

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Covid-19 Necessitates Improvement of Data Openness**

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We, the representatives from the Research Community (including think-tanks, academia and citizen researchers) of Malaysia, urge the Malaysian government to improve the level of data openness in our country, particularly in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

A lack of data openness and transparency has led to much speculations, misinformation and anxiety among the public in dealing with COVID-19. Despite the daily announcement by the Ministry of Health, the numbers do not provide sufficient information for Malaysian public to make informed choices. Vague names given to the clusters meant little, while the format of the announcement also made the progress of COVID-19 hard to track.

We understand that a “whole-of-society” effort is needed to combat COVID-19, not only on the health front but also on the social and economic fronts. By sharing more granular and timely Covid-19 and socioeconomic data, the government can also invite more collaboration from the civil society, think-tanks, citizen researchers and media to provide policy analyses and responses. Similarly, greater data transparency can also help debunk some myths and allegations about the government’s effort in handling both the COVID-19 spread and the economic downturn due to the pandemic.

We recognise the government’s effort to make data more accessible, with the establishment of the [data.gov.my](https://data.gov.my) portal in 2014. However, our open data level is still lacking. Even when data is made available online, it often is incomplete, not up-to-date or lacking in granularity.

The data governance and management in Malaysia is also fragmented across ministries and agencies. There is no clear definition as to what data can be shared, leading to each ministry/agency having a different set of practices to determine how data is shared with the public which hampers a data-sharing culture.

This needs to be changed. There is a need for an overarching framework on Data Governance. We need to promote a culture of data-sharing that is public unless deemed sensitive. At the same time, we need to also address the concern of data privacy. This can be done by clearly identifying what data types can be shared, and in what manner where anonymity can be assured.

Open data demonstrates a country’s commitment to proactively providing high-value information. Data is a valuable yet non-exhaustible commodity, and can generate a more transparent, accountable and participatory engagement process between governments and citizens. As taxpayers, citizens also have the right to access public data, so they can make informed decisions on policies, services and budgets.

## Call to action

As such, in the more immediate term, we urge the government to be more forthcoming in sharing meaningful, timely and more granular data. In the long run, we urge the government to engage with the research community as well as data scientists to deliberate a comprehensive legal and policy framework that will strengthen our data governance, and ensure our right to information. As the academic and think-tank community, we stand ready to engage with the government and offer our expertise in advancing data openness in the country.

As shown by the recent initiatives such as #Kitajagakita, Malaysians are capable of self-organisation, particularly with the help of technological advancement and increase in digital literacy. We urge the government to reciprocate, for the benefit of the nation.

## References:

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<https://refsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Strengthening-Malaysia%E2%80%99s-Open-Data-Ecosystem.pdf>

Signed by:





### *Organisations*

1. Research for Social Advancement (REFSA)
2. The Centre
3. Institute of Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS)
4. Institute for Research and Development of Policy (IRDP)
5. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
6. Centre for Governance and Political Studies (CentGPS)
7. CIVICA Research
8. Our Journey
9. Prison Fellowship Malaysia
10. PENGASIH MALAYSIA
11. IMAN Research
12. Malaysia Health Coalition
13. Penang Institute
14. Asia Strategy Leadership Institute (ASLI)
15. Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
16. Undi18
17. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor
18. Reproductive Rights Advocacy Alliance Malaysia
19. Agora Society Malaysia

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