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UNITED KINGDOM



# **SIUTATION ANALYSIS:** **CHILDREN IN LOCKDOWN: NINE** **MONTHS ON**

**DRAFT**

In April 2020, as the UK was locked-down for the first time in the coronavirus pandemic, we produced a rapid review of the impact this might have for children in the UK. The review – available [here](#) – provided an early overview of what may happen to inform policy and programmatic response.

Now, nearly nine months later, a lot more is known about the pandemic, the measures taken by government and the impact on children. This brief report provides an update on some key issues for children and young people in this period. It is intended to support local authorities in thinking about their ongoing work to help children during the pandemic and in the period of recovery that will follow it.

## Contents

Loss of capacity across local authority services .....	3
Loss of capacity across charity support services .....	7
Child nutrition .....	9
Access to healthcare .....	11
Children's mental health and bereavement .....	13
Domestic Abuse & Neglect.....	16
Housing and access to outdoor/green spaces.....	18
'Looked after' children .....	21
Young carers.....	23
Refugee and asylum-seeking children.....	25
Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) .....	28
Digital divide and access to information.....	30

## LOSS OF CAPACITY ACROSS LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES

In April, we stated that a combination of increased demand and reduced staff capacity would result in many vulnerable adults and children being unable to access the support they needed. Since April, more information has become available about the impact for local authorities.

### Increased costs

Across English local authorities, the IFS estimates spending pressures amounting to £4.4 billion and a £2.8 billion shortfall in non-tax income, making a total in-year pressure of £7.2 billion. Further billions are expected to be lost in future years as a result of lost taxes. The UK Government made £3.6 billion available to local authorities to support the additional costs associated with Covid-19. Even taking account of expected additional grants and other support to address spending pressures, the IFS predicts a shortfall of £2 billion across the sector in 2020-21.<sup>1</sup>

In the first quarter of the fiscal year (April-June), increased expenditure in adults' social care amounted to 46%, and in children's social care amounted to 33%.<sup>2</sup> Increased costs have been driven by additional responsibilities (for example in providing housing and social care to homeless people), the cost of additional staff to meet need and cover absence due to sickness or self-isolation, additional costs of routine practice (e.g. increase cost of PPE), and the increased number of vulnerable adults requiring a social care package on discharge from hospital.

### Change in levels of presenting need

During the pandemic, local authorities have reported a complex and changing pattern of presenting need. This pattern seems to be shaped by both changes in actual need and the lack of opportunities to identify and respond to need during lockdown. This has resulted in a reported increase in unmet need among adult social services, and a decrease in referrals to children's services during lockdown.

A survey by ADASS found that most Directors of Adult Social Care<sup>3</sup> reported increases in those presenting with a need for social care as a result of Covid-19 related changes. Just under half reported an increase in unmet need; almost a quarter said that unmet need had increased by between 1% and 5% and around the same proportion reported an increase of 6% or higher. A substantial part of this

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2020). *Covid-19 and English council funding: how are budgets being hit in 2020-21?* <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R-174-COVID-19%20and%20English-council-funding-how-are-budgets-being-hit-in-2020%E2%80%9321.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2020). *Covid-19 and English council funding: how are budgets being hit in 2020-21?* <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R-174-COVID-19%20and%20English-council-funding-how-are-budgets-being-hit-in-2020%E2%80%9321.pdf> (second reference)

<sup>3</sup> Association for Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS). (2020). *ADASS Budget Survey 2020 – Covid-19 Response*. <https://www.adass.org.uk/adass-budget-survey-2020-part-one-covid-19-response>



increased need appears to be driven by closures in other support services. Over half reported an increase in need due to carer breakdown, sickness or unavailability due to Covid-19.

The ADASS survey found variations in demand between local authorities, however. Forty-two per cent reported increased need due to domestic violence and safeguarding, but 35% reported a decline. Given the evidence suggesting increased risk of domestic violence during the coronavirus lockdown (see later section), this is likely to indicate an unmet and unidentified need.

Evidence from Government research shows that referrals to Children's social care services during lockdown has *decreased*. Local authorities report 18% fewer referrals in April to June, compared to the average of the same weeks in the previous 3 years.<sup>4</sup> The majority of local authorities have seen a greater than 30% decrease in referrals. The total number of children who have started to be looked after by local authorities is around 34% lower than in previous years.

A study of 15 local authorities during the pandemic also found a reduction in referrals. They attributed this in part to the redeployment of health visitors, and highlighted a marked decrease in referrals from schools and the NHS during lockdown.<sup>5</sup> However, referrals tended to be more serious and complex, with an increase in referrals from the police which were often linked to domestic violence.

In children's services, many are expecting a substantial increase in demand as lockdown eases. In some cases, referrals had already started to rise again during May, perhaps as health visiting services resumed more widely and schools started to have more pupils in.<sup>5</sup> During school closures and increased isolation, there are fears that many children who are at risk of harm are not being identified. Reports suggest that there may be a swell of demand as children return to school and need is identified. It is not yet clear how far children's services will have the capacity to meet this demand if this proves to be the case.<sup>6</sup>

Services have been adapting to respond to the changing situation; some have actively encouraged early referrals from schools, and directed cases where a statutory response was not required to early help teams.<sup>7</sup> Concerns about the increased demand on children's services prompted a contentious temporary relaxation of the duties local authorities hold to vulnerable children, including allowing for

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey: Summary of returns Waves 1 to 4*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/909199/VCYP\\_Survey\\_publication.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/909199/VCYP_Survey_publication.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Baginsky, M. & Manthorpe, J. (2020). *Managing through COVID-19: the experiences of children's social care in 15 English local authorities*. [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/131392323/Baginsky\\_and\\_Manthorpe\\_2020\\_Managing\\_through\\_COVID\\_19\\_Report.pdf](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/131392323/Baginsky_and_Manthorpe_2020_Managing_through_COVID_19_Report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The Early Intervention Foundation. (2020). *Covid-19 and early intervention: Understanding the impact, preparing for recovery*. <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/covid-19-and-early-intervention-understanding-the-impact-preparing-for-recovery>

<sup>7</sup> Baginsky, M. & Manthorpe, J. (2020). *Managing through COVID-19: the experiences of children's social care in 15 English local authorities*. [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/131392323/Baginsky\\_and\\_Manthorpe\\_2020\\_Managing\\_through\\_COVID\\_19\\_Report.pdf](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/131392323/Baginsky_and_Manthorpe_2020_Managing_through_COVID_19_Report.pdf)

virtual contact between social workers and children in care, relaxing the need for criminal records checks for foster carers, and being able to deprive children in care homes of their liberty if they showed symptoms of coronavirus. The stated expectation is that these flexibilities would only be used in exceptional circumstances. The Government said that Ofsted would be monitoring use of these powers, but data is not currently publicly available.

### **Norfolk County Council, Safeguarding Children Partnership**

In response to a drop in referrals to children's services following school closures, Norfolk County Council launched a public campaign, *See Something, Hear Something, Say Something*. The first phase encouraged neighbours, family, service providers and volunteers to be more aware of children's safety and to encourage them to contact children's services with any concerns. A second phase was aimed at children and young people themselves, to encourage them to contact a dedicated phoneline if they were worried for their own safety or for friends. The third phase included postcards and text messages to families to tell them about the range of support available through the Just One Norfolk support line and website.

The campaign, which was co-produced with their Young People's Advisory Group, has successfully raised awareness across the county. Calls to the Children's Services front door increased by 42% after the first phase; and the Just One Norfolk website saw a 95% increase in users.

<https://www.norfolkscb.org/see-something-hear-something-say-something-campaign/>

<https://www.norfolkscb.org/phase-2-of-see-something-hear-something-say-something-new-phone-line-text-service-for-children-young-people/>

### **Reduced staff capacity**

The average number of days lost due to sickness more than tripled in the three months from March to June, compared with pre-Covid-19 levels (8%, compared with 2.4%). This includes those self-isolating and shielding.<sup>8</sup> A survey of local authorities conducted in August found that 4% of local authorities were reporting over 10% of social workers being unable to work due to coronavirus. This is a substantial reduction compared to the position in May, where 13% of local authorities reported 10% of staff unavailable.<sup>9</sup> It is likely, however, that as we enter the second period of lockdown, these numbers will go up again.

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<sup>8</sup> Skills for Care. (2020). *The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, 2020*. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/Size-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/Size-and-Structure-2020.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey: Summary of returns Waves 1 to 8*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918185/VCYP\\_Survey\\_publication\\_W8\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918185/VCYP_Survey_publication_W8_Final.pdf)

## New ways of working

The restrictions on face-to-face contact and reductions in capacity, have prompted a rapid increase in the use of technology to provide care and support virtually. While it is clear that not all forms of support can be moved online, many home visits have been replaced by telephone or video calls.

As yet, there is no reliable evaluation to show how effective these new ways are in comparison to standard care. Nevertheless, the rapid development of technological solutions, the investment in these technologies, and the possibility of funding challenges in the coming months and years mean that we are likely to see a sustained delivery of online services and support.

Anecdotally, we have had mixed reports from those providing support to children and young people. Feedback suggests that it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to build new relationships with young people, or to engage with those who are reluctant. A Rapid Review of the evidence around virtual contact between social workers and those they support found that it is often more difficult to pick up on non-verbal cues, to have communication about emotional issues, and to build rapport.<sup>10</sup> Those involved in supporting families have reported difficulties with families being unable to participate due to a lack of internet connection or mobile data. Participants get cut off or are unable to participate fully because they cannot see or hear all parties properly.<sup>11</sup> It may also be difficult for children to find adequate privacy at home to have conversations with social workers effectively and safely. There have also been benefits reported around engaging young people, using creative games and methods and having increased flexibility in contact times.<sup>7,8</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> What Works for Children's Social Care. (2020). *Rapid Review Contact*. [https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC\\_Rapid\\_Review\\_Contact\\_April\\_2020.pdf](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_Rapid_Review_Contact_April_2020.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Community Care. (2020). *From 'harsh' virtual hearings to digital treasure hunts: remote social work under Covid-19*. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/06/12/childrens-services-coronavirus-technology-virtual-hearings-digital-treasure-hunts/>

## LOSS OF CAPACITY ACROSS CHARITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Leaders in the charity sector warn that many organisations risk collapse as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Over two-thirds of voluntary and community sector organisations have reported a loss of income during the initial months of the pandemic, despite increased demand for their service.<sup>12</sup>

### Loss of income

Regular tracking surveys report the lowest level of charitable giving in a decade, with only fifty-four per cent of respondents saying they had given to charity in the three months to August.<sup>13</sup> Over a quarter said that they had given less in the last twelve months than in previous years. This reflects reduced opportunities, including charity shop closures, fewer street collections and cancellation of fundraising events. One prediction suggests a shortfall in charity income of over £12 billion for 2020.<sup>14</sup>

Celebrations such as Christmas and Eid tend to be significant fundraising periods for the charity sector; people tend to give more in November and December than at any other time of year.<sup>15</sup> The the second lockdown and cancellation of fundraising and social events in this period will likely cause even more disruption to the income that charities desperately need.

### Impact on charity sector jobs and services

In a survey of 455 charities, conducted in August, nineteen percent had already made redundancies and a further twenty-three per cent planning to make further cutbacks after the furlough scheme came to an end. This could cost the charity sector 60,000 jobs.<sup>16</sup> Since that survey, the chancellor has announced changes to the scheme's successor, the Job Support Scheme, which offers greater assistance to employers and which may change the situation for some of these charities. The survey also found that one in ten charities say they expect to cease operating altogether before the start of December. Another survey found that eighty-eight per cent of youth charities expect to reduce their services and seventeen per cent said they may have to close permanently.<sup>17</sup>

As the pandemic continues, and in the face of further lockdowns, charities are concerned that demand for their services may exceed their ability to deliver as income losses force organisations to make cuts

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<sup>12</sup> NICVAS. (2020) *Significant loss of income felt across the voluntary and community sector amid Covid-19 pandemic* <https://www.nicva.org/article/significant-loss-of-income-felt-across-the-voluntary-and-community-sector-amid-covid-19>

<sup>13</sup> nfp Synergy. (2020). *Percentage giving at lowest level since nfpSynergy started polling.* <https://nfpsynergy.net/blog/percentage-general-public-giving-to-charity-record-low>

<sup>14</sup> European Fundraising Association. (2020). *Coronavirus impact sees UK charities set for £12.4bn income shortfall.* <https://efa-net.eu/news/coronavirus-impact-sees-uk-charities-set-for-12-4bn-income-shortfall>

<sup>15</sup> Charities Aid Foundation. (2020). *UK Giving and covid-19* <https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-uk-giving-2020-covid-19.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Pro Bono Economics (2020). *Covid Charity Tracker* <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/News/press-release-collapse-in-charity-provision-looms-at-moment-of-greatest-need>

<sup>17</sup> UK Youth. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on young people & the youth sector.* <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-External-Final-08.04.20.pdf>

to frontline support. Of the charities who are making cuts, fifty-nine per cent say that service delivery functions such as helplines, events and training have been impacted the most.<sup>18</sup>

In April, the UK government announced a £750 million funding package of support for charities to help them continue to deliver frontline services<sup>19</sup>; £370 million of this was set aside to support small, local charities working with vulnerable people. Industry leaders have warned that this is not nearly enough to prevent charities around the UK from having to close.<sup>20</sup> Other funding streams, including local and regional grant opportunities, are available to charities and voluntary organisations across the UK.

As statutory services are stretched or faced with backlogs once restrictions are lifted again, voluntary sector support will become even more crucial. It is difficult to estimate how many children will miss out on support as a result of lost capacity among charities. Over half of voluntary organisations say that children and young people are one of their beneficiary groups; more than a third provide a service to beneficiaries.<sup>21</sup> In 2018, around nine in ten UK households said that they had used a voluntary organisation at some point, and three-quarters had used a service run by a voluntary organisation in the last year, including emotional support, counselling, advice, youth groups and care provision.

### **Charity sector response to the pandemic**

Despite many organisations having to reduce regular activities, some have reported introducing new services in response to the crisis, including food parcel and prescriptions delivery, mental health support, befriending and support services for older people and wellbeing programmes for families.

Charities are adapting where possible to continue to provide support in innovative ways, including a move to virtual support and information.<sup>22</sup> It may be that in the longer-term, these innovations will encourage access to charity support in new ways and even expand the capacity of some voluntary organisations to reach beneficiaries. However, these adaptations are likely to work better for some children than others (see later section on the Digital Divide). Over eight-one per cent of respondents in a youth sector survey said that unreliable or no access to IT equipment including phones or Wi-Fi, could pose a barrier to young people engaging in services digitally.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Institute of Fundraising. (2020). *Gloomy winter ahead for charity sector*. <https://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk/events-and-training/resources/gloomy-winter-ahead-for-charity-sector>

<sup>19</sup> HM Treasury. (2020). *Chancellor's statement on coronavirus* <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rishi-sunak-on-economic-support-for-the-charity-sector>

<sup>20</sup> Civil Society. (2020). *Chancellor unveils £750m coronavirus package for charities*. <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/chancellor-unveils-750m-coronavirus-package-for-charities.html#sthash.ETOsOXFI.dpuf>

<sup>21</sup> NCVO. (undated) *Who Benefits from the Voluntary Sector?* <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/impact/beneficiaries/>

<sup>22</sup> Civil Society (2020) *How charities are changing the way they deliver during Covid-19*. <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/voices/how-charities-are-changing-the-way-they-deliver-during-covid-19.html>

<sup>23</sup> UK Youth. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on young people & the youth sector*. <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-External-Final-08.04.20.pdf>



## CHILD NUTRITION

At the start of the lockdown we highlighted the risks for the c. eleven per cent of children who had experienced food insecurity before the pandemic. Over the six months following the lockdown, as more families face financial difficulties as a result of prolonged furlough or job losses, it is becoming more evident that many new families are facing food insecurity. Families who were just about managing before the pandemic are no longer able to pay for food as incomes reduced.<sup>24</sup>

The proportion of households with a child where members have had to skip meals due to financial hardship went up to 33% in June, dropping again slightly in July.<sup>25</sup> In July, eighteen per cent of households with a child accessed food through food banks or other charities and thirty-two per cent were concerned about being able to afford food in the next month. Reasons for accessing food banks (across all households) included delays with benefits payments, job loss, someone in the household being on furlough, shielding or self-isolating due to Covid-19, and difficulties travelling to get food.

### Free school meal provision

Across the UK, during the period of school partial closures, Governments introduced schemes to ensure that pupils who were eligible for free school meals continued to receive support. Different approaches were taken across the four jurisdictions. In England, the scheme faced a number of problems, including delays in getting them sent out to schools, problems with the online system and families without internet access being unable to access the system at all.<sup>26</sup> The scheme was extended throughout the summer holidays, but campaigns to extend it to the October half-term were unsuccessful, prompting many councils to step in and fund meals over the holidays themselves.<sup>27</sup> The Government has since agreed to a £400 million package that will support low income families, including extending the food and activities programme in school holidays until Christmas 2021.<sup>28</sup>

Schemes implemented in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, adopted a range of methods, including bank transfers, which Human Rights Watch argues provides more dignity to families. Some

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<sup>24</sup> Bright Harbour. (2020). *The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19*.  
[https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020\\_-report-v5.pdf](https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020_-report-v5.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Ipsos Mori. (2020). *Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1-4*.  
<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/covid-19-wave-1-4-report-final-mc.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2020). *UK: Children in England Going Hungry with Schools Shut*.  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/27/uk-children-england-going-hungry-schools-shut>

<sup>27</sup> The Guardian. (2020). *Councils back Rashford and pledge to provide school meals over holidays*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/23/councils-across-england-pledge-to-provide-free-school-meals-over-holidays>

<sup>28</sup> BBC. (2020). *Marcus Rashford Welcomes School Holiday Support Climbdown*.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54841316>

local authorities also used vouchers or food deliveries. In Wales and Scotland, schemes have been subsequently extended to cover school holidays up until Easter 2021.

### **Food availability and prices**

A range of factors have left families with reduced access to food, including the loss of social food sharing with family and friends, reduced access to 'budget' shops or supermarkets due to transport restrictions, and relying on others to shop for them and being less able to control the spend.<sup>29</sup> The In July, the National Food Strategy report found that despite problems with supply, particularly early on in lockdown, the price of individual foods did not generally rise. However, in response to stockpiling, supermarkets were offering far fewer promotional offers which made the typical food costs for families higher.<sup>30</sup>

### **Infant nutrition**

It remains too early to see what impact the pandemic has had on breastfeeding rates among new mums. However, findings from one study show that about a third of women who wanted to breastfeed said they did not get enough support for feeding when in hospital, perhaps due to reduced capacity among staff or shorter hospital stays after birth. The same survey also found a mixed picture of impact on breastfeeding practices, with 30% *increasing* frequency, 17% *increasing* duration, 10% *decreasing* frequency and 15% *decreasing* duration as a result of lockdown.<sup>31</sup>

### **Impact of food insecurity**

Food insecurity results in both malnutrition and obesity, as people turn to cheaper, less nutritious food. Being unable to afford food also has other wellbeing impacts, including the loss of social benefits to eating as a family or with others, loss of 'special occasions' involving food, and the stress of managing budgets or being unable to meet the family's nutritional needs.<sup>29</sup>

As the pandemic continues, it is expected that the problem of food insecurity will get worse for many. Some families who have relied on savings or taken on debt to get them through a short-term crisis will struggle as the pandemic becomes more protracted. Utility bills will rise for many in the winter months, adding additional financial burdens, and more people will face job losses due to the end of furlough and the continued closures in some sectors.

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<sup>29</sup> Bright Harbour. (2020). *The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19*.

[https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020\\_-report-v5.pdf](https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020_-report-v5.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> National Food Strategy. (2020). *National Food Strategy: Part One*. <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NFS-Part-One-SP-CP.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Vazquez-Vazquez, A., et al., (2020). *The impact of the covid-19 lockdown on the experiences and feeding practices of new mothers in the UK: Preliminary data from the COVID-19 New Mum Study*. [Pre-print] <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.06.17.20133868v1.full.pdf>

## ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

### Children's access to hospital care

While the pandemic has focused concerns on NHS capacity to handle high numbers of Covid cases, the numbers of children presenting at hospitals dropped considerably during lockdown. One analysis of child attendance at emergency departments in Manchester hospitals showed a drop of nearly a third in March 2020, compared with March 2019.<sup>32</sup> Another study found a 90% decrease in attendance at one paediatric emergency department compared to the same period a year earlier.<sup>33</sup>

This drop may be due to fewer children falling ill or getting injured during lockdown. There were also considerable changes made in the organisation of paediatric services, including more direct referrals to specialists and other primary care referral services.<sup>34</sup> However, there are also concerns that children and parents who would normally seek medical help are not doing so due to parental concerns about drawing on NHS resources or exposure to Covid-19.

It is not yet clear whether this reduction in access to emergency care is resulting in poorer outcomes for children. To assess the impact of delayed presentation among children, a survey of paediatricians asked whether they had seen children who, in their opinion, had presented later than they normally have done. Around a third said that they had, and 8% said they had seen 3 or more presentations that they felt were delayed. Across the 2,433 participating paediatricians, nine child deaths were identified where they believed delayed presentation may have contributed.<sup>35</sup>

However, studies of outcomes from emergency presentations do not show a significant increase in poor outcomes, despite finding that children who are presenting are generally sicker than in earlier years.<sup>36</sup> The aforementioned study that found a 90% drop in attendance also found no increase in length of stay on the ward or admission to paediatric intensive care, and no deaths occurred. They argue that this may mean that the reduced presentation is generally appropriate to children's needs.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Isba, R. et al. (2020). Where have all the children gone? Decreases in paediatric emergency department attendances at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. *Arch Dis Child*. Epub ahead of print. <https://adc.bmj.com/content/archdischild/early/2020/05/19/archdischild-2020-319385.full.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Rose, K. et al. (2020). *Paediatric attendances and acuity in the Emergency Department during the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/medrxiv/early/2020/08/11/2020.08.05.20168666.full.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Adamson, J. et al. (2020). Not just little adults: preparing a children's emergency department for COVID-19. *Emerg Med J*. 37(8). <https://emj.bmj.com/content/emj/37/8/460.full.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Lynn, r., et al. (2020). Delayed access to care and late presentations in children during the COVID-19 pandemic: a snapshot survey of 4075 paediatricians in the UK and Ireland. *Arch Dis Child*. <https://bmj.altmetric.com/details/84736721>

<sup>36</sup> Roland, D. et al. (2020). Children's emergency presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*. 4(8) [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30206-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30206-6/fulltext)

<sup>37</sup> Rose, K. et al. (2020). *Paediatric attendances and acuity in the Emergency Department during the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/medrxiv/early/2020/08/11/2020.08.05.20168666.full.pdf>

## Capacity of children's health services

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health reports that up to 10% of paediatric staff were not available to work during lockdown as a result of shielding, and a further 13% had to change their way of working, e.g. to work remotely. In addition, around a fifth of paediatric staff were redeployed to adult services. Many community trainees and doctors were redeployed to acute settings, meaning that capacity in community services was reduced.<sup>38</sup>

Some paediatric inpatient space was lost to adult services, and, although this was relatively small (1-6%) there have reportedly been difficulties in getting space back. By the end of summer, most redeployed and shielding staff had returned. However, as COVID-19 cases increase again, it looks possible that these challenges to capacity will return.

## Vaccination rates

There is evidence to suggest that some parents were delaying or cancelling vaccinations for their children at the start of the pandemic.<sup>39</sup> Data on vaccination counts showed a decrease of around 2-3% in vaccinations for children at 6 months and for MMR vaccines at 12-18 months in the early weeks of lockdown. However, the numbers have since increased and returned to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>40</sup>

### Isle of Wight - Drive through immunisation clinics

Covid-19 school closures on the Isle of Wight prevented the schools-based immunisation programme from being completed. In response, the school nursing service worked with the council, NHS Trust and public health to create a 'Drive-through' immunisation clinic. Parents were contacted and given an appointment time to come to 'pods' based in local council car parks. The service was able to deliver in the open air, providing greater confidence to families, and it was well received by those who used it.

The drive-through model was subsequently extended to offer the HPV vaccination. Similar models have been adopted by other services and local authorities.

<https://saphna.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Newsletter-July-2020-.pdf>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-good-council-practice>

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<sup>38</sup> RCPCH. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on child health services – report*. <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/impact-covid-19-child-health-services-report#main-findings>

<sup>39</sup> Saxena, S. (2020). Routine vaccination during covid-19 pandemic response. *British Medical Journal*. 369:m2392. <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m2392.short>

<sup>40</sup> Public Health England. (2020). *Impact of physical distancing measures due to COVID-19 pandemic in England on childhood vaccination counts*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/917224/hpr1620\\_chldhd-VC.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/917224/hpr1620_chldhd-VC.pdf)



## CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND BEREAVEMENT

Among the most widely reported concerns for children as a result of the pandemic is the impact on mental health and wellbeing, both short- and long-term. A number of factors known to be associated with mental health outcomes are affecting far more children and young people as a result of the lockdown, including social isolation, withdrawal of peer support, lack of routine and structure, uncertainty about the future, financial concerns and anxiety about their own health or that of their families.<sup>41</sup> Some young people will also face the long-term mental health impacts of domestic violence, abuse and neglect which is likely to have increased during lockdown.

Despite this, the picture on young people's mental health, particularly among adolescents, seems to be more complex and varied than initial concerns suggested. Many surveys have been conducted throughout the pandemic so far in the UK and have reached different conclusions as to the overall effect on young people's wellbeing, and the Department for Education's *State of the Nation, 2020* report found no difference in children's reported happiness compared with the same period in recent years.<sup>42</sup> A number of things may have contributed to these differences.

First, surveys that stress the negative impact tend to highlight the proportion of young people who report negative impacts on their mental health (usually a substantial minority).<sup>43</sup> Some also give figures for those who reported an improvement in their mental health, though not all.<sup>44</sup> Studies that report a mean change in wellbeing tend to find no change or even an overall improvement in wellbeing, perhaps as positive and negative impacts balance out scores overall.<sup>45</sup> It is clear that the pandemic has impacted on young people very differently as they each experience a different set of circumstances.

Second, surveys have been conducted at different time points in the pandemic. The Co-Space study of over 10,000 parents and 1,000 adolescents one month into lockdown, found that while parents reported emotional, behavioural and attentional difficulties in primary school aged children, they

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<sup>41</sup> Crawley, E., et al. (2020). Wider collateral damage to children in the UK because of the social distancing measures designed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in adults. *BMJ Paediatr. Open.* 2020; 4(1). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7223269/>

<sup>42</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *State of the Nation 2020: Children and young people's wellbeing*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/925329/State\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_2020\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_s\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925329/State_of_the_nation_2020_children_and_young_people_s_wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> See YoungMinds, Barnardo's, Girlguiding and You-COPE surveys.

<sup>44</sup> Barnardo's, for example, report over a third experienced increased worry and stress, but do not give figures for those who experienced a decrease in worry and stress. Similarly, Girlguiding report 24% of girls aged 11-14 and 51% of girls aged 15-18 say coronavirus has negatively impacted their mental health, but no figure is given for girls reporting a positive impact. Girlguiding. (2020). *Early findings on the impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women*. <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girlguiding-covid19-research-briefing.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> See Widnall et al and Co-Space studies

actually reported a reduction in difficulties among secondary school pupils, and adolescents themselves reported no differences.<sup>46</sup> A study conducted in South West England in April-May found a decrease in anxiety and an increase in wellbeing, particularly among those who had been experiencing poor wellbeing prior to the pandemic, perhaps reflecting the removal of previous stressors associated with school or relationships.<sup>47</sup> The Department for Education's *State of the nation 2020: children and young people's wellbeing* report<sup>48</sup>, does suggest that there has been slight fluctuation in life satisfaction among 16-19 year olds during the pandemic, but doesn't find any significant difference between surveys in April and in September.

Two surveys by YoungMinds, in March and June, suggest that mental health and wellbeing has been more negatively impacted as the pandemic has continued. In June, forty-one per cent said that the pandemic had made their mental health much worse, compared to thirty-two per cent in March.<sup>49</sup> Overall, more than eighty per cent felt the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health, through increased loneliness and anxiety and loss of motivation. A minority (eleven per cent in June), however, felt that there had been improvements in their mental health, particularly associated with reduced academic pressure and reduced bullying.

Recently published results of two surveys by the Children's Commissioner for England find the opposite, however, with the proportion of those who feel stressed some of the time falling between March and June, though the proportion saying they felt stressed most or every day remained stable.<sup>50</sup>

The long-term impacts on young people's mental health will not be known for some time, and the impact on individual young people will likely change further over the coming months. The apparent improvement in many young people's wellbeing shortly after lockdown is also no cause for celebration. If it does reflect a removal of stressors that were contributing to poor mental health prior to the pandemic, it is likely that these stressors will return with the return to school and other aspects of 'normal' life.

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<sup>46</sup> Co-Space study. (2020). *Report 04: Changes in children and young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties through lockdown*. <https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CoSPACE-Report-4-June-2020.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Widnall, E., et al. (2020). *Young People's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Young-Peoples-Mental-Health-during-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-Report.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *State of the Nation 2020: Children and young people's wellbeing*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/925329/State\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_2020\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_s\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925329/State_of_the_nation_2020_children_and_young_people_s_wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Young Minds. (2020). *Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs. Survey 2: Summer 2020*. <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3904/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Children's Commissioner for England. (2020). *Stress among children in England during the coronavirus lockdown*. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/cco-stress-among-children-in-england-during-the-coronavirus-lockdown.pdf>

## Access to mental health services

While young people have been more susceptible to mental health difficulties during lockdown, the support available to help children who are struggling has reduced. Many outpatient clinics and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services have closed or moved to virtual provision.<sup>51</sup> The Young Minds survey in June found that nearly a third of young people who were accessing mental health support before lockdown were no longer accessing it despite feeling that they still needed that support.<sup>52</sup>

## Childhood bereavement and Covid-19

There is no clear figure on the number of children who have lost a parent or other close relative to Covid-19. As of 23<sup>rd</sup> September, there had been 41,862 deaths within 28 days after a positive test for Coronavirus across the UK.<sup>53</sup> Although the majority of deaths occurred among older adults, in England and Wales alone over 5,000 deaths were of adults aged 45 to 64, some of whom may have been parents to children under 18.<sup>54</sup> Children may also be severely affected by the loss of a grandparent or other close family member. The number of deaths following a coronavirus infection has increased again since then as we entered a second wave. It is therefore likely that thousands of children will have been bereaved as a result of this pandemic.

Bereavement can have a severe effect on children's mental health. During the pandemic, restrictions on hospital visits are likely to mean that many children were not with their parent when they died, or were unable to see them in the last days of their life.<sup>55</sup> As a result, bereavement charities say they expect to see an increase in the number of complex grief reactions over the coming months.<sup>56</sup> Children are also likely to have had reduced access to support following their bereavement. The effects of childhood bereavement can be devastating to children's mental health and educational achievement and can last well into adulthood.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Crawley, E., et al. (2020). Wider collateral damage to children in the UK because of the social distancing measures designed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in adults. *BMJ Paediatr. Open.* 2020; 4(1). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7223269/>

<sup>52</sup> Young Minds. (2020). *Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs. Survey 2: Summer 2020.* <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3904/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> These are the most widely reported government figures on deaths from Covid-19, but the methods for calculating these differ across the UK jurisdictions and have been critiqued.

<sup>54</sup> ONS. (2020). *Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional: week ending 11 September 2020.* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregisteredweeklyinenglandandwalesprovisional/weekending11september2020#deaths-registered-by-age-group>

<sup>55</sup> Marshall, S., et al. (2020). Children, dying parents and COVID-19. *British Journal of Child Health.* <https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/full/10.12968/chhe.2020.1.4.161>

<sup>56</sup> Childhood Bereavement Network. (2020). *Open letter to government on funding for bereavement services responding to Covid-19.* <https://childhoodbereavementnetwork.wordpress.com/>

<sup>57</sup> Ellis, J. et al. (2013). The long-term impact of early parental death: lessons from a narrative study. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.* 106(2). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3569022/#:~:text=Studies%20have%20revealed%20many%20negative,14%20and%20lower%20employment%20rates.>

## DOMESTIC ABUSE & NEGLECT

With the enforcement of lockdown, a spike in reports from across the globe indicated that domestic abuse cases were on the rise. The conditions created by the pandemic such as economic pressure on families, prolonged isolation, unemployment, and limited contact with social support systems, foster an environment for abuse to thrive. In addition to physical violence, other forms of abuse include emotional and psychological, sexual, and economic abuse as well as coercive and controlling behaviour. Although the lockdown rules have had an impact on all children and young people, those living in households where domestic violence is prevalent, have been put at particular risk.<sup>58</sup>

### Increased domestic abuse and interpersonal violence during the Covid-19 pandemic

Neglect, domestic abuse and child abuse often go unreported and are frequently hidden. Subsequently, accurate figures of the prevalence of abuse are unavailable. Furthermore, in contrast to rising reports of domestic violence, many child welfare organisations have noted a drop in the number reports of child abuse or neglect.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, this decrease is likely to be a result of fewer opportunities for detection as opposed to an actual decrease in incidence. Partial school closures, increased isolation and reduced capacity in social services have likely led to fewer opportunities for agencies to identify new abuse and neglect cases as early warning signs would go undetected.

As highlighted in our previous review, an estimated 160,000 children are living in households where domestic abuse is taking place,<sup>60</sup> and 62% of children who witness abuse of a parent are also directly harmed by domestic abuse.<sup>61</sup> Post Covid-19 lockdown, statutory and voluntary agencies across the UK highlighted the increased risks of domestic abuse. In Scotland, the number of charges for domestic abuse crimes rose to its highest level in four years.<sup>62</sup> Refuge reported a 25% increase in calls and online requests since the lockdown began in March 2020.<sup>63</sup> One study found that most calls were driven by third-party reports, such as neighbours, rather than victims themselves.<sup>64</sup> It is not clear whether this is due to increased awareness among neighbours who are at home more or whether this

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<sup>58</sup> Evans, M., et al, (2020). The new England Journal of Medicine. *A Pandemic within a Pandemic — Intimate Partner Violence during Covid-19* <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2024046>

<sup>59</sup> Campbell. (2020). *An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152912/>

<sup>60</sup> Women's Aid. (undated). *Children: The hidden victims of domestic abuse*. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/hiddenvictims/> accessed: 07/11/20.

<sup>61</sup> SafeLives. (2015). *Getting it Right First Time*. <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Getting%20it%20right%20first%20time%20-%20complete%20report.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> BBC news. (2020). *Domestic abuse charges reach four-year high*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-54071027>

<sup>63</sup> Refuge. (2020). *Press release: 25% increase in calls to National Domestic Abuse Helpline since lockdown measures began*. <https://www.refuge.org.uk/25-increase-in-calls-to-national-domestic-abuse-helpline-since-lockdown-measures-began/>

<sup>64</sup> Centre for Economic Performance. (2020). *Domestic abuse in times of quarantine*. <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cp578.pdf>



represents under-reporting among victims themselves, as they may be unable to find safe spaces at home to report the abuse.

A joint investigation by Panorama and Women's Aid found that police received one domestic violence call every 30 seconds in the first seven weeks of lockdown.<sup>65</sup> They also found that two-thirds of domestic abuse victims were subjected to more violence from their partners during lockdown and three quarters of women said that lockdown made it more difficult to escape their abusive partners.

### **Government & Local Authority response**

The UN secretary General, António Guterres, has urged all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19. Service providers such as shelters, food banks, legal aid offices, childcare centres are overwhelmed and understaffed.<sup>66</sup> In the UK, more than a third of specialist services have reported an increase in requests for their support.

The UK government published a list of hotlines and apps for victims but only one was specifically tailored for the Covid-19 crisis. In April, the Home Secretary announced £2m in funding to help bolster helplines and web-based services and to ensure means by which victims could seek help remained available. In May, the UK government pledged £76 million to support all vulnerable people during lockdown. This includes £25 million to help victims access domestic violence and sexual abuse support services, £10 million for safe accommodation and £3.8 million for community-based domestic abuse services.<sup>67</sup>

In **London**, the mayor has established a £1.5 million emergency response fund to provide victims of domestic abuse with safe accommodation and support. Some local authorities have provided funding to organisations like Refuge so that they are better equipped to respond.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-invests-in-safe-accommodation-for-victims>

**Devon County Council** and **Cornwall Council** have partnered with other agencies and launched an online campaign that highlights the broad spectrum of actions that count as domestic abuse. It also seeks to reach victims and reassure them that a range of support remains available. The service is anonymous, confidential and free to use.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-good-council-practice>

<sup>65</sup> Guardian. (2020). *Domestic abuse surged in lockdown, Panorama investigation finds*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/17/domestic-abuse-surged-in-lockdown-panorama-investigation-finds-coronavirus>

<sup>66</sup> United Nations. (2020). *Make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of national response plans for COVID-19*. <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/make-prevention-and-redress-violence-against-women-key-part>

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2020). *£22 million emergency coronavirus funding for more than 540 sexual violence and domestic abuse charities*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/22-million-emergency-coronavirus-funding-for-more-than-540-sexual-violence-and-domestic-abuse-charities>

## HOUSING AND ACCESS TO OUTDOOR/GREEN SPACES

### Families at risk of homelessness

The coronavirus pandemic has placed many households in financial difficulties and made it harder for some to pay rent. In August, research by Shelter and YouGov found that around 322,000 adult private renters (c. 4%) have fallen behind in rent payments since the start of the pandemic.<sup>68</sup>

In March 2020, the UK Government put in place measures to support families around housing. In England, notices of eviction given between 26 March and 28 August had to give tenants a minimum of three months' notice. This has subsequently been amended so that, with some exceptions, the notice period is now a minimum of six months. This is currently in place until 31 March 2021. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, similar regulations to protect tenancies have been put in place until 31 March. Mortgage lenders have also been issued guidance stating that repossessions should not take place before 31 October 2020, and recommending an extension of mortgage holidays.<sup>69</sup>

Concerns have been raised about those households who have been served an eviction notice in the period from March to August and who could be evicted before the end of 2020. Although it is not yet clear how many households are affected by this, one organisation makes a rough estimate of around 55,000 households.<sup>70</sup> There are also concerns that once these measures end, there could be a surge in evictions and homelessness.

Repossession actions in courts were suspended in March for England and Wales but restarted from 21 September. Guidance to bailiffs is limiting evictions in places where local lockdowns are in force, and are expected to prevent evictions over the Christmas period.<sup>71</sup> As yet, there has been no extension to the ban on evictions despite a second lockdown.

The Government increased Local Housing Allowance rates for housing benefits so that they cover the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of rents in each local area. This change has been welcomed as an essential and significant source of support for people in receipt of benefits. However, the impact for families is also limited by the continuing overall benefits cap and the national LHA caps.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Shelter. (2020). *Press release: Landlords, letting agents and charities urge the government to help renters clear Coronavirus (COVID-19) rent debts and stay in their homes.* [https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/articles/landlords\\_letting\\_agents\\_and\\_charities\\_urge\\_the\\_government\\_to\\_help\\_renters\\_clear\\_covid-19\\_rent\\_debts\\_and\\_stay\\_in\\_their\\_homes](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/landlords_letting_agents_and_charities_urge_the_government_to_help_renters_clear_covid-19_rent_debts_and_stay_in_their_homes)

<sup>69</sup> House of Commons Library. (2020). *Coronavirus: A ban on evictions and help for rough sleepers.* <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8867/>

<sup>70</sup> Generation Rent. (2020). *55,000 households left with no protection.* [https://www.generationrent.org/55\\_000\\_households\\_left\\_with\\_no\\_protection](https://www.generationrent.org/55_000_households_left_with_no_protection)

<sup>71</sup> House of Commons Library. (2020). *Coronavirus: A ban on evictions and help for rough sleepers.* <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8867/>

<sup>72</sup> Shelter. (2020). *New LHA rates: what do they mean?* <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2020/03/new-lha-rates-what-do-they-mean/>

## **Rough sleepers**

The Government made £3.2 million in emergency funding available to local authorities in England to support rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless people. By May, around 15,000 people had been provided with emergency accommodation. Subsequently, 274 local authorities have been allocated funding for short-term interventions to try and reduce returns to rough sleeping once the emergency accommodation has ended as part of a rough sleeping taskforce aiming to reduce rough sleeping beyond the pandemic.<sup>73</sup>

## **Housing quality**

Analysis of the most recent available Housing Survey data finds that 3,660 children are living in homes which consist of only two rooms. A further 1.6 million are living in overcrowded homes.<sup>74</sup> These families are likely to have experienced an extremely difficult lockdown, confined to overcrowded conditions. Small homes also make it impossible to isolate one member of the household if they are infected with coronavirus, increasing the likelihood that it will be spread to family members.

Thirty-one per cent of adults in Britain report a health problem because of the condition of, or lack of space in, their home during lockdown. Nearly one in five reported a health problem due to lack of space, and one in four arising from the condition of their home.<sup>74</sup> More than one in ten reported feeling depressed because of a lack of space in their home and fourteen per cent reported feeling stressed. Those reporting a lack of space in their homes were nearly twice as likely to report arguing more with their partner, and more than six times more likely to say their relationship had broken down during lockdown.<sup>74</sup> While equivalent data was not found for children, it is likely that poor quality or overcrowded accommodation will also have affected children more during lockdown.

Children's ability to learn at home is also affected by small or overcrowded housing. In May/June 2020, a survey of parents found that eighteen per cent said their child was struggling to do home learning because of a lack of quiet space for studying.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> House of Commons Library. (2020). *Coronavirus: A ban on evictions and help for rough sleepers*. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8867/>

<sup>74</sup> National Housing Federation. (2020). *Housing issues during lockdown: health, space and overcrowding*. <https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/homes-at-the-heart/housing-issues-during-lockdown---health-space-and-overcrowding.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020*. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020#extent-children-are-struggling-and-why>

## Access to outdoor spaces

Data from May 2020 show that around one in eight households has no access to a private or shared private garden. In London, this rises to twenty-one per cent.<sup>76</sup> Access to private gardens is very unequal; in England, Black people are nearly four times as likely as White people to be without a private outdoor space. People in manual occupations, casual workers and unemployed people are more likely to be without an outdoor space than those in managerial or professional occupations. According to the People and Nature Survey for England, eighty-seven per cent of people who had access to a garden said it was important to them.<sup>77</sup>

Access to public green spaces is more evenly distributed; those least likely to have a private garden are most likely to live close to a public park. Unfortunately, during the first lockdown some public green spaces closed, and all public playgrounds closed from March, with many reopening in the summer.

Data from the People and Nature Survey for England suggest that during lockdown many people were accessing green spaces less than they had previously.<sup>77</sup> Over sixty per cent of those who had not spent time outside said this was due to Government restrictions. For children specifically, around eighty-two per cent spent time in green and natural spaces at least once a week in May 2020. Forty per cent of adults said their child was happier when they had spent time outside, and a minority wished their child could spend more time outside to support their physical (38%) or mental (29%) health.

## Active travel

The early weeks of lockdown saw a widespread and dramatic reduction in traffic, with levels at around a third of what was typical on an equivalent day throughout much of April.<sup>78</sup> At a local level, many areas have reclaimed street space to encourage walking, cycling and spending time outdoors where risks of infection are generally considered to be lower.<sup>79</sup> The Government has encouraged local authorities to build on the increase in cycling and walking to establish temporary and longer-term measures to encourage more active travel.<sup>80</sup> It is hoped that this will contribute to improving physical health and access to outdoor space by reducing the risk of traffic collisions and improving air quality.

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<sup>76</sup> ONS. (2020). One in eight British households has no garden. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14>

<sup>77</sup> Natural England. (2020). *The People and Nature Survey for England: Monthly interim indicators for May 2020 (Experimental statistics)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics#section-7>

<sup>78</sup> Department for Transport. (2020). *Transport use during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>79</sup> Stenning, A. and Russell, W. (2020). "Stop the traffic and make space for play during lockdown". *The Developer*. <https://www.thedeveloper.live/places/places/stop-the-traffic-and-make-uk-streets-into-public-spaces-during-lockdown>

<sup>80</sup> Prime Minister's Office. (2020). *PM kickstarts £2bn cycling and walking revolution*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-kickstarts-2bn-cycling-and-walking-revolution>



## ‘LOOKED AFTER’ CHILDREN

The most recent available figures show that there are around 78,150 children ‘looked after’ by local authorities in England<sup>81</sup>, 14,262 children in Scotland<sup>82</sup>, 6,845 children in Wales<sup>83</sup>, and 3,281 children in Northern Ireland.<sup>84</sup> Around 200,000 children are in kinship care, many of whom are outside of the formal system but with often similar needs to looked-after children.<sup>85</sup>

Children in care settings are amongst the most vulnerable due to past experiences and a lack of resources available to them. Local authorities have highlighted the impact of the first lockdown on vulnerable adolescents, including increased mental ill health issues and anxieties about schooling and education.<sup>86</sup>

The government’s controversial emergency Coronavirus Act relaxes some of the duties of Local Authorities towards children in care. These include removing the requirement for six monthly care reviews, allowing temporary placement with an unconnected person, rather than with a family member or friend who is not an approved foster carer, and removing the oversight of a local authority nominated officer from the process.<sup>87</sup> The changes have been criticised by the Children’s Commissioner for England, the British Association of Social Workers and others who argue that these changes were unnecessary and would harm children by weakening the statutory framework.<sup>88</sup>

Concerns have also been raised about the impact of the government’s decision to suspend complaints enquiries of care providers during the pandemic. This measure, intended to reduce the risk of infection and alleviate pressures on local authority services, could make it more difficult for children to access help to uphold their rights during this period.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Office of National Statistics. (2020). *Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019>

<sup>82</sup> Children and Families Directorate, Scottish Government. (2020). *Children’s social work statistics: 2018-2019 – republication*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2017-2018/>

<sup>83</sup> StatsWales, Welsh Government. (2020). *Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age*. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-gender-age>

<sup>84</sup> Department of Health. (2019). *Children’s social care statistics for Northern Ireland 2018/19*. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland-201819>

<sup>85</sup> Local Government Association. (2020). *A child-centred recovery*. <https://www.local.gov.uk/child-centred-recovery>

<sup>86</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey: Summary of returns Waves 1 to 8*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918185/VCYP\\_Survey\\_publication\\_W8\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918185/VCYP_Survey_publication_W8_Final.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> Community Care. (2020). *Ofsted to probe impact of Covid on social care in ungraded inspections*. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/08/18/ofsted-probe-impact-covid-social-care-ungraded-inspections/>

<sup>88</sup> Article 39. (2020). *Ministers use COVID-19 to destroy children’s safeguards*. <https://article39.org.uk/2020/04/23/ministers-use-covid-19-to-destroy-childrens-safeguards/>

## Impact on Children Looked After

There are concerns about the stability of placements for looked after children during the pandemic, including what will happen if foster or kinship carers become ill and are no longer able to look after them, or if residential homes are unable to sustain staffing numbers that are required to run them safely.<sup>89</sup> The additional pressures of isolation on foster families, and for young people themselves, may place higher demand on children's homes, as well as on social services.<sup>90</sup> There is little or no spare capacity in the existing system to allow them to cope with these additional pressures.

## Government and Local Authority response

In a survey of local authorities conducted in August 2020, four out of five reported a rise in weekly foster and residential placement costs due to coronavirus.<sup>91</sup> Some local authorities have had to increase the package of support to foster carers to cover additional costs of care provision during lockdown.

In England, the government announced £33 million for the Staying Put programme which seeks to support young people leaving care to continue living with their foster parents past age 18, and a further £9 million to provide personal adviser support for care leavers through to 25, to help them into employment, education and training.<sup>92</sup> In Scotland, £11.6 million of funding was available for programmes that have been set up to help raise the attainment of care experienced by young people. Funding was also used to provide looked after children with laptops to support their home learning during the pandemic.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Children's Commissioner for England. (2020). *Supporting children during the coronavirus outbreak*.

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/03/17/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<sup>90</sup> Children England. (2020). *Children's charities: the impacts of coronavirus: Children England briefing for government*. <https://www.childrenengland.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ff922edd-e51a-434b-9a59-895cbb12d146>

<sup>91</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey: Summary of returns Waves 1 to 8*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918185/VCYP\\_Survey\\_publication\\_W8\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918185/VCYP_Survey_publication_W8_Final.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Multi-million support for vulnerable children during COVID-19*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-million-support-for-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19>

<sup>93</sup> Scottish Government. (2020). *£11.6 million for looked after children*. <https://www.gov.scot/news/gbp-11-6-million-for-looked-after-children/>

## YOUNG CARERS

Recent research estimates that there are around 800,000 young carers in the UK<sup>94</sup>, not accounting for the many young people who are carers but have not been identified. Young carers typically face additional challenges and poorer health, wellbeing, education and employment outcomes.<sup>95</sup>

### The impact on young carers

The pandemic has had a significant impact on young carers' ability to access support, including through schools and local services. Young carers have also had less access to informal support as they have been restricted from seeing friends and family, particularly where a family member may be 'shielding' due to a health condition.

One study found that many young carers and young adult carers have experienced increased difficulties managing the day-to-day practicalities of supporting their families during lockdown, from not being allowed into shops to lack of access to transport.<sup>96</sup> Young carers report that assessments for the people they are caring for and for themselves had been cancelled with uncertainty about when these would be rearranged. Other forms of support have also been withdrawn, including individual arrangements families relied upon such as shopping delivery and childcare.<sup>96</sup> The report recommends that as schools start to reopen, teachers should be mindful of young carers and the support provided for their return to school.

A survey by Carers Trust highlights increased pressures and a sharp decline in the mental health and wellbeing of young carers across the UK.<sup>97</sup> Nearly seventy percent of young carers who responded said they were feeling less connected to others since Coronavirus. Fifty-eight percent said they were spending more time caring since the pandemic. More than one in ten said that the amount of time they spent caring had increased by more than 30 hours a week, and thirty percent reported that they now care for more people than they did before the pandemic. Over half of young carers responding said that their education was suffering and 40% said their mental health had worsened.

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<sup>94</sup> Care Talk. (2020). *Helping to find hidden young carers*. <https://www.caretalk.co.uk/helping-to-find-hidden-young-carers/>

<sup>95</sup> Brimblecombe, N., Knapp, M., King, D. et al. (2020). *The high cost of unpaid care by young people: health and economic impacts of providing unpaid care*. *BMC Public Health* <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09166-7>

<sup>96</sup> Blake-Holmes, K. (2020). *Understanding the needs of Young Carers in the context of the Covid-19 Global Pandemic*. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/96135/3015513/CRCF+-+COVID-19+-+What+about+the+young+carers+-+final+findings+v2.0.pdf/2ef21020-5f6d-8693-891c-f2a50c56898b?t=1598002212010>

<sup>97</sup> Carers Trust. (2020). *My future, my feelings, my family*. <https://carers.org/downloads/what-we-do-section/my-future-my-feelings-my-family.pdf>

## Government & Local Authorities

The government released guidance for young carers which was not published until July – by when lockdown restrictions had started to ease.<sup>98</sup> The document acknowledges the ‘invaluable service’ of unpaid carers but provided limited new support, instead including guidance on hygiene, making an emergency plan and asking for help, and signposted to contact helplines. The Coronavirus Act 2020 temporarily releases local authorities from some statutory duties, including young carer assessments and transitional assessments for those moving into adulthood.

Carers in Scotland can request personal protective equipment (PPE) to support their caring role. The Scottish Government published guidance for carers on when PPE is needed. £300,000 from the £350 million communities funding to support people and communities affected by COVID-19, is being given to support young carers across Scotland. Young Scot will receive £200,000 to provide online subscriptions and e-vouchers for young carers.<sup>99</sup>

In Wales, the guidance for carers also includes when and how to request PPE, planning for alternative care arrangements and access to food and medicine. Guidance specifically for young carers is limited as the document primarily advises young carers to access support from local authorities or national carers’ organisations. In Northern Ireland, a new ID card has been launched to support carers who will be able to show their ID in stores to get access to priority shopping hours and consequently reduce the time they have to spend shopping.<sup>100</sup>

### Cardiff City Council

Cardiff Council is supporting young carers by enabling them to reach out through WhatsApp group chats, and they can access daily updates and activities to engage with their relatives at home. These include live video chats, workshops and educational videos, as well as information about other support services.

Cardiff Newsroom. 2020. <https://www.cardiffnewsroom.co.uk/releases/c25/23740.html>

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<sup>98</sup> Department of Health and Social Care. (2020). *Young carers and young adult carers: providing care during coronavirus*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-carers-and-young-adult-carers-providing-care-during-coronavirus>

<sup>99</sup> Scottish Government. (2020). *£300,000 for young carers*. <https://www.gov.scot/news/gbp-300-000-for-young-carers/>

<sup>100</sup> Carers NI. 2020. *New ID Card for carers launched*. <https://www.carersuk.org/northernireland/news-ni/new-id-card-for-carers-launched>

## REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN

Refugee and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are among the most vulnerable in the UK. They are likely to have far fewer social and financial resources to draw on. Parents of refugee children in the UK are more likely to be in low wage or insecure jobs and are at high risk of losing income during the lockdown. There are over 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the care of local authorities in England<sup>101</sup>, some of whom will have no other support in the UK.

Refugee and asylum-seeking children are more likely to have experienced significant trauma such as conflict, family separation and dangerous journeys to the UK, increasing the risk of depression, PTSD and other anxiety disorders<sup>102,103</sup>. The likelihood of developing PTSD increases with the number of traumatic events experienced; thus, the effects of the pandemic are likely to exacerbate mental health difficulties.

Refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families are at risk of not receiving accurate public health information due to language barriers. They are often dependent on statutory and voluntary sector services for information, advocacy and support to access their basic rights. Many services were reduced or disrupted during the first lockdown and are likely to be further disrupted as we enter a second lockdown. Refugee and asylum-seeking children are more likely to have no, or limited, access to IT equipment or access to Wi-Fi which creates a further barrier as services move to more online provision (see section on Digital Divide, below).

### School closures

School closures will have had severe impacts for many refugee and asylum seeking children as much of their support network may exist through the school. Many have already missed out on parts of their education as a result of their past experiences and displacement. The cancellation of exams may particularly disadvantage those who were working to catch up from previous lower predicted grades resulting from learning English as a second language, or from gaps in schooling. Children

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<sup>101</sup> Department for Education. December 2019.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850306/Children\\_looked\\_after\\_in\\_England\\_2019\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> Fegert, J. et al, (2018). Psychosocial problems in traumatized refugee families: Overview of risks and some recommendations for support services. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 12 (5)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5765601/>

<sup>103</sup> Mental Health Foundation. (2020). *Mental Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/MHF%20Mental%20Health%20in%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.pdf>



with limited English will likely face additional language barriers through remote learning without face-to-face support.

The quality of housing provided to refugee and asylum seeking families is a concern during the pandemic. Refugee and asylum support organisations have expressed concerns that the accommodation provided is often overcrowded and lack adequate sanitation with children having no space to play or study, with meals often eaten in crowded and shared spaces. Some are even required to share rooms with strangers, making it extremely challenging to socially distance, putting them at risk to contract Covid-19.<sup>104</sup>

### **Disruption to asylum processes and support**

Children who are in the middle of asylum claims have faced disruption as the Home Office cancelled screening interviews and face to face substantive asylum interviews were paused in March. In July, some substantive asylum interviews were resumed through video calls, and, as of writing, there has been no information issued about whether these will stop again during the second lockdown.<sup>105</sup>

During the first lockdown, travel restrictions resulted in decreased numbers of asylum seekers in the UK.<sup>106</sup> Numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children have escalated again since then, however, particularly on the Kent coast. In August, Kent County Council announced that it was no longer able to provide support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children, having reached the limits of its social care and placements capacity.<sup>107</sup> In response, the Home Office has taken on the responsibility for arranging care for new UASCs in Kent, through its Kent Intake Unit. Guidance issued to social workers in the Kent Intake Unit has been criticised for prioritising age assessments over meeting the welfare needs of these young people. An unannounced inspection of the Kent Intake Unit found that unaccompanied minors were kept there for unreasonably long times and at least one child was mistakenly transferred to an adult detention facility. They stated that the way that welfare interviews were conducted with UASCs suggested that the Home Office “might have lost sight of the purpose of the interviews”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Parliament UK. 2020 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/562/56205.htm>

<sup>105</sup> Right to Remain. (2020). *Changes to the asylum and immigration process due to Covid-19*. <https://righttoremain.org.uk/changes-to-the-asylum-process-due-to-covid-19/>

<sup>106</sup> Eurostat. (2020). *Asylum Quarterly Report*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report#Main\\_trends\\_in\\_the\\_number\\_of\\_asylum\\_applicants](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report#Main_trends_in_the_number_of_asylum_applicants)

<sup>107</sup> Community Care. (2020). *Kent no longer able to accept unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into its care*. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/08/17/kent-longer-able-accept-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-care/>

<sup>108</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. (2020). *Detention Facilities: Tug Haven, Kent Intake Unit, Frontier House, Yarl's Wood and Lunar House*. [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Dover-detention-facilities-web-2020\\_v2.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Dover-detention-facilities-web-2020_v2.pdf)

In June, the Home Office announced a £31 million funding package for UASC. This includes a targeted 25 per cent increase in funding for local authorities across the UK looking after the highest numbers of UASC compared with their child population.<sup>109</sup>

### **Financial support for asylum seeking families**

At the start of the pandemic, individuals with an active asylum claim received £37.75 weekly for essentials, with basic accommodation provided. This was increased by £1.85 per week in June 2020<sup>110</sup>, and a further 3p per week in November 2020.<sup>111</sup> These small increases have been criticised as insulting by refugee organisations. In contrast, Universal Credit payments have been increased by £20 per week in recognition of the added costs associated with the pandemic. Free School Meal provision has been temporarily extended to children who have No Recourse to Public Funds, such as those refused asylum.<sup>112</sup>

Asylum seekers and refugees will largely look to other organisations for additional support. In London, Haringey Migrant Support Centre has created an emergency fund for homeless and destitute migrant visitors whom they previously supported with food-bank vouchers, food parcels and clothes<sup>113</sup>. Doctors of the World has translated the health service's advice on Covid-19 into 26 languages to be disseminated by those working with migrants and refugees.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Home Office. (2020). *Funding to Local Authorities: Financial Year 2020/21*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/891484/UA\\_SC\\_funding\\_instructions\\_to\\_local\\_authorities\\_2020\\_to\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891484/UA_SC_funding_instructions_to_local_authorities_2020_to_2021.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Freedom from Torture. (2020). *Asylum support: a 26p a day increase is no increase at all*. <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/news/asylum-support-a-26p-a-day-increase-is-no-increase-at-all>

<sup>111</sup> Refugee Council. (2020). *Refugee Council says 3p weekly support rate increase is an affront to people left to languish in the asylum system*. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/refugee-council-says-3p-weekly-support-rate-increase-is-an-affront-to-people-left-to-languish-in-the-asylum-system/>

<sup>112</sup> Deighton, Pierce, Glynn. (2020). *Free school meals extended to thousands more children*. <https://dpplaw.co.uk/free-school-meals-extended-to-thousands-more-children/>

<sup>113</sup> UNHCR. 2020. *Charity sector scrambles to shield refugees as UK COVID-19 crisis deepens*. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2020/3/5e7a4d774/charity-sector-scrambles-to-shield-refugees-as-uk-covid-19-crisis-deepens.html>

<sup>114</sup> UNHCR. (2020). *UNHCR UK FAQs on COVID-19 in relation to refugees and asylum seekers*. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/unhcr-uk-faqs-on-covid-19-in-relation-to-refugees-and-asylum-seekers.html>

## YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)

### Impact on employment

Young people have been disproportionately hit by the economic impacts of coronavirus. Around 22% of young people aged between 22 and 25 in their first full-time job are working in sectors such as hospitality and non-food retail which were effectively shut down during lockdown. This compares with 16% of employees overall.<sup>115</sup> By the end of July, 2020, around 970,000 jobs held by employees aged 16-24 had been furloughed, around 47% of eligible jobs. In comparison, the proportion of workers of all ages who were furloughed was 29%.<sup>115, 116</sup>

The latest figures for youth unemployment, covering the period May to July 2020, show an increase in unemployment among 16-24 year olds of 36,000 from the previous quarter. Unemployment rate for this age group is at 13.4%, up from 11.4% in the previous year. In the same period, the number of young people who were economically inactive increased by 110,000 to 2.7 million in total, with around three-quarters of these in full-time education. In August 2020, the number of young people (16-24) who claimed unemployment related benefits increased by 124% to 526,000, compared with 291,000 in March 2020, though a portion of this will relate to changes in eligibility for Universal Credit.<sup>116</sup>

Forecasts for future unemployment levels also suggest high levels of unemployment for several years to come, potentially leaving many young people out of good jobs for a crucial part of their early careers. This 'scarring' effect can lead to reduction in incomes across working lives. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts peak unemployment rates at between 9.7% and 13.2% by quarter 1 of 2021.<sup>117</sup> In Scotland, one forecast predicts youth unemployment at 140,000 in quarter 1 of 2021.<sup>118</sup>

The economic effects are likely to be unevenly distributed across the UK. In areas where there is a high proportion of jobs in sectors that have been largely shutdown – such as the North East and North West of England - more young people are likely to face unemployment.<sup>119</sup> As well as regional differences, there is likely to be a widening gap between low paid and more affluent workers as some sectors bare the brunt of lockdown measures.

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<sup>115</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2020). *COVID-19 and the career prospects of young people*. <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14914>

<sup>116</sup> House of Commons Library. (2020). *Youth Unemployment Statistics*. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05871/SN05871.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Office for Budget Responsibility. (2020). *Coronavirus analysis*. <https://obr.uk/coronavirus-analysis/>

<sup>118</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research. (2020). *The 100,000 challenge*. <https://www.ippr.org/blog/the-100-000-challenge>

<sup>119</sup> The Edge Foundation. (2020). *The Impact of Covid-19 on Education*. [https://www.edge.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19\\_report\\_final\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_report_final_-_web.pdf)

## Impact on education and future opportunities

As a result of partial school closures, it is widely expected that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils will widen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The Education Endowment Fund found estimates that the attainment gap will widen by between 11% and 75%, with a median estimate of 36%.<sup>120</sup> This is due to a combination of factors making it more difficult to learn at home, including lack of access to technology and resources and reduced learning support from parents who themselves have lower levels of educational attainment, compared to their peers. Children may also face other circumstances that make it harder for them to learn from home, for instance caring responsibilities or lack of suitable study space. The result is that many young people from low income families will have poorer educational outcomes, fewer opportunities on leaving school, and a higher risk of poverty, with implications for social mobility across the UK.<sup>121</sup>

Since the start of the pandemic, apprenticeship opportunities have dropped dramatically, with a 60% drop in the number of apprenticeships starting in May 2020 than in the same month the previous year. The number of apprenticeship starts for 16-18 year olds has dropped by 79%.<sup>122</sup> Around 60% of employers responding to one survey said they had cancelled some or all of their internships or work experience placements, and a third of graduate employers said they were expecting to hire fewer graduates following the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>123</sup>

### Camden, Virtual work experience placements –

The Camden STEAM programme developed a *Virtual Work Experience* programme in partnership with national education charity *Speakers for Schools*. They worked with nine local employers - including Google, Francis Crick Institute, Skanska, and Camden Council – to put together tailored, 5-day virtual placements for 250 school students in years 11, 12 and 13.

<https://news.camden.gov.uk/camden-teams-up-with-leading-tech-companies-to-deliver-online-work-experience-for-the-boroughs-students/>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-good-council-practice>

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<sup>120</sup> Education Endowment Fund. (2020). *Rapid evidence assessment: Impact of school closures on the attainment gap*. [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA - Impact of school closures on the attainment gap summary.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA_-_Impact_of_school_closures_on_the_attainment_gap_summary.pdf)

<sup>121</sup> The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, UK Parliament. (2020). *Rapid Response: COVID-19 and the disadvantage gap*. <https://post.parliament.uk/covid-19-and-the-disadvantage-gap/>

<sup>122</sup> Learning and Work Institute. (2020). *We need a long-term strategy to combat the decline in apprenticeships*. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/we-need-a-long-term-strategy-to-combat-the-decline-in-apprenticeships/>

<sup>123</sup> Sutton Trust. (2020). *COVID-19 and social mobility Impact Brief #5: Graduate recruitment and access to the workplace*. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Access-to-the-Workplace-Impact-Brief.pdf>

## DIGITAL DIVIDE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As anticipated early in lockdown, many services and activities that previously involved face-to-face interaction have now moved to take place virtually in many cases. Among those activities that have shifted to be more online are school lessons, healthcare, court hearings, social care support, employment, applying for benefits and maintaining communication with friends and family.

The digital divide has been suggested as one reason that over 300,000 people have been unable to continue with psychological therapies during lockdown.<sup>124</sup> Some activities where online access was already commonplace – such as shopping or banking – have become more difficult for digitally excluded families to access, with significant impacts on their education, health, finances and wellbeing. The result is that those families who do not have adequate internet access, or the skills and confidence to use the necessary technology, are becoming further disadvantaged.<sup>125</sup>

The closure of libraries and other public services where people were previously able to access the internet, as well as the restrictions on accessing public space during lockdown, has contributed to the exclusion of some groups.

The digital divide is not simply about those families who do not have access to the internet at all (c. 2% of children aged 5-15),<sup>126</sup> or even about those who are reliant on mobile data (c. 6% of children aged 5-15)<sup>126</sup> which limits the speed of connection and the time they can use it. Unequal access may also be the result of sharing computers or tablets, particularly when siblings and parents use the same devices. A lack of skills and confidence at using technology is also a barrier for some.<sup>127</sup>

Digital exclusion is associated with low income. Families in more disadvantaged socio-economic situations are less likely to have internet connection and less likely to have devices for connecting online.<sup>128</sup> The British Psychological Society has called for free, universal internet access.<sup>124</sup>

### Government response

Between May and July 2020, the Department for Education has allocated devices and 4G wireless routers to local authorities and academy trusts to distribute to eligible pupils who did not already have devices at home. Eligible pupils included care leavers, children with a social worker and

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<sup>124</sup> The British Psychological Society. 2020. *Poverty and Covid-19: Amplifying, isolation, stalling*. <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Briefing%20paper%20-%20poverty%20and%20Covid-19.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> The Lancet. 2020. *Covid-19 and the digital divide in the UK*. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500\(20\)30169-2/fulltext#:~:text=The%20advent%20of%20COVID%2D19,have%20shown%20a%20marked%20fall](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500(20)30169-2/fulltext#:~:text=The%20advent%20of%20COVID%2D19,have%20shown%20a%20marked%20fall).

<sup>126</sup> Data from OfCom Technology Tracker 2020. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/data/statistics/stats20#april20>

<sup>127</sup> Holmes, H. and Burgess, G. 2020. "Pay the wi-fi or feed the children": Coronavirus has intensified the UK's digital divide. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide>

<sup>128</sup> Digital Access for All. (2020). *The Numbers*. <https://digitalaccessforall.co.uk/the-numbers>



disadvantaged pupils in year 10.<sup>129</sup> The first devices were dispatched to local authorities and trusts in May. By mid-June, 114,536 had been dispatched, rising to over 200,000 by the end of June. However, no data was available on how many of these had reached eligible young people by the end of the academic year.<sup>130</sup>

For the academic year 2020-21, additional devices were allocated for disadvantaged children who could not attend school due to shielding, and to disadvantaged children in years 3 to 11 whose face-to-face education is disrupted.<sup>131</sup> These devices have to be ordered by schools or local authorities as needed, and no data is yet available on the numbers distributed through this scheme.

In Wales, local authorities and schools identified digitally excluded learners, and 10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences were funded by the Welsh government and distributed via local authorities by the end of June.<sup>132</sup>

### **Scottish Borders, Inspire Learning Programme**

In the Scottish Borders, a programme to provide all pupils in secondary schools with an iPad to support their learning was already underway before the coronavirus pandemic, and roll out to pupils in P6 and P7 was already planned for June 2020. Teachers also each have iPads, and a suite of apps and tools to support learning is provided. The £16 million programme is a partnership with CGI, XMA and Apple.

In May 2020, the council announced that over 96% of young people were accessing learning resources and experiences through this programme. Reports suggest that schools have benefitted from the confidence that pupils have access to the same tools, and teachers have the skills and knowledge to use these to support learning.

[https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20009/schools\\_and\\_learning/914/inspire\\_learning\\_fags](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20009/schools_and_learning/914/inspire_learning_fags)  
[https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/news/article/3864/uk\\_first\\_as\\_inspire\\_learning\\_ensures\\_borders\\_pupils\\_make\\_most\\_of\\_technology\\_to\\_learn\\_at\\_home](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/news/article/3864/uk_first_as_inspire_learning_ensures_borders_pupils_make_most_of_technology_to_learn_at_home)

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<sup>129</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers provided during coronavirus (COVID-19)*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-provided-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>130</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Devices and 4G wireless routers data*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896820/Devices\\_and\\_4G\\_wireless\\_routers\\_progress\\_data\\_010720.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896820/Devices_and_4G_wireless_routers_progress_data_010720.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> Department for Education. (2020). *Get laptops and tablets for children who cannot attend school due to coronavirus (COVID-19)*. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>132</sup> Welsh Government. (2020). *Device and connectivity update for digitally excluded learners during coronavirus (COVID-19)*. <https://gov.wales/device-and-connectivity-update-digittally-excluded-learners-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

# CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES & COMMUNITIES IS A UNICEF UK PROGRAMME THAT WORKS WITH COUNCILS TO PUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS INTO PRACTICE.

The programme aims to create cities and communities in the UK where all children – whether they are living in care, using a children's centre, or simply visiting their local library – have a meaningful say in, and truly benefit from, the local decisions, services and spaces that shape their lives.

**[UNICEF.ORG.UK/CFC](https://www.unicef.org.uk/CFC)**

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