employees of day care centers from the area of this local government unit whose activities have been suspended on the basis of the order of the voivode, issued in accordance with Article 11 (1) of the Act of 2 March 2020 on special solutions related to the prevention, counteraction and combating of COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them.

Since the start of the pandemic, soldiers, especially soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces, were helping veterans, the elderly, as well as other people in accordance with the decision of the Minister of National Defense of 16 March 2020 [16], including: the families of medical personnel, veterans of operations outside the country, people with disabilities, single parents, quarantined due to suspected infection with the virus SARS-CoV-2. Under both operations, soldiers supported 9,208 veterans and 10,976 seniors and others, as listed in the TDF commander's decision [11]. Support included purchases and provision of other services; practical assistance was provided almost 23,000 times, e.g. in transporting the doctor to the person supported, or the person supported to the doctor.

In terms of cooperation with local authorities, TD soldiers carried out transports from food banks. A total of 6,332 transports were made, weighing 44,910 tons. Soldiers also performed activities related to the delivery of food parcels to the residents of care centers. A total of 160,974 parcels were delivered.

TDF soldiers also supported the activities of educational institutions in the fight against coronavirus and helped prepare them for the “new sanitation regime”. TDF's responsibilities included conducting staff training and providing disinfectant fluids to the facilities. In this way, 5,276 kindergartens, nurseries and other educational institutions were supported. In addition, TDF soldiers were deployed to support 256 sanitary-epidemiological stations, where their tasks included entering into the system the test results of individuals found to be infected with coronavirus. All the soldiers were specially trained and familiarized with the sanitary and epidemiological station operating systems, and their work consisted mainly of sorting mail, making notes and issuing quarantine notices.

Use of the application supporting the TDF'S activities

TD forces supported local governments through an application that connected soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces with employees of organizations helping those in need. The tool is called: [1] (Fig. 1).

Platforma wsparcia samorządów,
organów sanitarnych i podmiotów leczniczych

WPROWADZANIE NOWEJ TOŻSAMOŚCI

Login:

Hasło:

Powtórz Hasło:

Imię:

Nazwisko:

Numer telefonu:

Zarejestruj

Fig. 1. Creating a new user in the application [1]

Source: "Pomoc WOT" application dialog box – New user module

It is a web-based application that allows, among other things, care center employees to request support from TDF brigades. Through the application, 19,532 requests from 2,845 institutions reached liaison officers in TDF brigades. Based on interactive forms, in which the users indicated the location and scope of assistance and its priority, liaison officers from brigades were deploying DF soldiers. The main tasks performed by the TDF based on the submitted requests include temperature measurement, swab collection and sample delivery to laboratories, transportation, loading and unloading of food, as well as administrative work, support in the form of equipment, sanitary-epidemiological training, oxygen supply, transport of personal protective equipment, disinfection of premises, and transport of patients. A summary showing the largest number of application users is shown below (Figure 2).

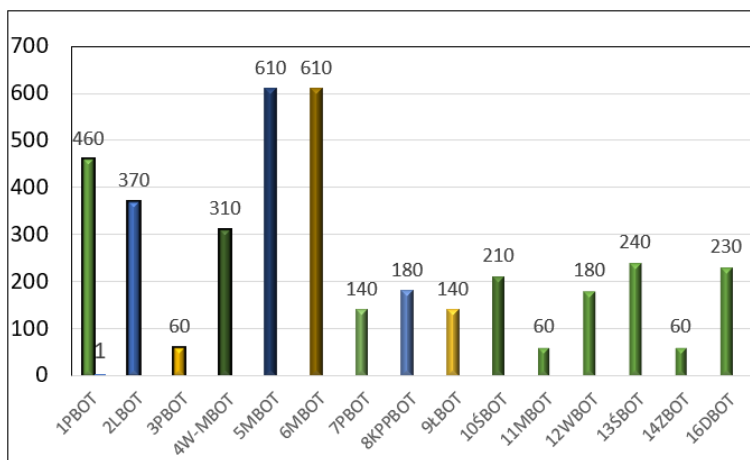


Fig. 2. Number of users of „Pomoc WOT” application, by voivodeship

Source: Own study, based on [1] [Status as of 31.05.2022]

The list shows that the highest number of application users was registered in Mazowieckie Voivodeship within the area of the 5th TDB Ciechanów and 6th TDB Radom, and in Podlaskie Voivodeship within the area of the 1st TDB Białystok.

Another criterion for the activity of individual territorial defense brigades was the number of requests in the “Pomoc WOT” application. The institutions with the highest number of requests are shown in Figure 3.

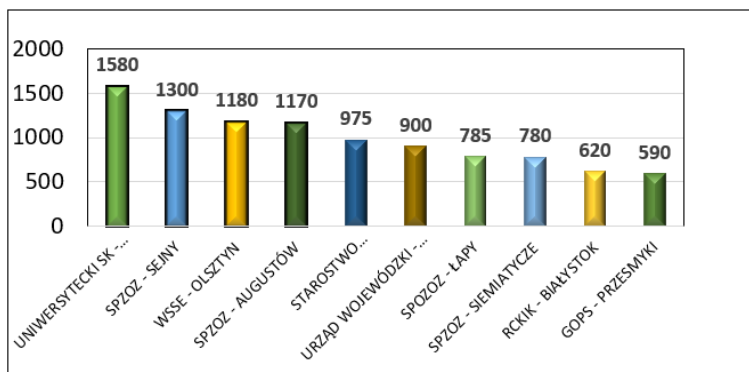


Fig. 3. The state's non-military system institutions with the highest number of requests

Source: Own study, based on [1] [Status as of 31.05.2022]

The list shows that most requests were made by health care facilities in Podlaskie Voivodeship, followed by Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship.

During the pandemic period, very important tasks performed by the TDF were related to supporting the activities of care homes. Care homes using the “Pomoc WOT” application, by voivodeship (Fig. 4).

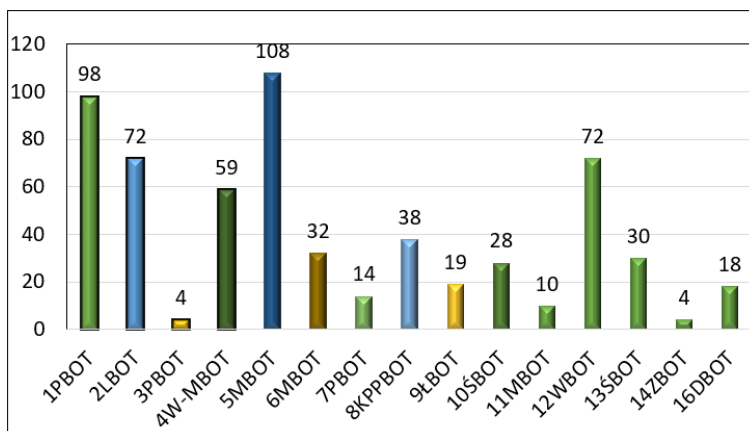


Fig. 4. Number of care homes – users of the „Pomoc WOT” application

Source: Own study, based on [1] [Status as of 31.05.2022]

The list shows that the highest number of care homes using the application was registered in Mazowieckie Voivodeship within the area of the 5th TDB Ciechanów, in Podlaskie Voivodeship within the area the 1st TDB Białystok and in Lubelskie Voivodeship (2nd TDB Lublin) and Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (12th VTDB Poznań).

Another type of support was that provided for NGOs. With the approval of the TDF Commander, TD brigade commanders were tasked with deploying soldiers to support NGOs. In total, soldiers supported 260 such organizations. As part of the support, soldiers carried out such tasks as: conducting triage, i.e. initial segregation of persons, transport from food banks, including 679 transports with a total weight of 3,729 tons, delivery of food parcels – a total of 203,448 parcels were delivered, delivery of meals for veterans and health care workers, logistical support.

As part of the previously mentioned operations, TDF soldiers and military academy cadets also supported the activities of the Agency for Material Reserve, from the unloading of transports with medical and hygienic materials arriving in Poland, through their placement in warehouses, to their transport to hospitals, health care facilities and provincial offices. Under this support, TDF performed 4,226 transports, including 535 transports to health care centers, 2,156 to hospitals, 812 to provincial offices, 732 transports to other medical entities. The shipments included 1,456,840 packages of face and respiratory protective equipment, 595,515 packages of other body parts protective equipment, and 80,355 packages of disinfectants [1].

Support for Border Guard

Another group of tasks concerned support for the Border Guard in border protection. Since 14 March 2020, as part of Operation “Odporna Wiosna”, 1,365 TDF soldiers together with Border Guard officers carried out 122 patrols and checkpoints in the surveillance of the state border with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which is also the border of the European Union [5]. Operations ended on 2 April 2020, when operational forces took over from the TDF the task of supporting the Border Guard under operation codenamed “Tarcza” [*Shield*].

TDF assistance in psychological support played an important role. To that end, on 18 March 2020, the TDF launched a nationwide toll-free 24/7 psychological support hotline manned by professional psychologists. Anyone, whether lonely, elderly, uncomfortable with isolation or experiencing increased distress from the coronavirus outbreak, feeling the need for professional support could get professional help from experienced psychologists. The hotline provided psychological support to 5,815 people and operated until 31 May 2020.

As part of another operation codenamed “Trwała Odporność”, on 15 November 2020, the TDF launched a nationwide 24/7 support hotline for care centers and NGOs. The mission of the hotline was to identify the support needs of care centers,

NGOs, and other aid agencies. Employees of aid institutions and aid organizations could call this toll-free hotline manned by the TDF soldiers with requests to support their activities in the field and assistance to their charges. Soldiers manning the hotline received a total of 502 calls concerning the implementation of tasks related to: assistance to individuals, assistance to care centers, assistance to NGOs, and other issues. The hotline operated until 14 December 2020.

Summary

TDF soldiers have been supporting medical personnel in the fight against coronavirus for more than 2 years. More than 1,000 TD soldiers were involved in carrying out the tasks each day, working in 57 hospitals and a dozen temporary hospitals, 15 sanitary stations, 70 vaccination points, and several blood donation and transfusion centers. In the first wave of the pandemic, as the number of cases increased, so did the number of police support projects associated with monitoring quarantined individuals. This adds up to tens of thousands of addresses inspected by TDF soldiers.

The “Pomoc WOT” application implemented at the TDF Command was developed to facilitate submission, without physical contact, of support requests for TDF soldiers. Through its use, each of the state’s non-military system entities eligible to receive military support had the ability to log into the application and submit a request for support. By activating it, there is no need for multi-level approval of the application through the voivode to the Minister of Defense, as in the cases described in the Polish Crisis Management Act of 2007. All submission steps are done automatically. Requests appearing in the “Pomoc WOT” computer system are approved by territorially competent voivodes without the need for additional activities, and information about the approval of the request is transferred directly to the commander of the Territorial Defense brigade.

As a result of the commitment to support the state’s non-military system in the fight against the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, TD forces:

- have enhanced emergency response capabilities,
- have acquired the capability to provide logistical support to the state’s non-military system, including medical and educational entities,
- have established relations with local authorities at the voivodeship, district, commune levels by TDB commanders, performing tasks under crisis management in permanent areas (in Polish: stały rejon odpowiedzialności – SRO),
- have confirmed the capability in terms of being able to engage 2–3 thousand soldiers per day.

As part of the ongoing counter-epidemic activities associated with COVID-19, the Territorial Defense Forces trained:

- 4,047 soldiers in the following courses: Qualified First Aid and Combat Life Saver and other medical qualifications;
- 667 soldiers in swabbing;
- 605 soldiers in bed ridden patient care.

The study found that:

- the downside was the implementation of the application “on the fly” without prior testing, which generated numerous technical errors, but this was due to time pressure;
- the implementation of the application has provided the ability to control and track the requests for assistance on an ongoing basis from within the TDF Command;
- the type of external entity (requesting assistance) has become apparent;
- it has become possible to gain insight into the reasons why voivodes reject applications,
- the application provided visualization of statistics about the support provided through automatic generation of requests;
- the TDF Command-level view provided a quick assessment of individual TDF brigade engagements;
- the introduction of the “Pomoc WOT” application reduced the response time of TDF soldiers from 72 hours (in the old system) to 6 hours.

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