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# Impacts of policy changes on Care-Leaving Workers in a time of coronavirus: Comparative analysis of discretion and constraints

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**ABSTRACT** *This policy analysis examines the impact of COVID-19 policy guidance on the role of workers who provide outreach to transition-age care leavers. The comparison focuses on four countries (US, England, Canada, Australia) and addresses the question: How do policy changes impact street-level bureaucracy (SLB) discretion, activities, resources, and constraints? A review of policy guidance identifies similar actions across the four countries focused on: public health measures, extension and flexibility of services, prioritization of cases, and enhanced use of technology. Extension and flexibility of services were particularly noted. Cautions about the temporary nature of these changes are identified.*

Note: In the interests of space, street-level theory and the pandemic context underpinning the articles for this Special Issue are discussed in detail in the Introduction to the Issue.

**Keywords:** street-level bureaucracy; policy implementation; leaving care; transition to adulthood; child welfare policy; comparative analysis

In the last two decades the plight of care-leavers has gained significant research attention. Many countries, including nearly all of those with advanced industrial economies, have developed specialized policies and programs to support young people leaving the foster care system for adulthood (Mendes and Snow 2016; Mann-Feder and Goyette 2019). Work with youth during the transition period typically involves a specialized case worker (we use the term “transition worker”) to engage youth in planning for the transition, supporting him/her during the transition, serving as a resource for information, connecting the young person to resources, and providing additional guidance, as needed. The transition worker’s unique role provides an opportunity to apply street-level bureaucracy (SLB) theory in the context of COVID-19. SLB theory has previously been applied to child welfare workers in bureaucracies (e.g. Smith and Donovan 2003). Transition-focused work is a front-line role and a newer form of practice that may not be as constrained as more traditional child welfare work. Moreover, the transition worker

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often focuses on bridging the young person to community resources related to housing, employment, and other necessary supports. Consequently, the role may have more discretion than traditional work and thus offers particular opportunities for examining how, as an SLB, it has been affected by COVID-19.

SLB theory falls within the family of “bottom-up theories” of policy implementation and is particularly focused on the interaction between the worker and the client within the organizational context. Lipsky’s (1980) work on SLBs in policy implementation is highly applicable to child welfare. Smith and Donovan (2003) used Lipsky’s theory to examine the everyday practices of frontline child welfare workers, finding that workers were not able to use best practices due to organizational pressures such as time limits and that, consequently, they conformed their practices to environmental expectations. Gibson et al. (2018) investigated paperwork and other processing tasks as part of accountability processes, concluding: “paperwork and the forms of accountability they represent were often experienced as a major barrier to effective child welfare practice, forcing workers to choose between upholding social work values and complying with institutional demands to document compliance with policy mandates”, p. 51. Collins (2015), in regard to transition-focused work specifically, described how workers could be in a position of using discretion to either help youth or create barriers to service. A worker might, for instance, successfully advocate for a youth who did not meet a specific goal (for example, school attendance) to be given another chance. In summary, SLBs typically operate with extensive discretion. They may interpret policy favorably or unfavorably for a particular client based on their views of the policy, the rewards existing in the workplace, and personal biases. These are methods of coping with the challenging nature of the work and the environmental context of strained resources.

## **Method**

This policy analysis focused on four countries: United States, England, Canada, and Australia. While not exhaustive, these countries were selected due to some broad similarities in regard to professional social work, formal child welfare systems, and specialized efforts regarding the transition-age population. English is a main language in each country, therefore facilitating access to needed documents for analysis. Other countries might have also been included (e.g. Israel, New Zealand) but limiting the comparison to four countries was necessary due to space considerations.

The research team included the first author, an international and US expert in child welfare policy and transition-aged youth, and the second author, a child welfare and youth engagement scholar with a decade of child welfare clinical practice experience. The authors met on a regular basis throughout the data collection and analysis processes for review and debriefing. Data collection occurred between May 2020 and July 2020. Data collection involved search activities focused on the following: national and sub-national (for example, state, province) government websites related to child welfare, websites of national child welfare organizations (for example, Child Welfare League of America, Child Welfare League of Canada), and international repositories of information (for example, the Better Care Network, CREATE Foundation of Australia). Search terms included “COVID-19” OR “coronavirus” AND “child welfare policy” AND “transition age youth OR foster youth OR care-leavers”. The goal of the search was to identify written policies that adapted the role of the transition worker (SLB) and practice in light of

COVID-19. We also recorded the policies related to the more general child welfare workforce because it is inclusive of transition workers. Data analysis was guided by the stages of thematic analysis outline by Braun and Clarke (2006), which had also been used in policy analyses (e.g. Smith and Cumming 2017). Thematic analysis allows research to identify patterns in data and making selections that capture something important in relation to the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006). The steps of thematic analysis, as applied in this study included: becoming familiar with the data through reading/re-reading/discussion; generating initial codes (identified below); searching for themes; reviewing themes (guided by SLB theory); defining and naming themes; and producing the scholarly report (this paper). First, the authors selected two different countries and independently reviewed the policies to identify inductive themes related to changes in policy and practice relevant to the SLB role. The authors identified initial codes of communication, safety protocols, care-leaver needs, and programs/services. Then, the authors revisited the data to analyze application of these codes to the theoretical framework. The authors reconvened and agreed upon four core themes: safety precautions, relaxation of rules, extension of benefits to youth, and use of technology. Examples of these, which were widely shared across the four cases, are provided below. Throughout the process, the authors wrote memos defining, describing, and providing examples of the themes. Additionally, analysis focused on the meaning of these changes to the role of the SLB. Using the categories derived from SLB theory (discretion and accountability, professionalism, and resources and constraints), the final stage of the analysis reflected on how the identified policy and practice changes impacted the transition worker role.

## **Findings**

### *Leaving-Care Policy and Practice*

In this section we provide a brief overview of major existing policy related to transition from foster care that was in place prior to the onset of COVID-19. Further details about the policy frameworks can be found in Mendes and Snow (2016) and Mann-Feder and Goyette (2019). In the US, the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) of 1999 and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 provide the framework and funding for states to support youth in the transition from care, including extension of care, in some circumstances, beyond age 18 (Collins 2015). In England, the Children (Leaving Care) Act of 2000 sought to improve preparation, planning, and consistency of support for young people leaving care and strengthened financial assistance. Subsequent legislation has been enacted to extend access to transition workers (that is, personal advisors) and aftercare support (Munro et al. 2016). Out-of-home care in Australia is the responsibility of each State and Territory, with its own legislation, policies, and practices. The Commonwealth Government recommends minimum benchmarks, such as the expectation for each care leaver to have a transition plan. Some initiatives for extending care and supporting care leavers are occurring at the state level (Mendes and Rogers 2020). In Canada, child welfare services are administered across the provinces and territories. Some provinces have extended care and provide transition support services (Woodgate et al. 2017), resulting in variability by location.

Although transition workers are part of the child welfare workforce, aspects of the work are different from other child welfare roles in at least three important ways. First, the youth clients are voluntary; after the age of majority, youth are not required to continue their connection to the child welfare system. Second, because they are no longer children, the statutory protective emphasis of the child welfare system is lessened. Third,

because of their older age, these youth have more capacity for voice and autonomy than others in the child welfare system.

Table 1 identifies key aspects of the comparison of the four countries in regard to existing national legislation, sub-jurisdictions, and the observed COVID policy impacts and the observed COVID policy impacts, described further below.

### *COVID-19 Guidance to Child Welfare Workforce*

Transition workers are part of the child welfare workforce. Therefore, most of the governmental guidance about COVID-19 directed at the child welfare workforce is inclusive of the transition workers. Each country offered significant emergency guidance at many points (and continuing) during the pandemic. There were common themes across the four countries that were also found in global documents (UNICEF 2020). These themes included safety measures, prioritization of cases, use of technology, and efforts to designate personnel as “essential workers”. Examples from each country are provided below. We also note that guidance related to COVID-19 has continued to develop. The findings we present are those that were in place during the time of data collection (May 2020 and July 2020).

**Table 1.** Comparison of COVID-19 impacts on policy and practice in four countries

Country	National legislation	Sub-jurisdiction	Examples of COVID-focused child welfare workforce guidance	Illustrative examples of impacts on care leaving practice
United States	Yes	50 US states, District of Columbia, Native American tribes	Required monthly caseworker visit was to remain in place but permitted visits to be conducted by videoconferencing	Encouraged agencies to reach out to youth and young adults who may need housing assistance
England	Yes	Local authorities	Local authorities are expected to prioritize the most vulnerable children, including undertaking necessary visits while taking appropriate infection control measures	Directed to assess care leavers’ needs and prioritize support to the most vulnerable
Canada	No	10 provinces and 3 territories	Wide range of public health measures related to distancing and precautions	Province of British Columbia allowed extension independent living agreements and relaxation of the life-skills policy
Australia	No	6 states and 3 internal/7 external territories	Providing face to face services when possible and providing on-going casework supports remotely via teleconferencing platforms	State of Victoria formally extended program to support care leavers who will turn 18 this year to remain in care until June 2021

In the US, caseworkers were instructed to adopt a virtual case management approach as appropriate and based on state public health guidelines. In a letter to child welfare leaders, on March 18, the Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau addressed monthly caseworker visits, noting that while it was "imperative that caseworkers continue to ensure the well-being of children in care" this must be balanced with health concerns. Thus, the required monthly caseworker visit was to remain in place but permitted visits to be conducted by videoconferencing (US DHHS 2020a). Other policy guidance focused on public health guidelines (for example, social distancing) when conducting in-person visits. Some jurisdictions did not have adequate protective equipment; consequently, the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services in a letter to child welfare leaders urged governors to work with their emergency management and public health leadership to ensure workers are classified as Level 1 emergency responders and have access to Personal Protective Equipment (US DHHS 2020b).

Similar guidance was provided in England, where local authorities are expected to prioritize the most vulnerable children, including undertaking necessary visits while taking appropriate infection control measures (Department of Education 2020). Local authorities and social work practitioners should make judgments about visits to balance the risks to children, families, and the workforce. Again, face-to-face contact can be replaced, where appropriate, by other methods. The government will provide laptops and tablets for children who have a social worker, to help them stay in touch with the services they need.

Workers in Australia were instructed to follow state and territory public health guidelines regarding social distancing practices, including providing face-to-face services when possible and providing on-going casework support remotely via teleconferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp (Center for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2020).

National and provincial governments in Canada also issued extensive guidance (e.g. British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development 2020). Additionally, the Child Welfare League of Canada (2020) suggested governments should: (1) designate child welfare and protection as essential services; (2) allow service providers and social workers the flexibility to be creative in arranging some visits for children and youth with parents or significant others, while respecting health guidelines; (3) cover the cost of technology for children, youth, families and elders so that significant connections can be maintained; (4) fund service providers and communities, enabling them to offer free and readily accessible online mental health support, including access to elders, counseling, and psychiatry; (5) ensure no young person transitions out of care during the pandemic and offer support and services immediately and unconditionally so that young people can maintain significant connections. The document also notes the importance of children's rights (referencing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC]), with particular attention to indigenous communities.

### *COVID-19 Guidance to Transition Staff*

Most of the guidance related to transition workers focused on adapting the services that are available to youth. In all four countries, where transition services were available, there was explicit guidance to extend time in care and provide other types of flexible services. In the US, during the early stages of the pandemic, the primary focus was on meeting the immediate needs of youth. State child welfare agencies were reminded that

federal funding can be used to provide room and board assistance for youth aged 18–21. Thirty-five states allow youth to re-enter foster care up to the age of 21 (sometimes up to age 23). Select states have issued executive orders and/or waivers to ensure continuity of care, access to technology, and other critical services (NCSL 2020).

On March 12, 2020, the Associate Commissioner for the US Children’s Bureau, in a letter to child welfare directors, encouraged agencies to reach out to youth and young adults who may need housing assistance. “We urge all child welfare agencies to immediately contact all youth and young adults in colleges or in other settings who may need assistance finding and securing housing while their college or university is closed” (US DHHS 2020c). Access to technology was also noted in the US. Access to a cell phone for a youth receiving transition services may be determined as necessary, and an allowable cost, if it facilitates participation in services or enhances effectiveness of the services in transitioning to adulthood (US DHHS 2020d).

In England, local authorities were instructed by the Department of Education (2020) to continue to do their best to meet statutory duties. They should carefully assess care leavers’ needs and prioritize support to the most vulnerable. Personal advisers should keep in touch with young people through technology such as phone or video, recognizing that some in-person visits will still be necessary. Personal advisers should carefully assess what is the right level and frequency of contact with each care leaver, considering each young person’s particular circumstances and levels of vulnerability. The Education Secretary asked local authorities to ensure nobody has to leave care during the pandemic. Local authorities are encouraged to utilize additional government funding to provide discretionary payments to care leavers to cover items such as food, utilities, and rent during this period. Laptops and tablets may also be provided to care leavers to help them stay in touch with the services they need.

Similarly, in Australia, there are increased calls for extending care to age 21 during the pandemic (Mendes and Waugh 2020). The State of Victoria formally extended the evidence-informed Home Stretch program to support care leavers who will turn 18 this year to remain in care until June 2021. This will allow youth to maintain their living arrangements and support as they transition to independence. While there were advocacy efforts aimed at extending care throughout Australia, Victoria is the only jurisdiction to formally extend care through 2020 (McDonald 2020).

In Canada, where services differ by province, a detailed example was identified in British Columbia. There, the Ministry for Children and Families described COVID-related changes in a letter to the youth population. The letter identifies the ability to extend independent living agreements or Agreements with Young Adults Program (AYA) until September 30, 2020. The letter also encouraged enrollment in the AYA program for those not yet enrolled (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development 2020).

Other points in the letter included relaxation of the life-skills policy. Previously, in order to qualify for AYA, young adults were required to attend a ministry-approved life-skills program that covered at least four of six learning domains (for example, financial literacy, social skills) for a minimum of 12 hours a week. The temporary changes to the life-skills policy included removing the need to be a ministry-approved life skill provider; reducing the focus of programming to one learning domain (versus four); reducing



weekly participation to five hours a week; adding cultural learning as a learning domain; and delivering programs remotely.

The Ministry’s letter summarizes the changes as offering greater program flexibility, providing support to connect with youth’s culture, and facilitating access to existing online programs. The letter further states: “If you have any questions, need any additional resources or would like help connecting with your family or Indigenous community, please let your social worker know.”

*Impacts on the SLB Role*

Analysis of the impact of COVID guidance on the SLB role examined three areas consistent with SLB theory: discretion and accountability, professionalism, and resources and constraints. Table 2 provides a summary of this analysis which we describe further below. COVID, and its impacts on policy and on the role of transition workers, continues to evolve. At the time of the analysis there appeared no observable difference in the impact on the SLB role across the four countries studied.

*Discretion and Accountability.* Automatic extensions of eligibility for services reduces the individual discretion of transition workers. In the context of the current crisis, many bureaucratic rules appear to have been relaxed for the present. It will be imperative to understand the longer-term impact of this relaxation, including the possibility that these temporary changes may lead to improved outcomes for this youth cohort. Optimistically, it may lead to more relaxed rules and communication mechanisms as standard operating

**Table 2.** Impact of COVID-19 on transition worker role

During COVID-19 pandemic (May 2020–July 2020)		Projected	
Discretion and accountability	Professionalism	Resources and constraints	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Automatic extensions</li> <li>● Relaxation of rules and expectation of youth outcomes</li> <li>● Contacts still required but may be by phone or video</li> <li>● Workers are key sources of information for youth</li> <li>● Accountability to indigenous and racial/ethnic minority population is needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Major source of support to youth</li> <li>● Impact of technologies on the professional role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resources are variable in different jurisdictions within countries</li> <li>● Emergency nature of pandemic has increased resources in some areas and lifted constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduced discretion</li> <li>● Reduction in transition worker role</li> <li>● Enhanced youth accountability to meet goals</li> <li>● Reduced resources requiring tightened eligibility</li> <li>● Potential staff cuts in public sector resulting in fewer transition specialists</li> </ul>



procedure. It also might lead to more rigid rules in the longer term, which we discuss further below in regard to accountability.

Transition workers are key sources of information for transitioning youth. They become quintessential SLBs in this context as they inform youth regarding eligibility for services, facilitate access (for example, helping with forms), and advocate in important educational, health care, and welfare systems. Systems may be variable in terms of how much discretion the worker is allowed. It is also the case that supports available to youth are variable in different settings. In the US, for example, North Carolina and the District of Columbia are the only jurisdictions that introduced formal legislation targeting the unique needs of older youth in the child welfare system during COVID-19 (NCSL 2020). Much of practice with transition-age youth is about attaining specific goals and benchmarks, particularly related to education and employment. The pandemic has led agencies to relax some of these outcomes in the short term. Transition workers are less focused on this aspect of the work than on ensuring the young person is stably housed and has access to services. In addition, there has been a heightened emphasis on meeting the emotional and support needs of youth including mental health needs given the concern that social distancing will result in social isolation. Questions remain as to when more accountability will resume and whether it will be enhanced.

In the US, most meetings for youth will be held via videoconferencing or telephone. In New York City, for example, all family team conferences pertaining to older youth (for example, 30–45-day planning conferences) will be held by videoconference. It is unclear what steps will be followed to ensure youth attend, participate, and have their needs met, especially given that certain requirements (education, employment) for receiving funds are being overlooked during this crisis. Court appearances are also largely being held virtually and/or postponed (Division of Child Protection 2020). It is uncertain what impact this will have on transition workers and accountability.

Accountability also must consider the extent to which the child welfare systems are accountable to indigenous and racial/ethnic populations. Given the specific needs of indigenous youth and youth of color, their disproportionate number in child welfare systems, and the disproportionate impact of COVID on these communities, aggressive care efforts are critical. It is not clear what the impact of this would be on the individual SLB, or the degree to which transition workers are trained and equipped to provide culturally competent services (Fast et al. 2019; Mendes et al. 2019).

*Professionalism.* In addition to this formal policy guidance, it is also important to note the perspectives of young people regarding their needs. One UK organization aimed at supporting the youth voice conducted a survey of care leavers and created a document outlining tips for personal advisers. These include: (1) be particularly aware of the issues that impact on care leavers' well-being; (2) check in on young people more regularly; (3) make sure you know young people's current circumstances and needs; (4) ensure the young person knows where to turn for support; (5) speak to the young person about how their birth family/support network can help them; (6) identify contingency plans in case of illness; (7) make sure the contact details for the young person and people who support them are up-to-date; (8) have systems in place for emergency financial and practical support; (9) ensure staff have the equipment needed to keep in touch and support young people remotely; (10) have fun together virtually (Coram Voice 2020). Similar

suggestions were offered from a recent US-based study (Greeson et al. 2020). As these youth-constructed tips suggest, providing support and guidance to the young client is a major component of the role that has been amplified in the current context.

A second point about the impact on the professional role is the broader effect that the pandemic has had on the changing nature of professional work. Similar to the rise of telehealth, communication technologies will continue to affect professions. In Australia, for example, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare outlined creative strategies for transition workers to support and engage young people during COVID-19 (cited in Mendes and Waugh 2020). There was a focus on maintaining connections by meeting clients in open spaces/outdoors, taking a walk, or holding conversations on digital platforms. There was also a focus on meeting the educational needs of youth by providing laptops, computers, phones and phone credit. They also offer strategies for providing support with accessing food, transportation, housing, and medical needs, and providing information about various online activities.

*Resources and Constraints.* The available resources, and resulting constraints, are highly variable within each of the four countries. Despite national-level policies, local variation is common. Thus, state and local funding and policies may limit a transition worker's ability to provide best practices. This was always the case prior to the onset of the coronavirus but has been exacerbated during the pandemic. A second relevant point is the emergency nature of the coronavirus, which has resulted in some additional resources and some constraints being lifted. This is likely to be a short-term scenario, however, which we discuss further below. Even with some temporary increase in services, available resources to serve child welfare populations, including care leavers, are known to be highly insufficient (Collins 2015). A common method of rationing care is to impose eligibility criteria for services (most commonly requirements for engagement in education and employment).

## **Discussion**

The impact of COVID-19 on the work of transition workers reflects both the general impacts on the child welfare workforce and the changed policy in regard to leaving care. Policy guidance regarding child welfare workers emphasized various safety protocols and relaxation of some common rules related to interactions with children, youth, and families. One of the most significant changes was the movement to remote meetings. For transition workers, this is likely to be less challenging than other parts of child welfare practice because the client population is older youth who are generally comfortable with technology-based communications. These COVID-affected changes were mostly similar across the four countries examined. Professional social work and advanced child welfare systems are similar in the four countries and all four have research and scholarly traditions related to leaving care. There were some differences with both child welfare practice and leaving care, however. These differences are reflected in their standard approach, rather than through the COVID impacts. As noted, the US and England have national legislation on leaving care that enabled the application of national benchmarks on leaving care practice during COVID-19, although there is variation in practice at state

and local levels. In Canada and Australia there is no national legislation and consequently no uniform standards; some of the jurisdictions have addressed leaving care, specifically, but most have not. All except the US addressed children's rights within the context of their leaving care efforts. The US does not use this frame because it is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The influence of COVID-19 on the role of transition workers was primarily caused by its impact on transition policies. Across the four countries there was relaxation of the rules and automatic extension of services. This relaxes the conditions under which transition workers conduct the work. It may also place an additional burden on workers, who already have limited resources and high caseloads, to locate additional services for clients (for example, housing, healthcare, social support) that may be challenging to access during a pandemic. Extension of care has been a critical policy development related to COVID-19. The SLBs are often sources of information. Hence, they are in a position to share information and support youth to access services. Nonetheless, with limited funding (often varying by state and/or territory) and resources, workers are in a position to use discretion in terms of prioritizing the needs of clients.

There are some common patterns in the policy guidance provided to transition workers. The nature of transition work has important differences from other child welfare workers; this affects the impact of COVID-19 on discretion and accountability. First, because their clients are older youth, issues related to child protective work are less dominant. For the most part, but not fully, check-ins can be adequately managed through phone contact and other technologies. The remote check-ins during the pandemic may provide transition workers with creative and flexible mechanisms for building supportive relationships.

Extensions of care and relaxations of rules are likely to be temporary. The current environment provides the opportunity for advocates to push for more permanent supports. The real danger is that the current temporary relaxation will end, followed by an extensive tightening of rules, regulations, and sanctions. Even more threatening is the potential for cutting back services, support, and the staffing of the SLB role. The coronavirus is taking a massive toll on economies worldwide. Government funding for social services, which is never secure, is likely to be threatened as governments grapple with loss of revenues. At that time, the SLB role might change even further and result in operating under severe constraints. The theory of SLBs would predict that these workers would then use their discretion in creaming (i.e. selectively choosing clients who are easiest to serve) and other biases. It is also worth noting that creaming already occurs to some extent – transition support is a voluntary service with eligibility rules related to participation in education and employment, for example.

The broader role of safety nets in these countries is also relevant, particularly given the financial vulnerability of care leavers. There are limitations to social welfare provision in all four countries, but the US has a comparatively weak safety net, particularly in relation to income support payments and health care (Russell 2018). The SLB role will always be constrained when there are few social welfare resources available to youth leaving care. Also relevant to comparison is the broader context of the social work profession in each of the countries. In earlier research examining SLB coping behavior among child welfare workers in Denmark, Baviskar and Winter (2017) made a comparison to the US and noted that the Danish context allowed for more worker discretion because the

professional level of Danish SLBs is much higher. The challenges of addressing transitioning youth needs that have been amplified by COVID-19 also point to limitations of relying on the professional workforce. More robust approaches need to also engage informal social support including peer networks.

In conclusion, transition workers, although part of a child welfare workforce, have slightly more autonomy and discretion in their role because the services they provide are not mandatory or driven by the child protection function. The coronavirus pandemic has altered their role in four main ways: allowing more flexibility in services provided, enhanced safety protocols, greater use of technology, and prioritization of cases. Especially the flexibility in services has altered the SLB role to enhance discretion, loosen accountability, increase resources, and minimize constraints. This is time-limited, however, and there is substantial likelihood of upcoming restrictions on the services and role of the SLB. This has implications for SLB theory in regard to the impact of the crisis and its aftermath on the changing nature of the SLB role. The patterns identified are largely consistent across the four countries examined. Differences mostly reflected institutionalized political and cultural differences that preceded COVID-19.

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