

## Scottish Parliament – Call for Evidence: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights

### How have groups been affected by the virus?

Groups of people have been affected by the virus in various ways including, but not limited to:

- their susceptibility to the virus: prevalence, morbidity and mortality
- the level of threat of unemployment/reduction in hours
- impact on mental health
- safety from domestic abuse
- access to testing
- access to personal, protective equipment
- access to technology/internet learning for children when schools are closed, or they are self-isolating

### Which groups have been disproportionately affected by the virus and the response to it?

Various groups of people have been shown to be disproportionately affected by the virus:

- elderly people
- care home residents
- those with underlying physical and/or mental health issues; co-morbidities
- those living in overcrowded/multigenerational homes
- BAME individuals
- those living in areas of multiple deprivation
- those working in the hospitality and entertainment trades and businesses
- students and children
- those who cannot work from home

The response to the virus has also negatively affected some groups disproportionately:

- prioritising PPE supplies to hospitals discriminated against care home staff and residents
- provision of tablets and laptops to facilitate online learning for children unable to be at school has been patchy and well below requirements
- patchy availability of tests has meant some have been unable to access them at all, and others have had to travel far, at significant expense or inconvenience, whilst feeling unwell
- shortage of beds and ventilatory support machines in some areas but not others
- GPs have moved consultations online and primary care services generally have been overwhelmed. Inevitably, people with new and potentially serious conditions will have struggled to be seen
- hospitals have had to postpone new, non-COVID referrals and appointments for ongoing review of other conditions, as a result of moving so many resources and personnel to managing the virus

Have there been specific equality or human rights impacts on groups of people as a response to the virus?

Evidence suggests that the effects of COVID-19 have exacerbated inequalities that were already present. Those living in poverty and with poverty- or poor housing-related co-morbidities, the unemployed, those on zero-hour contracts and individuals from BAME communities, have all suffered disproportionately from the virus and the response to it.

What do the Scottish Government and public authorities (e.g. local authorities, health boards etc.) need to change or improve as a matter of urgency?

1. Ensure that in all residential care settings standards are being set to facilitate regular communication and contact between residents and their families and close friends, in a manner that balances staff and residents' safety with the mental and emotional health needs of residents, many of whom would happily choose a greater measure of risk in return for such contact.
2. Ensure that standards of PPE use and staff training in care homes are maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Fund the availability of many more tablets/laptops for children to be able to learn at home at times when they are having to isolate, or if schools are closed through lockdown.
4. As rapid testing becomes more widely available, prioritise areas of deprivation.

What do the Scottish Government and public authorities need to change or improve in the medium to long term?

1. Sponsor continuing research into the disproportionate effects of the pandemic, and the measures taken in response to it, across different groups and communities.
2. Review monitoring and assessment procedures in residential homes.
3. Build more low-cost social housing but avoid creating ghetto areas of deprivation.
4. Consider ways to encourage a culture of resilience in place of victimhood.