



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE



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Crisis management in Lithuania: Towards A More Resilient System



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CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

- In the past several years, Lithuania has encountered **several significant crises**, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the influx of illegal immigrants from Belarus, the arrival of Ukrainian refugees or the crisis of high energy prices
- All of these crises were **transboundary crises** transcending the country's boundaries
- First, to effectively address individual crises, governments should possess **sufficient governance capacity** (Christensen et al., 2016)
- Second, during the recovery phase of individual crises, governments should enhance **resilience in governance** to better anticipate systemic threats and to better prepare for future crises

PURPOSE

- The main aim of this chapter is to examine **the institutional arrangements and decision-making practices in crisis management** within the Lithuanian government and public administration
- More specifically, it seeks to assess **the evolution of these mechanisms** in response to managing specific crises and their functioning during “normal” times
- Also, the chapter delves into **the concept of resilience in public administration**, exploring how the country’s authorities have developed different governance instruments for handling future systemic threats.



OUR APPROACH

The chapter focuses on **the governance of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis of illegal migration** to answer the specific research questions in terms of key actors, managerial instruments and decision-making processes

While exploring these issues, we followed **a longitudinal approach that allows capturing shifts between different phases of individual crises** and grasping their spillover effects (Kuipers et al., 2022)

We focused on **a convincing narrative** while aligning with the research protocol in terms of structure and the main research questions

The only deviation from the research outline is moving information on **the role of coordination channels** to part 1 (overall policy) and 2 (national structures) to reduce fragmentation and to enhance coherence

OUR METHODS

- **Desk research**, including **an inventory of previous crises and emergency situations/events** in the country (Patkauskaitė-Tiuchtienė et al., 2022):
 - with explosives comprising about 90% of incidents (alongside with such more important emergencies as the outbreaks of swine fever, flooding due to heavy rains or droughts in the agricultural sector)
 - The financial crisis that started at the end of 2008 was managed from the centre of government outside the crisis/emergency system
- Also, **the results of 10 interviews** were used while preparing this chapter, for instance in relation to the preparedness of Lithuanian authorities for a major outbreak of infectious diseases

MAIN POINTS

- The results of managing both the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration crisis in Lithuania shaped **the creation of a new National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) within the Government Office**
- Also, Lithuanian authorities **established new resilience mechanisms or strengthened the existing resilience mechanisms in the country's public administration** as a result of these crises

TOWARDS A NEW SYSTEM

- The previous crisis management system heavily relied on **hierarchy** within the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior ([Widmalm](#) et al., 2019)
- The new system emphasises **network-based coordination** that makes it better suited to addressing future systemic threats and transboundary crises through collaborative efforts with different state and municipal institutions, NGOs and business companies, as well as other states and international organisations.

GOVERNMENT'S OVERALL POLICY AND COORDINATION

- Overall, both Lithuanian governments led by Prime Ministers S. Skvernelis and I. Šimonytė initially attempted to rely on **the existing institutional arrangements and standard professional routines** to manage the individual crises
- However, as **these approaches proved to be ineffective due to the scale and speed of these transboundary crises**, it became necessary to urgently develop new solutions for crisis and emergency management
- In response to the new reality, the Lithuanian authoritative decision-makers created the centralised system of managing the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and the special inter-institutional arrangement to coordinate the crisis of illegal migration in 2021. This highlights **a shift to more centralised and joint governance solutions** during major crisis events in the country

NEW CRISIS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT MODEL

Political–strategic level

Decision-making/coordination level

Operational-tactical level



MAIN INSTRUMENTS OF RESILIENCE IN GOVERNANCE IN LITHUANIA

- **Safeguarding critical infrastructures** (e.g. energy, water/wastewater and health infrastructure) in the country's largest cities
- **Developing a network of shelters** that should protect the population from air hazards and other threats during military aggression
- **Setting up a network of preparedness officers** (*drawing from the experience of Finnish institutions*) responsible for organising the activities of crisis management and civil protection in individual institutions
- **Organising civil protection exercises** to test the readiness of the country's authorities and population to respond to possible future threats, including potential nuclear accidents at the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant in Belarus
- **Employing various practices of anticipatory governance** to enhance their preparedness for the future (e.g. strategic foresights and stress testing)

STYLE OF DECISION-MAKING DURING CRISES

	Government-wide decision-making bodies	Specialised crisis decision-making bodies
Centralised decision-making	<p>COVID-19 and healthcare reform decision-making from the second half of 2021</p> <p>Decision-making on crisis management in the NCMC and the National Security Commission (since May 2023)</p>	<p>COVID-19 decision-making in the first half of 2020</p> <p>Decision-making on illegal migration in the system of emergency management (November 2021-May 2023)</p>
Decentralised decision-making		<p>COVID-19 decision-making in the second half of 2020 and the first half of 2021</p> <p>Decision-making on illegal migration in the system of emergency management (July-November 2021)</p>

- A gradual shift from **the use of specialised crisis management bodies to government-wide decision-making arrangements**
- Overall, the decision-making of Lithuanian authorities initially focused on operational responses to the crises, but latter **the attention of authoritative decision-makers shifted more to strategic decisions and policy reforms**

USE OF INFORMATION AND DATA

- **Major transformation in the management of state data from *MS Excel sheets* to a single and integrated state data system** based on:
 - "Palantir Foundry", an advanced data analytics platform for situational intelligence and decision-making developed by Palantir
 - Storing the state data on the AWS (Amazon Web Services) cloud in Ireland instead of the data centres physically located in the country

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Overall, **the country's crisis management system was able to "bounce forward"** (Manyena et al., 2011) by adequately responding to the individual crises and better preparing for future systemic threats
- Lithuanian authorities not only created **the new system for crisis management**, but also made **several strategic decisions aimed at enhancing overall resilience** in specific policy fields:
 - consolidating various public health agencies and adopting major health reform;
 - building the physical barrier on the Lithuanian-Belorussian border or proposing the establishment of a new agency specifically tasked with providing accommodation and other social services to migrants.
- While the NCMC has recently managed several minor events in the country, **its capabilities to respond to more serious events are still to be tested.**



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Thank you for the attention!

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