

Socio-professional Reintegration Services in the Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Małopolska Region

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Abstract: **Background:** The research issues concern the most important aspects of socio-vocational reintegration and rehabilitation services (e.g. instruments of support, barriers of service delivery, effects of activities), cooperation in local communities and the scope of institutional support.

Research objectives: The aim of this article is to present the most important implications of the coronavirus pandemic for socio-vocational reintegration services in reintegration units operating in the Małopolska Region.

Research design and methods: The material constituting the basis for analysis is mainly the results of a survey conducted by the Regional Centre for Social Policy in Kraków in the framework of cyclical monitoring of the social economy sector in the Małopolska Region. 73 Reintegration Units participated in this part of the study out of 122 active ones in the Małopolska voivodeship in 2020.

Results: The analysis makes it possible to conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic and related phenomena in the socio-economic sphere had a strong impact on the current functioning of reintegration units, reduced the scope of possible instruments for socio-occupational activation, which in turn had a negative impact on the results of support. The activities of the reintegration units, hampered by the pandemic, did not receive effective support from the public administration or local partners. The pandemic also limited the possibilities of cooperation between reintegration units in local communities.

Conclusions: The long-term effects of which will probably be felt for an unspecified period of time, in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of socio-occupational reintegration services provided by reintegration units.

Keywords: social reintegration, vocational reintegration, social economy, reintegration units, pandemic, Covid-19

JEL Codes: A130, Z130, Z180, I380

Suggested citation:

Rychły-Mierzwa, A. (2021). Socio-professional Reintegration Services in the Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Małopolska Region. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, 1, 58–74, <https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2021.1.04>

1. Introduction

Reintegration Units, i.e. social integration centers (CIS), social integration clubs (KIS), occupational therapy workshops (WTZ) and occupational activity establishments (ZAZ) in the light of the Polish National Programme for the Development of the Social Economy, in force at the time of preparing this article, are one of the four groups of entities belonging to the sphere of social economy and solidarity (Krajowy Program Rozwoju Ekonomii Społecznej, 2019). Due to the fact that the activity of RU focuses on professional reintegration and social integration the are included in the group of solidarity economy entities. The beneficiaries of the CU support

are people at risk of social exclusion, who find it difficult to meet the expectations of the labour market: people with disabilities, who are the only group of support in the case of the WTZ and ZAZ, the long-term unemployed, people affected by mental crises or experiencing homelessness – the main group of beneficiaries of the KIS and CIS (see: Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Act of 13 June 2003 on Social Employment (ustawa o zatrudnieniu socjalnym) (Dz. U. z 2020 nr 176 ze zm.). Referring to Lipowicz and Małecka-Łyszczek (2020, p. 8), it can be said that the category of „social exclusion” is a criterion that allows to distinguish a subset of actors of solidarity economy in the ongoing evolution within the social economy and the resulting redefinition of its functions. Sadowska (2018, p. 170), on the other hand, in the context of her reflections on the category of social exclusion, draws attention to the comprehensive nature of the intervention, the duration and localisation of the reintegration process, as well as the parallel actions necessary in this context to develop social capital, which are also inherent in the activities of CIS, KIS, WTZ and ZAZ. According to this author, the main goal of reintegration is to return to the labor market, because it is work that is the reference point for determining the degree of usefulness of the individual for society as a whole. Danecka sees reintegration units as institutions „mediating” between traditional forms of social assistance, labour market institutions, non-governmental organizations (including church organizations) and manifestations of self-organization and self-help of people affected by exclusion, and assesses the reintegration process itself as requiring effort and commitment on the part of support recipients (Danewska, 2010, p. 92). Taking Gosk’s classification as a point of departure, the RU can be included in the category of the reintegration process. Gosk, reintegration units can be included in the area of the labour market, as they fulfil the functions of either employers (ZAZ, to some extent also CIS) or employment support institutions (WTZ, KIS) (Gosk, 2006). Therefore, reintegration units are an extremely important link of active social policy, based on the ideas of „empowerment”, decentralization, local management, activation based on the activity of NGOs (Rymsza & Karwacki, 2017, p. 32).

Reintegration Units are counted among the so-called new institutions of social economy. In the model of social and professional integration based on social economy instruments, RUs are the first element of the support path for people at risk of social exclusion. Their task is to prepare beneficiaries to take up employment in the first place in social enterprises or, in the case of persons with disabilities, in the sheltered labour market, and ultimately to employment in the open market. Reintegration units, unlike social cooperatives, non-profit companies or other forms of social enterprises, have limited economic activity, which in their case plays a secondary role in relation to integration functions (Frączak & Wygnański, 2008, pp. 20–21).

2. Literature Review

For the purposes of this article, a definition of social reintegration and professional reintegration has been adopted in accordance with the Guidelines for the implementation of projects in the area of social inclusion and combating poverty using the resources of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund for 2014–2020, according to which social reintegration is „rebuilding and sustaining the ability to participate in the life of the local community and perform social roles in the place of work, residence or stay”, while professional reintegration is „rebuilding and sustaining the ability to provide independent work on the labour market”.

While we can point to numerous analyses concerning the functioning of social entrepreneurship, both in the broader context of the activity of economic entities in Poland in the era of the pandemic and in the light of the activity of the SE sector, the issue of the functioning of reintegration units and socio-occupational reintegration services based on SE instruments has so far been on the margins of the research interests of analysts dealing with either the SE sector or more broadly with the sector of social services in the period of the pandemic. An exception in this regard are works of Prorok (2021), Glac and Zdebska (2021), Ćwiklicki and Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek (2020), Gardziński (2020), and Marzec (2020). To the issue of SE sector support mechanisms in the era of the pandemic refer, inter alia, considerations of Krenz (2021) and Mazik-Gorzelańczyk (2020) are also relevant.

As far as the international literature context is concerned, which may form the background for deliberations on the situation of Polish social economy (but is of little use in the case of Reintegration Units), it is worth mentioning the studies published by the Canadian Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER, 2020, 2021), or the comparative material on local and global conditions of PES functioning in the era of pandemic on the example of Slovak, Belarusian, Irish and Swedish organizations (Stukalo, Simakhova, Baltgailis, 2021).

3. Material and Methods

The aim of this article is to answer the question, on the example of the SHU operating in the Małopolska Region, whether and, if so, how the restrictions in social and economic life resulting from the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic in 2020 affected the activities of CIS, KIS, WTZ and ZAZ. We will cite the findings of a study on the condition of the RU carried out by the Regional Centre for Social Policy in Kraków (ROPS) as part of the cyclical monitoring of the social economy sector in Małopolska (Rychły-Mierzwa, 2020, 2021a). The aim of this study in the part concerning Reintegration Units is to provide empirical data for the diagnosis of the situation of this group of entities, in particular in the area of: instruments and effects of reintegration activities, development barriers and needs in the area of statutory activities and in the area of cooperation with local partners. The 2020 study additionally took into account the context of the socio-economic situation related to the coronavirus pandemic. It consisted of two components. First is an analysis of the founding documents, which covered all the Reintegration Units in the Małopolska Region, present in the databases and registers of the relevant public institutions (as of December 31, 2020). The scope of the study included data provided to ROPS by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (MRiPS), the State Fund for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities (PFRON), the Małopolska Voivodship Office in Kraków (MUW) and the Marshal's Office of the Małopolska Region (UMWM).

The research questions within the framework of the analysis of the found data concerned in particular:

- number of Reintegration Units in the Małopolska voivodeship,
- number of beneficiaries of support provided by Reintegration Units,
- structure and size of particular groups of persons at risk of social exclusion among persons benefiting from support of CIS and KIS in 2020,
- number and structure of staff of Reintegration Units in the Małopolska voivodeship,
- employment effectiveness of Reintegration Units,
- available forms of support in the field of social and professional reintegration,
- sources of financing activities and costs of social and professional reintegration.

Second is a survey study conducted between April 26 and May 10, 2021 using the CAWI methodology, i.e. computer-assisted interviewing using an online survey questionnaire developed for this purpose. The scope of the research questions in the questionnaire was based on the results of the analysis of the found data. The research questions included in the survey questionnaire focused on:

- Statutory forms of socio-occupational reintegration activities under sanitary constraints;
- Problem areas in the implementation of socio-occupational reintegration services related to the pandemic;
- The scope of use and availability of instruments to support socio-occupational reintegration in a pandemic situation;
- Actions for the local community;
- Cooperation partners in the local environment,
- Needs for support of socio-occupational reintegration services and staff development Reintegration Units.

73 reintegration units participated in this part of the study out of 122 active ones in the Małopolska voivodeship in 2020: 8 of 13 CIS, 17 of 29 KIS, 41 of 69 WTZ and 7 of 11 ZAZ. The scope of analysis covered only the Reintegration Units, in the case of which, based on the analysis of found data, reintegration support was identified in 2020 for min. 1 beneficiary.

For the purpose of this article, it was assumed that in a pandemic situation, Reintegration Units:

- were limited in their ability to deliver socio-occupational reintegration services in their current format, as reflected in a smaller employment effect;
- were less active in their local communities than in the years preceding the pandemic, which limited the spaces for socio-vocational activation of their beneficiaries;
- did not receive support from the public administration and local partners adequate to the problems they experienced in 2020.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. *Constraints on the delivery of socio-occupational reintegration services*

The first, direct and – as the results of the survey showed – the most acute consequence of the spread of the epidemic threat to the delivery of reintegration services was the limitation of the possibility to run classes in the current formula, on the premises of the institutions. The basis for the temporary suspension of full-time classes in order to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 infectious disease in the WTZ, CIS and KIS was Article 11.1 of the Act of 2 March 2020 on specific solutions related to preventing, counteracting and combating Covid-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 374, as amended).

Suspension of residential classes occurred in stages, by successive decisions of the Małopolska Governor (MUW, 2020) and in the first period of the pandemic development lasted from 12 March to 24 May. The restoration of residential classes in Reintegration Units occurred gradually, under sanitary restrictions. In the period from May to October 2020, the activities of Reintegration Units were suspended again several times due to the increased number of coronavirus infections in particular districts of the Małopolska region. In the case of the WTZ, the possibility of providing reintegration services in the full-time formula in its entirety was suspended again on October 16, 2020 (MUW, 2020c). The decision to increase the number of

participants in residential classes to 50% of the total number of participants was not officially made until the following year (MUW, 2021).

Despite the significant reduction in the possibility of providing reintegration services in the current formula, in the ROPS survey, reintegration units responded positively in only a few cases to the question about implementing alternative activities in the area of social and professional reintegration and activation other than in the remote formula (5 out of 41 of the WTZ, 1 out of 7 of the ZAZ, 1 out of 17 KIS, 1 out of 8 CIS).

Table 1. Implementation of remote support in Reintegration Units in 2020 in the Małopolska Region by entity type

Type	N	Not remotely conducted	Fewer activities conducted remotely	Remote and onsite activities equally	Most of the activities in remote form
WTZ	41	17	20	4	0
ZAZ	7	0	1	1	5
KIS	17	4	5	2	6
CIS	8	0	3	2	3

Source: Own elaboration.

In total, 82.19% of the Reintegration Units that participated in the study implemented remote instruments for the delivery of socio-occupational reintegration services in 2020, but to a very diverse degree (Table 1). In the light of the results of the ROPS survey, the greatest extent of remote delivery of reintegration services occurred in occupational therapy workshops: available in all 41 surveyed WTZ, but only in the case of four entities treated as a complement to residential activities. In the case of 20 of the 41 surveyed SHTs, it applied to all support participants. In the case of 21 entities it was implemented within 2 weeks of the introduction of pandemic-related restrictions. 3 WTZ declared that they would not launch the remote formula for delivering reintegration services until the fall of 2020. In the case of the Social Integration Centres, remote activities were not carried out at all in 10 of the 17 entities studied; 5 of them provided remote support to the majority of participants. Only 3 KIS launched remote support within 2 weeks of the suspension of inpatient classes. In the CIS, the provision of reintegration services remotely was to an even greater extent supplementary – not a single entity treated this form of work as the main one, 2 out of 8 CIS did not start reintegration services remotely at all, and in the case of 4 out of 6 CIS that did, it covered a minority of participants. The remote formula for the delivery of reintegration services concerned the ZAZ to the least extent – although it was implemented in the initial period of pandemic restrictions, it was available only in 2 of the 7 surveyed entities. The remote form of support was implemented at most to the same extent as the support provided on-site.

The survey indicates that the pandemic conditions and the introduction of the formula of remote work with participants in 2020 has had a quite visible impact on the offer of socio-occupational reintegration services provided by the Vocational Training Centres, the Social Integration Clubs and the CIS, and to a lesser extent by the ZAZ. In the case of the WTZ, previous research indicated that the most common form of social reintegration support was the organization of visits to cultural institutions – in 2019 declared by all WTZs participating in the survey that responded to the question regarding this (37), and in 2020 available in the offer of only 14 of the 41 surveyed entities. A similar marginalization was observed in the organization

of integration meetings (33 indications out of 37 surveyed in 2019, in 2020 a form of support present in only 15 WTZ), to a slightly lesser extent in the offer of WTZ was also available learning to perform social roles (23 indications, i.e. 53.49% of surveyed in 2020. The availability of this form of support was declared by 86.49% of respondents in 2019). It is worth noting that despite the difficult conditions of providing services, 25 of the 41 surveyed WTZs had more than 5 forms of social reintegration support in their offer.

Also in the case of social employment entities, i.e. KIS and CIS, we observe a small scale of use of social integration instruments that required group work. 4 out of 17 surveyed KIS declared the use of integration meetings in their activities as an instrument of integration (8 out of 22 in 2019). Implementation of self-help groups into the offer was declared by 4 surveyed KIS (in 2019 in 5 out of 22). The group forms of support implemented in the form of educational groups and support or self-help groups in the CIS in 2020 were attended by a total of 132 beneficiaries, which is less than in the previous year (173). The most accessible form of social reintegration support in the KIS and CIS in 2020 was social skills training, available in 7 of 8 CIS (in 2019 in 6 of 8) and in 8 of 17 KIS (in 2019 in 16 of 22). The spectrum of social integration instruments in ZAZ in Maopolska, on the other hand, did not change much in relation to the results of the previous ROPS survey and included to the greatest extent such activities as: organization of integration meetings, self-help activities, general education, social skills training – forms of support declared by 4 out of 7 surveyed entities.

The basic form of vocational reintegration in the WTZ is occupational therapy carried out in occupational workshops. However, the results of a survey conducted by ROPS show that in 2020 only 15 of the 41 centres participating in the survey declared the availability of support in the form of practical vocational training provided in the form of workshops/workshops/working groups. Also other forms of vocational reintegration support were available in only a few WTZ, e.g. practical vocational training in the form of apprenticeship with local employers concerned only 6 WTZ, similarly to the availability of external training or vocational courses for participants. Traineeships were available to participants of only 2 WTZ.

Services addressed to KIS participants within the framework of professional reintegration are, as in previous years, advisory and training activities, but a reduction in the number of support beneficiaries is noticeable: vocational training was implemented for 147 participants in 16 KIS (in 2019, this form of support covered 323 beneficiaries), advice and training on running your own business covered 26 support participants in 4 entities (in 2019 – 32 beneficiaries), advice and training on social cooperatives was implemented, as in 2019, in 3 KIS, for 17 people. It should be noted that 11 out of 29 KIS did not declare a single beneficiary of support within the framework of professional reintegration.

In the case of vocational reintegration support in the CIS in 2020, preparation for functioning in the work environment within the framework of vocational workshops was of primary importance. The number of persons activated within the manufacturing or service activities of the CIS in 2020 (162 persons – beneficiaries of only 5 out of 13 CIS) was nevertheless lower than in 2019 (199). Career counselling and job offers provided by the center in 2019 the dominant form of support in CIS within the framework of professional reintegration, which concerned 243 people – was used by 156 beneficiaries in 9 out of 13 CIS in the year under study. Also, a smaller number of CIS participants than in 2019 (in 2020 – 57 people, in 2019 – 85 people) benefited from vocational training organized by external entities. Both the offer of vocational training and training on running a business, including a social cooperative, were available in few entities, respectively in 3 and 2 CIS.

In the light of the analysis of the data found in the ROPS survey, the effects of the reintegration activities of the reintegration units of Małopolska in 2020 are as follows:

- The number of people benefiting from the support of WTZ in the Małopolska Voivodeship in 2020 (69) is 2726 (in 2019 – 2685 in 68 entities). Only 14 people out of 122 who left the WTZs in Małopolska in 2020 (11.48%) took up employment, so the number of beneficiaries of WTZ support taking up a job in 2020 visibly deviates in a negative way from the indicators of previous years (in 2019 – 19.51%, in 2018 – 26.63%) [PFRON, 2018, 2019, 2020];
- In 2020, 806 people started classes in KIS (29) (the corresponding value for 2019 is 1050 participants in 31 KIS). Data from 2020 show a further decrease in the number of KIS participants. In the year under study, nearly 50% fewer people started participating in KIS support than in 2017, with a similar number of subjects. Economic independence in 2020 concerned 139 KIS beneficiaries, i.e. 26.73% of those who completed participation in KIS (in 2019 – 19.53%), this group includes 64 former KIS participants who took up employment in the open labour market in 2020 (in 2019 – 139 people) (MRIPS, CAS-KIS, 2019, 2020);
- A total of 484 people benefited from the offer of 13 CIS in 2020, which is 46 more than in the previous year (438 in 14 entities). This number includes 201 people continuing to participate in support from 2019. Participation in CIS support in 2020 was completed by 235 people, of which we can speak of economic independence in the case of 66 people, i.e. 28% (in 2019 this percentage was 37%) (MRIPS, CAS-CIS, 2019, 2020).

Due to the specificity of instruments in the area of professional activation, a separate analysis is needed of the state of implementation of reintegration services by ZAZ. The goal of vocational activity enterprises is to activate people with disabilities through employment. The support of ZAZ in this area covered 464 people in 2020, which is more than in the previous year (402) (MRIPS, 2020a, MRPiPS, 2019). The survey made it possible to identify additional, apart from the basic one, vocational activation instruments in ZAZ, implemented in 2020, among which the most important was increasing the professional qualifications of employees with disabilities, declared by 4 out of 7 surveyed entities. The pandemic has not changed the nature of the economic activity of the ZAZ in any way in Małopolska, the dominant group are manufacturing-service establishments (9 out of 11), 2 ZAZ in the region are service establishments only (catering and accommodation services) (UMWM, 2020). It should be stressed here that the nature of the problems concerning ZAZ, which are related to the epidemic condition and the resulting limitations, is more similar to the challenges faced by social enterprises in 2020 than to the barriers of reintegration units at that time. ZAZ, as entities for which economic activity is the basic instrument of professional activation and at the same time an important source of financing for day-to-day operations, were particularly affected by the general situation related to the development of the pandemic and restrictions in socio-economic life. This was manifested in the loss or reduction of the market for goods or services provided, which had an impact on opportunities for reintegration support for employees with disabilities (Rychły-Mierzwa, 2021b).

4.2. Reducing the scale of collaboration in the local environment

In the case of 42 of the 73 reintegration units (57.53%) which participated in the survey conducted by ROPS in Kraków, a lack of cooperation with partners in the local environment in 2020 was declared. Most of them (25, including 19 WTZ, 4 KIS and 2 ZAZ) associated this state of affairs with a pandemic situation. A further 17 entities (11 WTZ, 2 ZAZ, 3 KIS and 1 CIS) stated that the current scale of local cooperation had been reduced in 2020. Local cooperation on

a scale comparable to that realised before the pandemic was declared by 17.81% (13 out of 73) entities, only one entity (WTZ) confirmed a greater scale of local cooperation in 2020 compared to the previous period.

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Table 2. Reintegration Unit partners in the local community in 2019 and 2020

Type of partner organisation	2019 <i>N</i> = 62	2020 <i>N</i> = 31
Municipality/city	38	21
Social assistance center	26	22
Cultural/sports center	25	5
Powiat/county	20	6
Powiat family help center	24	8
Powiat labour office (pup)	8	10
Local media	15	4
Local employers	36	14
Association/foundation	45	14
WTZ	39	11
ZAZ	19	7
KIS	6	2
CIS	7	0
Number of Reintegration Units with local partners	62	31

The number of responses does not sum to *N* because more than one response was possible.

Source: Own elaboration.

The results of the survey (Table 2) indicate that most of the Reintegration Units cooperated with local government institutions, such as the social welfare center (22 indications out of 31 entities) and the city/municipal office (21 indications). To a lesser extent, the partner for the Reintegrating Unit was the local government at the county level, although it should be noted that in light of the fact that 10 out of 31 entities stated that they started cooperation with county employment offices – the scale of cooperation of the Reintegrating Unit with the PUP is slightly larger than in the previous year (8 out of 69).

Among the partners from the social economy sector, the most frequently indicated partner of Reintegration Units, as in previous years, was a non-governmental organization (14 indications). Nearly half of the surveyed Reintegration Units declared cooperation in 2020 with local employers, so this does not represent a change compared to the results of analogous ROPS

surveys conducted in previous years (36 out of 69 respondents in 2019). As in previous years, however, among the reintegration units themselves, the most frequently indicated partner was the WTZ (11 indications), while to the least extent the social employment entities (CIS and KIS). 16 out of 31 Reintegration Units indicated cooperation with private individuals or informal groups of inhabitants.

In light of the survey, the scale of involvement of reintegration units in local undertakings to counteract the effects of the pandemic should be assessed as relatively small. Such activities were declared by 9 entities (6 WTZ, 2 ZAZ and 1 KIS). These included the production and distribution of personal protective equipment, providing meals to people in need in the local environment, assistance with shopping, psychological support and information activities for carers of dependent persons.

4.3. Scope of support for socio-occupational reintegration services during the pandemic as a response to barriers to activity Reintegration Units

In assessing the impact of the negative effects of the pandemic on the delivery of reintegration services in 2020 (Table 3), respondents paid particular attention to such phenomena as the threat to the existing effects of reintegration services, limited opportunities for cooperation with partners in the local environment, changes in the legal environment, increased absenteeism of support participants and the need to work remotely. The following were assessed as having the least severe impact on the delivery of reintegration services in 2020: a shortage of personal protective equipment, financial difficulties of the organization running the unit, staff shortages related to the personal or health situation of the staff of the Reintegration Unit, and difficulties in managing the entity. It is worth noting that the limited possibilities of selling products or services of reintegration units, even though economic activity is not the primary source of livelihood of their activities, was rated in the category "not a problem" by only 17 of 73 respondents (23.29%).

Table 3. Assessing the impact of negative pandemic effects on reintegration service delivery in 2020

Factor	Scale				
	To a very large extent	Rather to a large extent	Neither to a large extent nor to a small extent	Rather to a small extent	It was not a problem at all
Threat to the existing effects of reintegration services	30	24	12	7	0
Limited possibilities of cooperation with partners in the local environment	27	25	10	8	3
Changes in the legal environment	17	32	10	8	6
Increased absenteeism of support participants	21	27	12	11	2
Need to work remotely	23	22	16	9	3
Limited possibilities of selling products/services	18	21	13	4	17
Difficulties in managing the organisation/entity	7	15	21	12	18

Factor	Scale				
	To a very large extent	Rather to a large extent	Neither to a large extent nor to a small extent	Rather to a small extent	It was not a problem at all
Staff shortages due to health or other personal situation of employees	6	14	13	20	20
Financial difficulties of the leading organisation	6	11	11	15	30
A shortage of personal protective equipment	4	7	16	12	34

N = 73.

Source: own elaboration.

From the perspective of the managers of the reintegration unit, the factors which had the greatest negative impact on the delivery of reintegration services were: limited opportunities for direct contact with the beneficiaries of support, subjective feeling of threat, lack of technical infrastructure for remote working and deficit of external support. On the other hand, the deficit of personal protective equipment, the flow of information within the team or the maintenance of information security in the context of work carried out remotely were not difficulties (Table 4).

Table 4. Factors most hindering the delivery of reintegration services faced by Reintegration Units staff in 2020 pandemic situation (manager's perspective)

Factor evaluated – rating of „to a very large extent” and „to a great extent”	WTZ	ZAZ	KIS	CIS	Total
Difficulties related to the limited possibility of direct contact with the beneficiary	37	5	13	5	60
Subjective feeling of threat	35	5	8	5	53
Lack of technical infrastructure for remote working	33	2	6	3	44
Deficit of support	30	2	5	3	40
Difficult contact with public administration	21	3	6	5	35
Deficit of IT competences	18	2	4	3	27
Reduced efficiency of work	12	2	5	2	21
Limited information flow within the team	7	0	5	2	14
Information security	9	0	4	1	14
Deficiency of personal protective equipment	3	2	3	1	9

N = 73.

Source: Own elaboration.

A more in-depth picture of the difficulties of Reintegration Units in implementing socio-occupational reintegration services during the pandemic condition was provided by the answers to the open-ended question regarding the most important barriers to the implementation of reintegration services at the time of the survey, i.e., in the period April–May 2021. These inevitably referred mainly to the prolonged pandemic situation (Table 5).

Table 5. Classification of the difficulties of Reintegration Units in the Małopolska Region in the implementation of socio-occupational reintegration services during the 2020 pandemic

Problems concerning the instruments of socio-occupational integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Limitations resulting from the general situation, causing the necessity of working with a limited number of participants, – Continuation of partial work with the use of methods and techniques of remote communication, causing limitations in inter-personal contacts negatively influencing the previously worked out effects of socio-vocational activation, – Limited accommodation conditions not conducive to returning to work in the office, – Limited possibility of organising outings outside the institution, negatively influencing the spectrum of social integration instruments, – Limited possibilities of taking up employment, internships or apprenticeships, especially by persons with disabilities, having a negative impact on the possibilities of professional activation (particularly acute in the case of WTZ operating in rural areas), – Problems in cooperation with the families of beneficiaries in the WTZ with regard to remote classes – Difficulties in organizing practical training and vocational workshops for employees of the ZAZ.
Psychosocial problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High levels of anxiety among support participants and their families, associated fear of participating in inpatient activities, – Misunderstanding of the pandemic situation, psychological problems (anxiety, depression, obsessions), – Deficit of skills among the participants of the support regarding the sanitary regime in the broad sense of the term (e.g. lack of distance, unwillingness to disinfect, putting on masks), – Lack of will and motivation among participants to resume activity within the WTZ, deepening of the phenomenon of deficit of interest in professional activation, – Decrease of the level of motivation to change their life situation and to take up employment among participants of the KIS and CIS.
Problems arising from systemic conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Digital exclusion of beneficiaries and their relatives (low level of digital competence and deficit of necessary ICT equipment), – Extraneous procedure of assessing disability, resulting in aggravation of the problem of inadequate assessment (indications for therapy in the WTZ were given to persons disabled to an extent preventing effective vocational rehabilitation), – No offer of group vaccination against Covid-19 for the participants and staff of WTZ, – Sudden changes in the legal environment, destabilizing the current work and the developed model of activity during the pandemic, – Inconsistency in the activities of institutions supervising the functioning of Reintegration Units, – Reduced level of income from economic activity.

Source: Own elaboration

The catalogue of support instruments addressed generally to ES entities in connection with the coronavirus outbreak was relatively broad, and included, among others, exemptions from the payment of social insurance contributions, wage subsidies from the funds of the Guaranteed Employment Benefits Fund during the period of economic downtime or reduction in the working time introduced by the employer, reimbursable financial support, the possibility of amending the terms of the agreement on support for the implementation of a public task or on entrusting the implementation of a public task, the possibility of extending the deadlines for reporting by ES entities. From the perspective of the Reintegration Unit, the most important systemic solutions were such as:

- preserving the current level of co-financing social employment entities from public funds,
- the possibility for CIS run in the form of a local government budgetary establishment, performing tasks related to counteracting Covid-19 to receive a grant from the budget of the local government that exceeds 50% of their activity costs,
- preservation of the current level of co-financing from PFRON funds of the costs of participation in an occupational therapy workshop, regardless of the suspension of classes at a WTZ

- co-financing of the costs of ZAZ operations at an unchanged level,
- the possibility for ZAZ to seek compensation for the salaries paid (in the part financed from manufacturing or service activities) in the event of a drop in turnover or downtime (MRPiPS, 2020).

Table 6. Support for socio-occupational reintegration services with public funds

Type of support	WTZ N = 41	ZAZ N = 7	KIS N = 17	CIS N = 8
Compensation on the basis of the act of 02.03.2020. On special solutions related to preventing, counteracting and combating Covid-19	0	1	0	0
Changes in the terms of repayment of loans to ses/ bank loans),	0	1	0	1
Repayable financial instruments	0	1	0	1
Protective measures (masks, disinfectant fluids)	1	0	1	0
Co-financing of salaries and contributions from fp/ fgśp	2	0	0	1
Changes in the scope of implementation or settlement of commissioned public tasks	3	1	0	1
Solutions for beneficiaries of projects co-financed from esf	3	0	4	0
Implementation of a public task to combat Covid-19, without an open tender	5	2	0	0
Remission / deferment of payment of social security contributions	3	1	2	2
Program of ad hoc support for ngos to counteract the effects of Covid-19	18	1	0	2
The entity did not benefit from support from public funds other than system funding (pfron/fp)	8	2	10	2

The number of responses does not sum to N because more than one response was possible.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6 shows the scale and scope of capitalization the support from public funds other than the “systemic” support indicated above by the Reintegration Units participating in the ROPS survey. The survey results show that the instruments of the so-called “anti-crisis shield” intended for the ES entities were largely unavailable to the WTZ, ZAZ, KIS and CIS and the organizations that run them (cf. March, 2020, 108-109), primarily due to the limited scope of the economic activity of the Reintegration Units, conducted mainly in the form of unpaid public benefit activity. The survey shows that out of 73 entities participating in the study:

- 22 (30.14%) did not benefit from any support from public funds other than maintaining the current level of funding for reintegration services regardless of the suspension of the stationary form of work;
- most, i.e. 55 Reintegration Units (75.34%), made use of the instruments available under the Covid-19 NGO ad hoc support programme;
- only 2 entities benefited from repayable financial instruments, and the same was the case with facilities for repayment of loans/loans to SEs.

The solutions in the field of facilitating the repayment of liabilities to the Social Insurance Institution, facilitating the implementation of projects co-financed from EU funds, or changes in the implementation of commissioned public tasks had also relatively small impact in relation to the Reintegration Units.

In the light of the survey results, the scale of support for Reintegration Units in Małopolska from the local environment, both from individuals, the business sector (Table 6), and local government (Table 7), was also not significant: 69.86% of the surveyed Reintegration Units declared no support from business entities, 54.79% did not use support from individual members of the local community, 49.32% of the surveyed Reintegration Units declared no support from local government. In the case of support from companies and individuals the survey showed that the most common was financial support in the form of donations, in-kind support was provided only by individuals, similarly volunteering as a form of support Reintegration Units had a greater scope in the case of assistance provided by individuals than employee volunteering. The greatest extent of support from companies and individuals was provided by the WTZ and the smallest – by the Individuals' KIS.

Table 7. Support for socio-occupational reintegration services from business and individuals

Type of support	Supporter	Type of organization			
		WTZ	ZAZ	KIS	CIS
Donation (support in kind)	business entities	0	0	0	0
	individuals	15	0	0	0
Image support (promotion of the organization)	business entities	0	0	0	0
	individuals	0	0	0	0
Volunteering	business entities	3	0	0	0
	individuals	5	2	1	3
Purchase of products or services	business entities	6	2	0	0
	individuals	10	1	0	1
Donation (financial support)	business entities	20	0	0	0
	individuals	14	2	0	1
Lack of support	business entities	21	5	17	8
	individuals	16	3	16	5
<i>N</i> = 73		<i>N</i> = 41	<i>N</i> = 7	<i>N</i> = 17	<i>N</i> = 8

The number of responses does not sum to *N* because more than one response was possible.

Source: Own elaboration.

Only 35.62% of respondents explicitly declared themselves as beneficiaries of local government support. Unlike in 2019, in which the most frequently declared form of support was grants for the implementation of a public task (23 indications out of 77 respondents, i.e. 29.87%), in 2020 the first place is occupied by support implemented mainly in non-financial formula, with only 6 entities (8.22%) declaring the receipt of grants. The smaller scope of cooperation in 2020 than in the previous year is well illustrated by the fact that not a single of the surveyed entities stated support of the local government units in the implementation of joint ventures (while in 2019 it was experienced by 17 Reintegration Units and was the third most frequently declared form of support after grant and in-kind support).

Table 8. Forms of local government (municipality or county) support for *Reintegration Units* activities during a pandemic

Type of support	Organizational type			
	WTZ	ZAZ	KIS	CIS
Subsidy in the framework of supporting or entrusting the implementation of a public task from the public benefit area	5	0	0	1
Provision by the local government of real estate/ premises for activity	0	0	4	0
Consulting	1	1	0	0
Image support/promotion of the entity	1	0	0	1
Support in the implementation of joint projects	0	0	0	0
In-kind support (e.G. Sharing a room, office equipment etc.)	5	0	5	0
Other	2	0	1	0
Lack of support from territorial self-government units	21	6	6	3
Lack of knowledge/awareness of support from local government	6	0	2	3
<i>N</i> = 73	<i>N</i> = 41	<i>N</i> = 7	<i>N</i> = 17	<i>N</i> = 8

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

The most important consequences for socio-occupational reintegration services in 2020 resulted from the limitation of opportunities for their implementation in the full-time residential formula, which visibly affected the scope of instruments of reintegration units and the effects of support. The factors most negatively affecting the delivery of reintegration services were: in the group of problems related to the instruments of reintegration – limited opportunities for direct contact with the beneficiaries of support and a reduction in the scope of cooperation in local communities; among the problems of psychosocial nature – the subjective feeling of threat, and among the systemic conditions – the lack of technical infrastructure for remote working, and the deficit of external support.

Compared to previous years, in 2020 there was a reduction in the scale of such instruments of social integration as visits to cultural institutions, integration meetings, activities in the form of self-help or therapeutic groups, but also the availability of support within the framework of vocational activation in the formula of occupational workshops. A smaller number of Reintegration Units participants than in 2019 benefited from vocational training organized by external entities and internships and apprenticeships with employers. Most of the surveyed Reintegration Units in 2020 implemented remote instruments for the implementation of socio-occupational reintegration services, albeit to a very varying degree. As a result of the impact of the above-mentioned factors, we observe a threat to the already existing effects of reintegration services, resulting in a decrease in the employment effectiveness of the Reintegration Units, which is particularly visible in the case of the WTZ.

However, the pandemic conditions did not disturb the trend observed in recent years in Małopolska in the systematic increase in the number of participants of WTZ, ZAZ, and CIS. However, the number of people taking up classes in KIS has decreased. It should be stressed here, however, that in view of the trend visible for several years in the lower number of KIS beneficiaries, the pandemic should be regarded in this case as a neutral factor.

The instruments of the so-called “anti-crisis shield” intended for social enterprises were to a large extent unavailable to the WTZ, ZAZ, KIS and CIS and organizations running them. The scale and formula of support for Reintegration Units in Małopolska from the local environment – both from individuals, the business sector and local government – also failed to respond to the problems articulated by the Reintegration Units, in particular the issue of underfunding of socio-occupational reintegration services, highlighted by the pandemic, which made it impossible to invest in equipment necessary for remote work or to improve staff qualifications in innovative methods of working with beneficiaries using remote forms of communication.

In view of the protracted epidemic situation, the long-term effects of which will probably be felt for an unspecified period of time, in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of socio-occupational reintegration services provided by Reintegration Units, a recommended solution should be, in the first place, systemic definition and stabilization of WTZ, ZAZ, KIS and CIS. The current state of “suspension” of Reintegration Units – between organizations conducting economic activity (within the system of the SE sector) and support institutions whose basis of operation is the Act on Social Assistance and, indirectly, the framework of the labour market institutions – generates a deficit of support instruments appropriate to the specificity and problems of this group of entities. The problem in terms of not fully defined role and systemic location of Reintegration Units was significantly highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the changes in social functioning forced by it and the effects it caused in socio-economic life.

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Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

The authors would like to thank the anonymous referees for their useful comments, which allowed to increase the value of this article.

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Published by Cracow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland