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**Shared-knowledge, Transparency, and Accountability: In Enabling State-Society Relations Governance on COVID-19 Resilience Building Societies**

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## Shared-knowledge, Transparency, and Accountability: In Enabling State-Society Relations Governance on COVID-19 Resilience Building Societies<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This policy brief examines shared-knowledge, transparency and accountability to improve enabling state-society relations on COVID-19 resilient building governance and takes into account the impact on third-country nationals (TCNs) in Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania. Existing research pointed to state-society relations as decentralised multi-stakeholder governance in public service reform for sustainable resilience building societies. However, the governance faced budgetary constraints and low public sector performance management. Although the relational governance shows certain public authorities have failed and/or ineffective to administer and achieve a range of public policy goals, there is still little policy study research in Nordic, Baltic, Central Eastern European - CEE and Central Western European countries explaining the improvement of state-society relations model on COVID-19 resilient building societies and its impacts to TCNs' in the selected entities. Based on a qualitative cross-country oriented research approach with fewer country comparisons, primary data from the authors of this policy paper research, documents, published and unpublished scholarly texts are collected and analyzed with document and content analysis techniques. The findings indicate insufficient shared-knowledge for responsive decision to local concerns, lack of diverse interests groups' consultations, and quality service delivery often not transparent that infringe the core values of trust, public accountability, mutual responsibilities, and citizens' participation in effective public service relational governance implementation and impact TCNs and ethnic minorities peoples' COVID-19 crisis-related resilient in the selected entities. This policy brief recommends shared-knowledge for open access to relevant information, mutual corporate responsibilities between government, public and private organization policy for public interest, diversify migrants communities involvement in policy consultation for open democracy, rebuilding of bureaucrats' professional capacity to ensure commitment and increase public service staff, and legislation to set specific working ethics and values compatible with public interest that combine honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, and fair equal treatment of citizens (especially from heterogeneous minorities subgroups) in the formulation, implementation, and delivery of public care to sustain COVID-19 resilient building societies. Not meeting these marginal policy adjustments and recommendations may intensify the reinforcement of public service distrust and corruption, deepen political and /or social inequalities, jeopardize open democracy, and impair sustainable COVID-19 resilient building societies.

### Introduction

The policy brief examines shared-knowledge, transparency, and accountability to improve the overall enabling state-society relations on COVID-19 resilience building. It also takes into account the impact to TCNs heterogeneous subgroups and ethnic minorities groups of citizens. Moreover, TCNs' and

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other ethnic-minorities' groups of citizens should not simply be joined together in one monolithic category on COVID-19 shock-related resilient building governance. TCNs are a distinct group of people characterised by varying degrees of a political and socio-economic integration process with diverse needs on crisis-related and stresses resilient building. The policy brief put forward the argument that Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania public administrators must take into account the plurality and dichotomy of the country's TCNs when involving multi-stakeholders to address COVID-19 resilience building. These marginal adjustments may be useful for policymakers' decision-management, administration, and arrangement considering a new organizational form of the enabling state-society relations to improve COVID-19 resilience building governance in the comparative entities. Within the context of shared-knowledge, transparency, and accountability that ensures decentralised multi-stakeholders, cooperation between government and the community, and mutual trust, the significant improvement on COVID-19 resilience societies may be sustainable.

### **Policy Audience**

This policy brief is addressed to Government Officials, private actors, and institutions. In this case, Government Officials are policymakers that define, maintain, and enforce the rule of the laws as regulator for collective action, while relying on public administration in COVID-19 resilience building politics. Private actors and institutions are non-state policymakers' bodies<sup>3</sup> that influence sustainable new organizational reforms in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to build resilience societies that impact TCN's and socio-economically ethnic minorities groups.

### **Policy Aims**

The aim is to improve the overall changes in the enabling state-society relations governance on COVID-19 resilience building and take into account the impact to TCNs in Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania. This policy brief argues that there is a need for a marginal improvement in enabling state-society relations multi-stakeholders governance to ensure trust in public sector performance and build resilience societies. Therefore, diversify external experts' and community participation is relevant to reduce centrality for better policy response of local conditions and that may guarantee transparency, accountability, trust and ethical values with anti-corruption tendencies in an open democratic resilient inclusive-oriented society. This may reduce risks and sustain COVID-19 reliance building societies. This policy brief also offers recommendations to state-society relational multi-

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<sup>3</sup> such as practitioners, lobbyist, public interest groups, public relations firms, business groups, faith-based organizations, community-based organization, individual activists, and social media

actors governance on COVID-19 resilience building that impact TCNs and other ethnic minorities groups in the selected entities

## Background of the problem

Government's shock and crisis-related reforms have a long history in industrialized democracies. The reform takes place in a fragile macroeconomic context, often coupled with budgetary deficits (see Esien, 2019; 2020) to sustain resilience societies (Fraser and Kirbyshire, 2017: 6-7). In 2019Q4, according to Table 1, the general debt-to-GDP ratios were 30.8% (Czechia), 36.3% (Lithuania), 59.4% (Finland), and 70.4% (Austria) (Eurostat, 2020: 2). Such pervasive budgetary constraints, even though they were below the EU27 (77.8%), had a significant impact on government provision of public care. The impact revolves around a new governance to change the organizational management of complex inter-related, uncertain shocks and stresses related resilience (Fraser and Kirbyshire, 2017: 9) in public policies formulation, implementation and administration ramification.

The move contributes to a more decentralisation and also reduces quality and performance of government (Marino, 2012). Quality and performance determines public "trust in government" performance and public sector overall quality (Thijs et al., 2017: 54-55) in delivery of public care on resilience building. From 2010 to 2016, for instance, citizens' trust in government fell in Austria (54% to 35%), Finland (49% to 40%), and Czechia (32% to 27%) (see Table 2). On the other hand, in Lithuania, from 2010 to 2016, citizen's trust in government rose from 12% to 23%. This suggests distrust of government indicates ineffective use of taxpayers' money in public sector management and aspects of corruption in dealing with public businesses.

Decentralisation and multi-stakeholders governance reforms are desirable within the interaction, arrangement, cooperation, coordination, and interdependence of state and non-state institutions for resilient building (Thompson, 1965; see Esien, 2019; 2020). This enables, for instance, participation, individual responsibilities, awareness, diversity, self-regulation, integration and adaptation on COVID-19 resilience building coping strategies systems. Nevertheless, it will take time for bureaucrats to adapt to the new decentralised multi-actors relational open method of cooperate governance in complex public policy making and implementation that requires bureaucrats' professional capacity and quality performance management (Thijs et al, 2017; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Sustainable multi-stakeholders governance is also complex because of its normative ideals that lack autonomy and self-regulation with accountability (Fraser and Kirbyshire, 2017: 11) for improvement on COVID-19 risk-related resilience building. Multi-stakeholders reforms take place in

the context of efforts to decrease the size of government. In Austria, for instance, expenditures shrank from about 19.76 per cent of GDP in 2015 to about 19.49 per cent in 2017 (The Global Economy, 2020). In Finland, the annual government expenditure was more than 24.39 per cent of GDP in late 2015 and about 22.81 per cent in 2017. In Czechia, expenditure shrank from about 19.22 per cent of GDP in 2015 to about 19.19 per cent in 2017. In Lithuania, spending fell from 17.22 per cent of GDP in 2015 to 16.31 in 2017 (see Table 4).

Not surprisingly, government relationship with business and civil society participation for “shared set of responsibilities” (Kooiman, 2003: 5) often dominates the state and inter-organizational socio-political agenda. A reduction of exclusion that involves non-state actors’ regulators seems most industrialized economies effective programmes to sustain resilience societies. The current situation is in sharp contrast to the old age of sovereign nation-states (Potůček and Rudolfova 2016) resilience building systems governance, when the government was the exclusive regulator responsible for the provision of public care (Midley, 2000). This suggest public welfare delivery on resilience building was not run in the market, but through government commitment on building public service capacity for service delivery (Esien, 2019: 271; 2020)

Transferring public service: The new concern to deliver public care through multi stakeholder that includes non-state agencies has led the government to view state-society relational governance as an opportunity for collective responsibility and to replace the centralised hierarchical state providers in two ways. First, the government cooperates in “a system of continuous nested government at several territorial tiers” (Marks, 1993: 392) with multiple non-state institutions to enhance effectiveness, democratic legitimacy, individual autonomy and responsibilities on resilience building policy goals. Second, state-society relational multi-actors governance strengthen resilience building strategies beyond systems and emergency plans to improve social safety nets and bolster public services performance (United Nation, 2018: 4). The hope of this concern seems to have been that public administrators would cooperate, monitor and control performance and institutional compliance. Even though managing the governance seems difficult in the worsening economic situation with weakened government effective responsiveness and low administrative capacity to observe non-state institutions behaviours and achieve policy goals.

In short, despite enabling state-society relations, the multi-stakeholder governance faces challenges. Some bureaucrats have failed or are ineffective in responsiveness to manage a huge sum of taxpayer’s money in the selected entities on resilience building range of policy goals. These uncertainties also impact TCNs and disadvantage ethnic minorities groups subjective well being. Within this context, a

rigorous policy study to improve the enabling state-society relations multi-stakeholder governance on resilience building is imperative in the selected entities. This policy brief fills this gap and improves the overall enabling state-society relation multi-stakeholder governance on COVID-19 resilience building in Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania and its impacts to TCNs and ethnic minorities groups.

The next section concerns the policy options to derive recommendations on COVID-19 resilience building improvement for sustainability.

### **Policy Option: Broader Adjustment in the border of Enabling State-Society Relation Institutional Framework**

This policy brief research design includes primary and secondary data. The primary data are from the authors' research. The secondary data are published and unpublished publication on multi-stakeholders resilience governance. The criteria for selecting the documents include official reports, policy studies, and academic journals. Geographical focus, type of data available and audience drives the data selection choice and sources in this policy brief to increase the reliability of the approach. The enabling state-society relations multi-stakeholders model is the main component of this framework. The key features of enabling state-society relational framework covers the following: (I) Shared-knowledge; (II) Societal consultation; and (III) transparency and accountability for mutual trust in public business

Without open shared knowledge, there is a lack of adequate well-managed communication, participation and transparency. Without transparency, lack of accountability and corruption persists with societies that feel excluded and behave unethically and untrustworthy. With open shared-knowledge, diversified societal consultation, and transparency, there is increasing tendencies for collective share of responsibilities and mutual trust to effectively sustain public funds for public benefits, cohesive society with respect, human dignity, economic prosperity, and open democratic responds on COVID-19 resilience building societies.

### **Shared-knowledge for responsive decision to local concerns**

While budgetary constraints is clearly desirable from the central government for market efficiency perspective, governments' efforts to provide public care cannot be achieved alone, as they are in some countries (Esien, 2019; 2020). The developments of multi-stakeholders relations in the provision of public care are essential to political mobilisation, political equality, and sustainable development.



Governments cannot provide, manage, administer, and govern these services at an adequate level from their own administrative capacity. Multi-stakeholders relational governance brings together different partners across territorial tiers (Marks, 1993: 392), scales and/or sectors in dialogue, decision-making and implementation of solutions in a coordinated and integrated manner (Djalante et al., 2011). This is fundamental to ensure open information with knowledge sharing and public accountability (Fraser and Kirbyshire, 2017: 9). Reduced multi-stakeholders and knowledge sharing may cope with budgetary constraints but exclude greater participation by groups affected by decisions. This indicates challenges in citizen's participation that impact COVID-19 resilience building, which may undermine vulnerable peoples' voices. The only way to keep down such presumably undesirable development in the selected entities is likely to maintain participation and open information with efficient knowledge sharing that may encourage responsive decision and democratic legitimacy to local concern and changing circumstances. This is important for addressing unpredictable, evolving and locally experienced COVID-19 shock and stresses related resilience.

### **Societal consultation for engagement and partnership**

Direct government consultation is one of the ways for the central government to consult with economic and social actors in the course of policy preparation as part to achieve policy goals and sustainable governance. Such sets of societal consultation in the form of organized interest groups participation in policy-making and corporatist structures of interest mediations are resourceful for bureaucrats to strengthen effective policy processes. Consultation of this kind may make sense to build reliance coping societies, but bureaucrats' adaptation in multi-stakeholder governance and professional quality performance challenges create complex outcomes. In response to a survey in Austria, Czechia and Lithuania, for instance, the quality of bureaucrats slightly diminished and risks public service politicised rather than professional (Thijs et al. 2017, p. 38) that may create barriers for independent diverse policy advisers to enter into policy advice on COVID-19 resilience building. Since the government has failed to strengthen the involvement of different citizens' priority, public administrators' professional capacity and quality service performance on COVID-19 resilience building is imperative. Targeting civil service professional quality may not eliminate the incapacity or insufficiency. Even though enabling state-society relational multi-stakeholder governance can bring beneficial influences to both citizens' resilience and to the taxpayers, the benefits depend crucially on the government's regulatory capacity to manage the relation well. In this environment, a simple selection of bureaucrats (without consultation of diverse interest groups such as community-based and migrants' communities), efficient regulatory quality, rule of the law for sustainability,

system of values, and the reduction of exclusion is not sufficient to build COVID-19 resilience shock-related societies.

### **Restricting transparency and accountability for mutual trust in public business**

Institutionalised regulatory mechanisms ensure transparency and accountability for government trust in public service. For example, institutional compliance regulatory mechanism guides checks & balances such as transparency international watchdog bodies and ombudsman (Thijs et al., 2017: 38-39) to effective regulation. A striking feature of the current enabling state-society relational multi-stakeholders governance in some countries, however, is the virtually restricted legal access to government information by citizens / public and transparency perception to corruption that impact administrative capacity on COVID-19 resilience building. In Czechia, for instance, there is a relative low score (fourth quintiles) in overall ranking of digitalization and service delivery capacity and performance that indicates restrictive government information with clearly less accessible to the public (Thijs,et al.,2017: 48). Several authors emphasize that transparency and accountability in Czechia, Lithuania, Austria, and Finland need further policies alongside existing Non-discrimination Acts for Equal Treatments measures to tackle corruption (see Esien, 2019; 2020; Thijs et al., 2017: 48) and enhance equal opportunities. Governments in the selected entities, for instance, introduce a transparency Amendment Act to fight corruption. However, information asymmetry between the principal (government bodies) and agents (private organizations) exist in enabling state-society relational multi-stakeholder governance corporate arrangements that influence the provision and implementation of transparency policy measure on COVID-19 resilience building (Kameník et al., 2010: 6).

In the past decades, central governments in Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania, determine public administration and control from a sovereign nation states regulatory perspective. Recently, under state-society relational multilevel actors' governance, the governments involve agents from the private and non-profit sectors among other non-state institutions in public service governance on COVID-19 resilience building. Lack of transparency and open shared-knowledge, with unequal societal consultation indicate insufficient government response to citizens' participation, ineffective management, and distrust in government and public service performance. The policy outcome may also limit diverse citizens' participations especially from migrants' communities and undermines vulnerable people on COVID-19 pandemic resilience building societies. This makes the enabling state-society relational multilevel actor's governance ineffective and inefficient for quality capacity performance and sustainable COVID-19 resilience building coping strategies.



As a matter of fact, each of the above may be considered as a prerequisite in enabling state-society relations multi-stakeholder governance in a way that best serves taxpayers' money and protects inclusion on COVID-19 resilient building sustainability. If knowledge sharing is open and transparent, there is a possibility that diverse citizens from different interest groups (such as NGOs) and (migrants) communities (who are equally the most vulnerable welfare dependence in crisis-related shocks and stresses) will take part and share the collective burden with individual responsibilities. Without open shared-knowledge, there is no guarantee that taxpayer's voices are headed on COVID-19 resilience building. Moreover, without transparency and accountability there is a strong possibility of corruption and public distrust in government provision of public care. Lack of transparency also shows that vulnerable people and ethnic minority groups experience political inequalities and are excluded from public assistance sub production regimes (such as healthcare, employment, and work systems etcetera). These people are likely people with disabilities (PWDs), elderly, lone mothers, TCNs (such as (im) migrants, refugees, undocumented newcomers) and socio-economically disadvantaged ethnic minorities' heterogeneous subgroups with multiple disadvantaged. Hence, the bigger picture and potential benefit of critical thinking, evaluation of policy performance and diversify expertise knowledge are blur and underrepresented on government effective and efficient negotiations at several territorial tiers of COVID-19 resilience building sustainability in the selected entities.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In this policy brief, Austria, Finland, Czechia, and Lithuania's public policy reform on COVID-19 resilience building in the realm of enabling state-society relational multi-stakeholders governance, is marked with shortcomings. A substantial part of the relational corporate governance exempts a well-managed communicative open knowledge sharing for responsive decision to local concern. Equally, the weak effective responsiveness of governments to societal consultation and democratic deficits may undermine minorities group of peoples' voices on COVID-19 resilience building policy goals. Moreover, quality and service delivery performances are often not transparent that infringe citizens' participations to manage tax payers' money. Under these circumstances, public distrust may prevail in public service performance and the core idea of collective responsibilities, autonomy, reduction of exclusion, democratic legitimacy, and the effectiveness and responsiveness of governments' policy goals for sustainable development on COVID-19 resilience building is blurred.

As a matter of fact, the research recommends following policy reforms improvement in this area for marginal adjustments:

- 1) State-society relations on COVID-19 resilient building should be subject to freedom of collective shared-knowledge and open information. Access to relevant information should be made easy (e.g. in different TCNs citizens' languages) and available to the public through well organized e-government service delivery platform.
- 2) Mutual cooperation and partnership between all the government units, migrants' communities, actors, and institutions that provide public services and goods on COVID-19 resilient building should be clearly enforced and nested at several territorial tiers.
- 3) Migrant communities should participate in crisis-related resilience policy consultation and policy advice as they are the most affected in COVID-19 pandemic crisis to ensure sustainability, enhance open democracy, and reduce democratic deficit
- 4) Public administrators should commit to cut government spending on consultants, and reinvest, taxpayers' money to rebuild public service capability with permanent jobs and increased staffing. This is good news for open democracy- less corporate interest and more frank and fearless advice to the government.
- 5) Trust in government, ethic and value-added standard in COVID-19 resilient building includes (a) standardize open information for transparency (b) data information that is focused, proportionate, relevant, and not too frequently change to the COVID-19 process, and (c) legislation that should set specific working ethics, which include empathy, humility, compassion, honesty, integrity, and fairness to treat contemporary super diversity public service users

In conclusion, the enabling state-society relational multilevel stakeholder governance is decisive not only in public management and administration of tax payers' money that regulates fiscal imbalances and adjust budgetary deficit, but decentralised collective responsibility of the state, the business, and civic sector in service delivery system on COVID-19 resilience building through open shared-knowledge, transparency, and accountability that impact TCNs and ethnic-minorities citizen's shock-related resilience building policy outcomes. Not meeting these goals might not only lead to the lack of public value accountability, corruption, and political inequalities, but may devastate vulnerable people's subjective wellbeing, jeopardize citizen's trust in government and public service performance and impair open democracy on COVID-19 crisis-related resilience building sustainability.

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## Appendix:

**Table 2: Trust in government 2010 to 2016, in %**

	Trust in Government,		
	2010	2016	Difference in point
Austria	54	35	-19
Finland	49	40	-9
Lithuania	12	23	+11
Czechia	31	27	-4

Thijs et al, 2017; Esien, 2019; 2020

**Table 3: Professionalism of Civil Service**

	Civil Service Professionalism	
	2012	2015
Austria	4.4	4.3
Finland	5	5
Czechia	3.7	3.8
Lithuania	4.5	4.4

Quality of Government Expert Survey; Seen in Thijs et al., 2017: 43

**Table 4: Government annual expenditure in % of GDP in Austria, Finland, Czechia & Lithuania**

	Annual Government Expenditure in Percent of GDP			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Austria	19.76	19.67	19.49	19.32
Finland	19.22	23.66	22.81	22.66
Czechia	19.22	19.27	19.19	19.97
Lithuania	17.22	17.00	16.31	16.49

The Global Economy.com, 2020