

Unwanted People and Desired Citizens

Contemporary Attitudes, Challenges and Perceptions
of Migration and Integration



Edited by

**Cezary Smuniewski, Andrea Zanini,
Cyprian Aleksander Kozera, Błażej Bado**

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Reliable Aid. Support of the Polish Armed Forces for Ukrainian War Refugees after 24 February 2022

Abstract

Poland's reception of Ukrainian war refugees has become a test for state and local government administration, as well as the society in a situation of crisis. The purpose of the article is to show the role of the Polish Armed Forces, primarily the Territorial Defense Force, in the activities aimed to support Ukrainian refugees. Presented will be the legal basis for using the Polish Army in counteracting the consequences of non-military crises. The structure, potential and goals of the Territorial Defense Force will be shown. Finally, the author will analyze the TDF experience of participating in the Reliable Aid operation. Theoretical methods such as analysis, synthesis and inference based on legal acts and the literature of the subject will be used to achieve the objective thus outlined.

Keywords: war refugees from Ukraine, Reliable Aid operation, Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, Territorial Defense Force

1. Introduction

Support for hundreds of thousands and then millions of Ukrainian refugees – mostly women with children – who crossed the Polish border after 24 February 2022 has become a huge challenge for the Polish state, its administration, services, but also the whole of society, which has unsparingly hurried to help. Also the Polish Armed Forces, primarily the Territorial Defense Force, were ordered to take part. Over the following months, soldiers helped hundreds of thousands of refugees. The Reliable Aid operation has become an example of the army's fulfilment of its mission of supporting administration and society in counteracting non-military threats, in this case caused by the war across the eastern border of Poland.

2. Legal basis for using the Polish Armed Forces in counteracting the consequences of non-military crises

The rules for using the Polish Armed Forces to support administration, other services and society in counteracting non-military threats are based on a number of laws and regulations as well as decisions of the Minister of National Defense.

The legal act which at the time of the Russian aggression against Ukraine generally defined the tasks of the Polish Armed Forces was the Act on the universal obligation to defend the Republic of Poland. It stated that they safeguard the sovereignty and independence of the Polish Nation, its security and peace, and “can also participate in combatting natural disasters and eliminating their consequences, anti-terrorist and property protection activities, search activities and saving or protecting human health and life, cleaning up areas from explosives and hazardous materials of military origin and their disposal, as well as in the implementation of crisis management tasks.” (Act 1967/220: Article 3(2))

Soon, however, this act was replaced by a new legal act, the Act on the defense of the Homeland. Actually, the tasks of the Polish Armed Forces from the previous Act were literally repeated, adding only “protection and defense of cyberspace.” (Act 2022/2305: Article 11(3))

In turn, according to Art. 18 of the Act on the state of natural disaster, “during the state of natural disaster, if the use of other forces and means is impossible or insufficient, the Minister of National Defense may put at the disposal of the voivode in whose area of activity a natural disaster occurs, sub-units or units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, together with directing them to perform tasks related to preventing or removing the consequences of a natural disaster.” (Act 2017/1897: Article 18(1))

Sub-units and units of the Polish Army can also be used to support protection of the state border, as has been the case for the last two years on the border with Belarus.¹ In Art. 11b of the Border Guard Act it has been specified that in the event of a threat to public security or disruption of public order within the territorial scope of a border crossing point and within the border area, in particular: an imminent threat of an attack on inviolability of the state border or its accomplishment; bringing

¹ For more information on the crisis at the Polish-Byelorussian border see Łaciak, Smuniewski, Boguszewski 2022: 43–61.

immediate universal danger to the life, health or freedom of citizens; an imminent threat of an attack on objects or devices used by the Border Guard; threats of a terrorist offense or its perpetration in relation to these objects or devices or which may result in danger to human life – if the use of Border Guard forces proves insufficient or is justified by the degree of the threat, units and sub-units of the Polish Armed Forces may be used to provide assistance. Their use is based on the decision of the President of the Republic of Poland issued at the request of the Prime Minister. In the event of urgency, the decision to provide such assistance is taken by the Minister of National Defense at the request of the minister competent for internal affairs, specifying the scope and form of assistance, immediately notifying thereof the President of the Republic of Poland and the Prime Minister (Act 2023/1080). The army can provide support to the Police according to similar principles.

The Polish Armed Forces were used in the activities to support administration and other services as regards helping and relocating refugees from Ukraine under the provisions of the Crisis Management Act. Pursuant thereto, if in a crisis situation the use of other resources and means is impossible or may not be sufficient, the Minister of National Defense, at the request of the voivode, may put at his disposal sub-units or units of the Polish Armed Forces, together with ordering them to perform crisis management tasks.

In the tasks of crisis management to be fulfilled by the army, the legislator included the following:

- 1) participating in monitoring threats;
- 2) performing tasks related to assessing the consequences of the phenomena occurring in the area of the incidence of threats;
- 3) performing search and rescue tasks;
- 4) evacuating the affected population and property;
- 5) performing tasks aimed at preparing suitable conditions for the temporary stay of the evacuated population in designated places;
- 6) participating in the protection of property left in the area of the incidence of threats;
- 7) closing off the area of the incidence of threats or the place where a rescue is conducted operation;
- 8) carrying out protective, rescue and evacuation works at vulnerable buildings and historical monuments;
- 9) carrying out works requiring use of specialized technical equipment or explosives held in stock by the Polish Armed Forces;

- 10) removing hazardous materials and their disposal, using the resources and means held in stock by the Polish Armed Forces;
- 11) eliminating chemical contamination as well as biological contamination and infections;
- 12) removing radioactive contamination;
- 13) performing tasks related to the repair and reconstruction of technical infrastructure;
- 14) participating in ensuring that the transport routes are open for traffic;
- 15) providing medical assistance and performing sanitary and anti-epidemic tasks.

Units of the Armed Forces may be placed at the disposal of a voivode in a full-time setup or as ad hoc task groups (Act 2023/122).

In the Polish Armed Forces, "The plan for using units and sub-units of the Polish Armed Forces in the event of crisis situations" has been developed and implemented at all levels of command, with annexes in the form of detailed plans relating to crisis management areas. These include: the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in defense against terrorism; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in combating floods and ice phenomena; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in snow removal actions; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in rescue and firefighting operations and in removing the consequences of spatial fires; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in eliminating the consequences of technical failures with toxic industrial agents and radiation accidents; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in clearing the area of explosives and dangerous objects; the plan for using the Polish Armed Forces in search and rescue operations; the anti-epidemic action plan. They contain legal regulations for the participation of the army in crisis operations and tasks entrusted to them in connection with the imminent danger (Kazuro 2020: 115).

3. Territorial Defense Force (TDF)

In recent years, the burden of counteracting non-military threats by the Polish Armed Forces has rested primarily on Territorial Defense Force. They have been operating in Poland since 1 January 2017 as a fifth type of the Armed Forces. The Territorial Defense Command has been established at the central level, while a territorial defense brigade was to be established in each voivodship (at least in accordance with the original plans).

The TDF tasks include:

- 1) during peacetime: creating a secure operating environment in permanent areas of responsibility (PAR); maintaining combat readiness to defend Poland's territory; supporting local communities and the non-military system (NMS) as part of the implementation of crisis management tasks; implementing planning, organizational, mobilization and training projects; conducting activities in the field of strategic communications aimed at shaping patriotic and civil attitudes and values;
- 2) during a non-military crisis: supporting local communities and NMS in implementing crisis management tasks; attaining readiness for participation in the immediate and universal response to an emergency situation or a non-military crisis in order to prevent or counteract it, minimize and remove its consequences, as well as restore the state existing before its occurrence;
- 3) during a military crisis: preparing PAR for defense and attaining readiness to take action as intended; NSM support in strengthening the protection and defense of the state border, critical infrastructure and facilities particularly important for the security and defense of the state and local communities; development of the TDF warfare command system; conducting reconnaissance activities as well as demonstration and deterrent activities; preparing and securing arrival of allied (coalition) support forces; providing a cover for mobilization and operational deployment of troops;
- 4) during wartime: conducting combat operations in collaboration with operational and support troops as well as NSM elements; ensuring universal protection and defense of PAR, including state-owned property, public facilities and cultural assets against plunder and destruction; securing the entry into the combat of allied (coalition) support forces; securing reconstruction and functioning of government and local government administration structures as well as security and public order in liberated areas (Wywi al 2019: 75–76).

It was assumed that TDF would achieve full readiness to carry out the tasks as intended by 2021. By that time, seventeen Territorial Defense Brigades were to be formed, which together with the TDF Command and elements supporting the functioning of TDF were to amount to approx. 53,000 soldiers (5,000 professional and 48 thousand doing territorial military service) (*Struktura i zadania* 2023). To this day, however, such structure has not been achieved, just as the planned number of soldiers has not been reached. In the meantime, some changes have occurred in the planned

structure: the 15th and 17th Territorial Defense Brigades have not been formed, while under the decision of the Minister of National Defense, started has been the formation of the 18th, 19th, and 20th Territorial Brigades and the Border Defense Component (*W Wojskach Obrony Terytorialnej* 2022; *Brygady WOT* 2023).

Enlistment for TDF service is based on volunteers. The candidates who meet the health and other requirements (such as education) and have not previously done active military service and have not yet been sworn, undergo a 16-day initial training ended with a tactical loop and an oath. In turn, reservists at the first stage of service at TDF are trained at so-called compensatory courses (8 days).

A three-year training cycle awaits every TDF soldier, including graduates of the sixteen-day and compensatory courses. The first stage, individual training, lasts a year, and during this time TDF soldiers learn the rudiments of tactics and shooting. Classes take place during 11 two-day meetings and integrated two-week field training. A similar cycle is conducted in the second year of service, but here the emphasis has been placed on specialist training (e.g. drivers, paramedics, divers, parachute jumpers). By the end of the second year, soldiers start coordinating tactical training at the platoon and company level. The third year of training is devoted to coordinating companies. Only after completing the training at this level, i.e. after about three years (and not less than 124 days of training for each soldier; specialists will have more of these days), the first TDF units will achieve operational readiness (Glińska, Kowalska-Sendek 2017). Unfortunately, this process has been much delayed, inter alia because of TDF's commitment in other activities besides training (such as eradicating the effects of the pandemic).

As at the end of 2022, approx. 36 thousand soldiers served in TDF (*Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej* 2022).

During the 5 years of the formation's existence, TDF soldiers took part in many actions related to counteracting the consequences of non-military threats, including floods and inundations (*Wojsko Polskie* 2019; *Szef MON* 2021), COVID-19 pandemic² (Gąsiorek, Marek 2020: 61–75) or the refugee crisis on the Belarusian border, where the Territorial Defense Force under operation "Strong Support" were used to support the Border Guard and administration.

² More information on the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, cf. Smuniewski, Składanowski, Przepiórka 2020: 91–127; Urych, Zapisek 2022: 4–19; Lisowska, Cichosz 2022: 4–21.

4. Implementation of tasks under operation Reliable Aid

The Polish Armed Forces began the activities in support of public administration even before the open aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. In view of the growing threat of an armed conflict that would result for Poland, among others, in an influx of refugee masses, on 15 February 2022, soldiers of the 6th Mazowiecka Territorial Defense Brigade were delegated to prepare and support the construction of refugee shelters. The next day, 16 February, soldiers of the 3rd Podkarpacka Territorial Defense Brigade were involved in creating reception points in border crossing areas (Sura 2023).

On 24 February, Russia's open military invasion of Ukraine began. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, a new status was introduced for immediate appearance of soldiers of the Territorial Defense Force who – as expected – will be used to support state and local government administration involved in the tasks of receiving refugees from Ukraine. Soldiers of territorial defense brigades from Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Podkarpackie voivodships could be ordered to come to their units in less than 6 hours, while soldiers of other territorial defense brigades in less than 12 hours. The immediate appearance call was received very quickly by soldiers of the TDF Cyberspace Action Team (Pietrzak 2022).

Already two days later, on 26 February 2022, by the decision of the Minister of National Defense, the TDF Commander issued an order to create and keep ready for operation Refugee Relocation Support Groups (Sura 2023).

In this way, TDF activities under operation Reliable Aid began. Soldiers were to focus primarily on support to public administration bodies, NGOs and other entities involved in the activities related to relocation, temporary accommodation, integration and care of refugees. The TDF's task was primarily to maintain continuity of the refugee relocation system throughout the country. They were also responsible for the preparation and functioning of their temporary accommodation places and support for integration processes with Polish society (Sura 2023).

Already on 14 March 2022, Minister of National Defense Mariusz Błaszczak decided to step up the involvement of Territorial Defense Forces in helping refugees from Ukraine to 6,000 people. They were to support the activities of voivodes, local governments and other institutions responsible for receiving refugees. The TDF forces, in accordance with the minister's decision, were to be strengthened with cadets of military schools (*Niezawodna Pomoc* 2022).

At the peak of the operation, about 1.5 thousand TDF soldiers and 70 units of equipment were involved within 24 hours. They supported over 35 reception points, involving on average some 600 soldiers each day. Over the first twelve months of activities, support was given to 20 places of temporary stay of refugees. Under operation Reliable Aid, support was given to over 2.5 million refugees, and approx. 750 thousand of them were transported to places in the country and abroad. Nearly 1,600 tons of all kinds of materials necessary to help refugees were also transported (Sura 2023).

Soldiers of the 3rd Podkarpacka Territorial Defense Brigade, operating in the border area of Podkarpackie Voivodship, exhibited particularly great commitment. In the first weeks of the activities, over 300 TDF soldiers and 23 units of equipment were involved there. They helped transport refugees from the border to reception points, kept records of people, supported information points, distributed food and conducted organized relocation of refugees to temporary places of stay. As in other voivodships, the soldiers who spoke Ukrainian and Russian were delegated to serve at registration and information points. Soldiers of the 3rd Podkarpacka Territorial Defense Brigade cooperated with other state services responsible for security, including the Bieszczady Border Guard Unit, the Police, the State Firefighting Service and the Voivodship Crisis Management Centre, as well as non-governmental organizations (Voluntary Firefighting Brigades, scouts) and volunteers (Mac 2022).

The army also supported the logistics of state administration. For example, the 9th Łódź Territorial Defense Brigade provided containers and military tents as storage space keeping donations and food. The army, supporting Caritas of the Archdiocese of Łódź, also dealt with the transport of larger quantities of food from donors to warehouses and relocation points in Łódzkie Voivodship (Glińska 2022).

On 16 March, in the evening, a group of several dozen children with oncological diseases from Ukraine (some of them were also infected COVID-19) arrived in Kielce. Soldiers of the 10th Świętokrzyska Territorial Defense Brigade – alongside policemen, firefighters, scouts, Railway Protection Guard and volunteers – were involved in transporting them to hospitals in Kielce (Woś 2022).

Support to residents of Ukraine often went beyond the scope of operation Reliable Aid. Soldiers of the 1st Podlasie Territorial Defense Brigade were strongly involved in organizing collections of the most necessary things for soldiers of the Ukrainian Territorial Defense. Among the collected things were power generators, power banks, long-life food, sleeping bags, warm

clothing and sanitary products. In addition, soldiers of the 14th Light Infantry Battalion, in cooperation with the hospital in Hajnówka, donated medical equipment and supplies, including thermal blankets, drips, headphones and drip apparatus, as well as special sets for children. This equipment went to soldiers, ambulances and hospitals, including a children's hospital in Kiev (Wilczewski 2023).

The Armed Forces also supported organization of humanitarian convoys to Ukraine. Soldiers of the 4th Warmińsko-Mazurska Territorial Defense Brigade provided assistance to Caritas of the Ełk Diocese, which sent trucks with medicines, food and dressings across the eastern border (Kacprzycka 2022).

From April to July 2022, TDF's activities were also supported by soldiers of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Within the Polish Task Force, the Canadians cooperated with soldiers of the 5th and 6th Territorial Defense Brigades. Their main tasks included territorial support at the reception points in Warsaw and Nadarzyn. In addition, in order to support the process of relocating refugees and facilitate their migration process, a Canadian visa point (Visa Application Center) was launched at the reception point in Warsaw, which provided the refugees with an opportunity to settle in Canada (Wojenka 2022).

In September 2022, for three days, the Territorial Defense Force hosted representatives of the delegation of the Territorial Defense Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, headed by Brigadier General Serhii Sobko – Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff of the Territorial Defense Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The meeting was a bilateral exchange of experiences between the two formations. The delegation's visit began at the Territorial Defense Force Command in Zegrze. Then, representatives of the Polish and Ukrainian territorial defense forces took part in the conference "Independence of Information" organized by the Academic Centre for Strategic Communication at the War Studies University in Warsaw. At the end of the visit, the delegation visited the command of the 1st Podlasie Territorial Defense Brigade. One of the main points of the program in Podlasie was getting acquainted and practical shooting with the Polish MSBS GROT carbine (Sura 2022).

An interesting initiative was shown by soldiers of the 73rd Light Infantry Battalion in Malbork, who supported the Poviat Youth Centre in Garczyn, which became a refuge from Russian invasion for children from two Ukrainian orphanages from the Khmelnytsky region. It turned out that they welcomed the presence of a dog named Riko, who visited them

together with his guardian, coordinator of Section K9 7 of the Pomeranian OT Brigade: "It turned out that his presence had an extremely positive effect on the children staying there, who have established an unusual bond with the four-legged friend. Walks, plays and spending time together allowed them to forget for a moment the tragedy they had experienced. So, the dog Riko became not only one of the inhabitants of the center in Garczyn, but also a favorite pet for Ukrainian children." (Szalbierz 2022)

5. Conclusions

The reception and relocation of almost one million Ukrainian war refugees who crossed the Polish border after 24 February 2022 has become a huge challenge for society, state administration, local governments and services. It turned out that the involvement of the Armed Forces, including primarily Territorial Defense Forces, was necessary.

Once again, this youngest, fifth type of the Armed Forces, proved its usefulness in the counteracting activities of a non-military nature. The territoriality of the TDF organization allowed for – just like during floods and flooding – quick arrival of soldiers to their units and start of their operations. The use of soldiers doing territorial military service instead of professional soldiers is also a much cheaper solution, as experience from activities on the Polish-Belarusian border has already shown since the summer of 2021. The involvement of TDF also allowed for continuing planned training in operational military units. Unfortunately, at the same time, the re-directing of TDF soldiers to crisis control activities took them away from normal combat training; thus, the situation from the COVID-19 pandemic was repeated (although certainly on a lesser scale). Operation "Reliable Aid" also offered but another opportunity to test in practice the possibility of cooperation between government administration (primarily voivodes), local governments, NGOs and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in the face of a non-military crisis.

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