


# The Neighbours Next Door


The Story of Muslim Organisations  
Responding to COVID-19



Do you need any help?



Together  
we can get  
through this!



I'm here for you if you  
need me!

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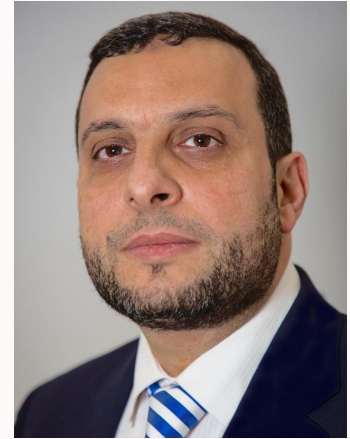
# A reflection



*In the name of God, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is reported to have said 'Let whosoever believes in Allah and in the Last Day honour his neighbour' [Narrated by Abu Huraira in Al-Bukhari & Muslim]. Our report 'The Neighbour Next Door' highlights how, in this time of crisis, the Muslim community up and down the UK have come out in mass to support their neighbours in their time of need, no matter their faith, their race, their migrant status, their health or their wealth.

This pandemic has stopped the world in its tracks and has shaken all of humanity. No nation has been left untouched by its damage, and the world stands as it does now, in a state of mourning and uncertainty about what the future may hold. In the UK alone, at the time of writing, we have lost over 45,500 lives. That is over 45,500 families who have lost loved ones to this virus; children



Fadi Itani  
CEO of MCF

mourning parents and grandparents, parents mourning a loss of a child. If not mourning the loss of someone they love, many across the UK are experiencing job losses financial and mental health struggles and more. Those who were already at the margins of society pre-pandemic are facing even greater difficulties unsure of when, and if, their situation will get better.

We begin this report remembering the lives that have been taken these past few months and we hold the families of those who have lost loved ones in the UK and around the world close to our hearts and in our prayers. Together we can get through this, and this report is a testament to the power of coming together, pooling resources, and looking out for our neighbours.

## Acknowledgements

MCF has a dedicated team of staff and volunteers whom have contributed to the production of this report. A special thanks to Ahmed Uddin, Anas Abu, Isra Kandur, Tanzeela Nassir and Sakinah Abdul Aziz for their hard work and dedication in researching and producing this report.

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# Foreword

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The COVID-19 crisis has, for so many of us, been the worst of times. It is hard to find anyone who has not been touched in some way by the crisis, the likes of which we have not experienced in living memory. With warnings of a second wave to come, it is clear that people and organisations across every aspect of society – government, business, civil society – more than ever need to work together to support those around us. And the crisis has shown that they can.

COVID-19 has shown what is best about us – a sense of community spirit, a coming together, of putting aside our own interests and differences. It has reminded us that people still come together to do things, that they care about others. It has shown that trust and reciprocity, and kindness, remain widespread,

across social or religious boundaries. People across the UK are helping neighbours and communities. From grocery shops and prescription pickups to call lines and mask making, we have been shown in practical terms that getting involved to help others is part of what makes us.

The Muslim community in the UK is integral to this community spirit and action. Muslim volunteers, local groups and organisations have been pivotal to ensuring that people up and down the UK get the support they so desperately need. They are supporting victims of domestic abuse and helping the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. Whether supporting the homeless or those with precarious migration statuses, Muslim charities have been committed to ensuring that nobody is left behind.

There are challenging months ahead. We know that communities will be needed more than ever. And reading this report, we have much to build upon. We should be proud of the dedication of so many during this testing time – may it be the positive legacy of this crisis.



**Karl Wilding**

*CEO, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)\**

\*NCVO represents over 15,000 voluntary sector organisations across England.

# Introduction



COVID-19 has created a multi-layered crisis in societies across the world. It has been having devastating effects on those infected and their loved ones, their social life, psychological wellbeing and education, as well as having a wider effect on the health care systems, and economies globally. Not only does COVID-19 exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, it has created new vulnerabilities that we must now grapple with.

The British Muslim charitable sector responded swiftly, at the time of writing, the Muslim Charities Forum (MCF) has identified 194 Muslim charities attending to a whole array of needs. Many mosque spaces were shut and turned into centres to support the local community, such as organising a food bank or providing training to volunteers. Funds have been distributed to those that have been hit hardest financially by the virus. With the unfortunate loss of lives, many took on the task of providing burial and bereavement support. Key workers such as NHS staff, have been gruelling away

working long shifts in hospitals, and so various charities organised themselves to support the NHS staff in times of great strain on their lives. The instant response by these organisations was impressive, and even more so when considering that the vast majority of these groups have solely relied upon community resources to sustain their work.

Traditionally the British Muslim charitable sector has responded to events abroad, either through responding to disaster situations or attending to humanitarian needs. With the rise of poverty and inequality over the past decade and, now, with this current national emergency, many Muslim INGOs have refocused some of their resources to servicing needs here at home. There have been a number of specialist charities that have been set up to solely focus on domestic concerns. In the last few years, we have witnessed flash floods devastate various parts of the country, particularly in the North, as well as the Grenfell Tower tragedy. These events were

indicative of the need for charities to begin building capacity at home in order to be better equipped at responding to emergencies in the UK.

In this pandemic, whilst charities mobilised where they could, there was, at times, a lack of coordination which led to the replication of work. MCF found it necessary to coordinate a COVID-19 response, whereby vital information could be shared with and between organisations to enable them to both better respond to the crisis, and to maintain the security and safety of their organisations and volunteers. We have been engaged with charities and responded to their needs by mobilising the Muslim charitable sector and providing the latest information and resources for enduring this crisis, such as information on good practices, unmet needs, keeping staff safe, accessing funds and so on.

We facilitated greater cooperation, so that resources could be better utilised and shared in order for the sector to more effectively reach those in need. We coordinated the sharing of knowledge with organisations such as the National Emergencies Trust, the UK Community Foundations and the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergency Partnership, to help more Muslim led groups access the funding, resources and skills support available. We also provided a series of webinars providing the sector with information on accessing grants, the safety of volunteers and accessing the furlough scheme, helping to ensure charities were kept up to date and well informed. MCF also raised and has distributed vital funds to individuals and families that have been hit financially by the crisis, as well as to support local grassroots groups in being able to respond to the needs of their local community.

MCF found itself at the focal point of the response and has been carrying out a mapping exercise, capturing the work that is being done nationwide. This mapping has better enabled volunteers to get involved, find out where to access support and finally, to improve coordination and connecting of resources by identifying any unmet needs and ensuring the community can fulfil those needs.

MCF also launched the Campaign for National Solidarity, with the aim of providing financial support to members and non-members. The feedback received from the charities that were responding to COVID-19 illustrated two primary concerns. The first was that they would be in difficult positions financially due to the higher demand for their services. A large number of their service users were/are facing a loss of income and have fallen into greater hardship.

“ **AT LEAST**

**194**

**MUSLIM CHARITIES AND GROUPS HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING PEOPLE ACROSS THE UK DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS.** ”

Secondly, the charities themselves were worried about their reserves or access to institutional funding to support their activities. Our campaign raised funds for the purpose of distributing hardship funds via chosen delivery partners and secondly to replenish core funds of charities that are struggling to sustain their response to the

pandemic.

Volunteering and charitable work within the Muslim community does not receive the same appreciation and support in comparison to the mainstream civil society groups. This applies particularly to Muslims working or volunteering within mosques, Islamic organisations/charities or cultural organisations. There are some organisations within the Muslim community who may not engage enough with the wider community but deal with local needs and issues and as a result they do not access and are not utilising mainstream support. There is also an issue of capacity and expertise, often the right personnel are not available within the organisation to facilitate outreach to the wider support networks out there. This is especially true within mosque structures, where it is the elderly of the community that are gatekeepers to the institution and they prefer to work with what they are comfortable with, and this presents a missed opportunity in utilising young experienced people. There is also the issue of lack of capacity of Muslim charities including strengthening governance, policies, overcoming psychological barriers, and unsustainable funding models.

However it is pertinent to highlight there has been poor outreach and little effort made by institutional funders. This has been a historical issue. These concerns have been raised to the National Emergencies Trust and UK Community Foundations, which, to their credit, have taken this into account. As a result there has been greater consultation with BAME led groups, which has now resulted in small to medium sized BAME led groups accessing vital funding. The capacity to deliver a high level of output from the Muslim community has always been our strength, having access to institutional funding can only enhance the ability to

achieve greater results. The services that are being delivered by these groups have been varied and have far-reaching impact on neglected sections of the community. Thousands of Muslim workers and volunteers pursue community-focused goals, driven by a 'culture of benevolence' inherent in the Islamic faith. This work typically strengthens both religious and civic identity, and helps Muslims become more engaged, politically interested and active citizens.

This report will aim to highlight the great work that has been carried out by the Muslim charitable and voluntary sector during this crisis. It will highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses that the sector has, how these weaknesses could be addressed and where the support should come from. Crucially it will also bring to the fore some of the tremendous work that has been carried out by British Muslims in this country at a time of great need.





# Background of the response group

Muslim groups have responded to the pandemic through a number of different setups. They have provided a platform for people of all backgrounds to be involved in initiatives that have attended to the varying needs of the community during the COVID-19 emergency. Below is a list of the different types of organisational setups:

- International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) E.g.: Islamic Relief UK, WF Aid
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) E.g.: National Zakat Foundation, As Suffa Outreach
- Mosques and other places of worship E.g.: Green Lane Mosque, Al Nagashi Mosque and Centre
- Cultural/Faith Sensitive Organisations E.g.: Discover Islam, Eden Burial Fund
- Voluntary groups E.g. British Islamic Medical Association, Muslim Youth Helpline
- Umbrella organisations E.g.: The Muslim Charities Forum, The Muslim Council of Britain
- Private Muslim family foundations E.g.: Aziz Foundation, COSARAF Foundation

The majority of Muslim organisations responding are either mosques or voluntary groups. Some are well resourced whilst others are operating on very limited resources. They are heavily reliant upon community fundraising with very little access to institutional funding. There are many different barriers that prevent these organisations from accessing funding beyond the community. Some of it is down to limited expertise and knowhow,

compounded by the complicated application process. The British Muslim community has for many years been sympathetic to international humanitarian causes, but has now found itself allocating resources to a number of national UK-based responses. Whilst the support and the goodwill of the community is present, many groups will struggle to finance their operations for an extended period of time. Funding is needed to support their programmes and, crucially, extra resources are needed for bolstering their core costs. Ramadan has been the month that many of these groups would raise the bulk of their funding, this year Ramadan has fallen in the height of the pandemic and lockdown. As a result some groups, in particular small/medium sized charities who are unable to compete digitally with their larger counterparts, are in a precarious financial situation.

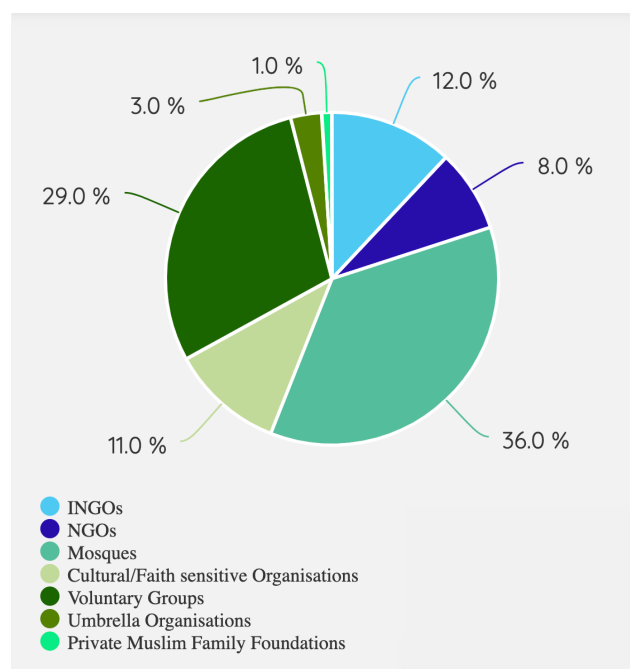


Figure 1: Type of Muslim Organisations responding

\*Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar where Muslims fast and increase their performance of spiritual activities such as praying and giving to charity.



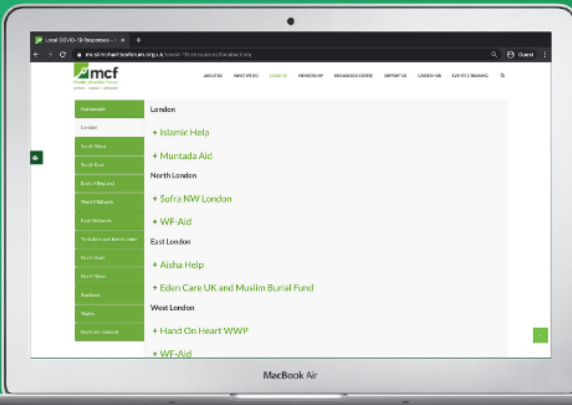
In order to draw in funds, huge resources are utilised to get the attention of donors. Marketing costs are typically very high especially in the digital sphere where charities are bidding for key words such as 'Islamic Charity', 'Zakat', 'Muslim', etc. As a result many smaller to medium sized charities are muscled out due to the lack of funding available to bear such costs. From our research and outreach, we have found that it is the small to medium sized charities that have been fastest to respond to COVID-19 and have carried out the bulk of the work in supporting the community. Yet it is them that will have the least resources available to them to sustain this level of commitment.

As alluded to earlier, many INGOs have been forced to reckon with a domestic crises and, as a result, responded to a national need without prior preparation. Some of the large INGOs have had a strategic focus to work on the domestic arena, but many have not. As a result, the response has often been knee-jerk with little coordination with

others. Our work allowed us to coordinate the response appropriately in attending to the real needs on the ground and highlighting unmet needs. Many INGOs also consulted with us prior to launching any campaign. Although we do not know for certain, it is likely that most INGOs in the British Muslim charity sector will now have a permanent presence in UK domestic programming. In the last few weeks, we have gathered evidence demonstrating the need for more cash grants as so many in the community are facing great financial difficulty. Some of the larger INGOs have already started to consult with others, including ourselves in attempting to set up a domestic programmes unit that distributes cash grants from their Zakat\* funds.

MCF has created a list of Muslim charities responding to COVID-19 which can be viewed here:

<https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/covid-19-resources/localaction/>



**MCF has put together a list of Muslim organisations supporting those affected by COVID-19 to help charities find partners.**

Checks have been carried out but we recommend you do further screening to ensure you are happy to work with them.



**Check out the list:**

Scan the code or visit:  
<https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/covid-19-resources/localaction/>



MCF have carried out an extensive mapping exercise, whereby we have listed the number of Muslim led organisations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has allowed us to highlight the valuable work that is taking place but also identify any unmet needs. This information has allowed us to inform our sector, as a result many have tried to fulfil the gaps that have been identified. Please note this is not an exhaustive list and we are still engaged in the mapping process.

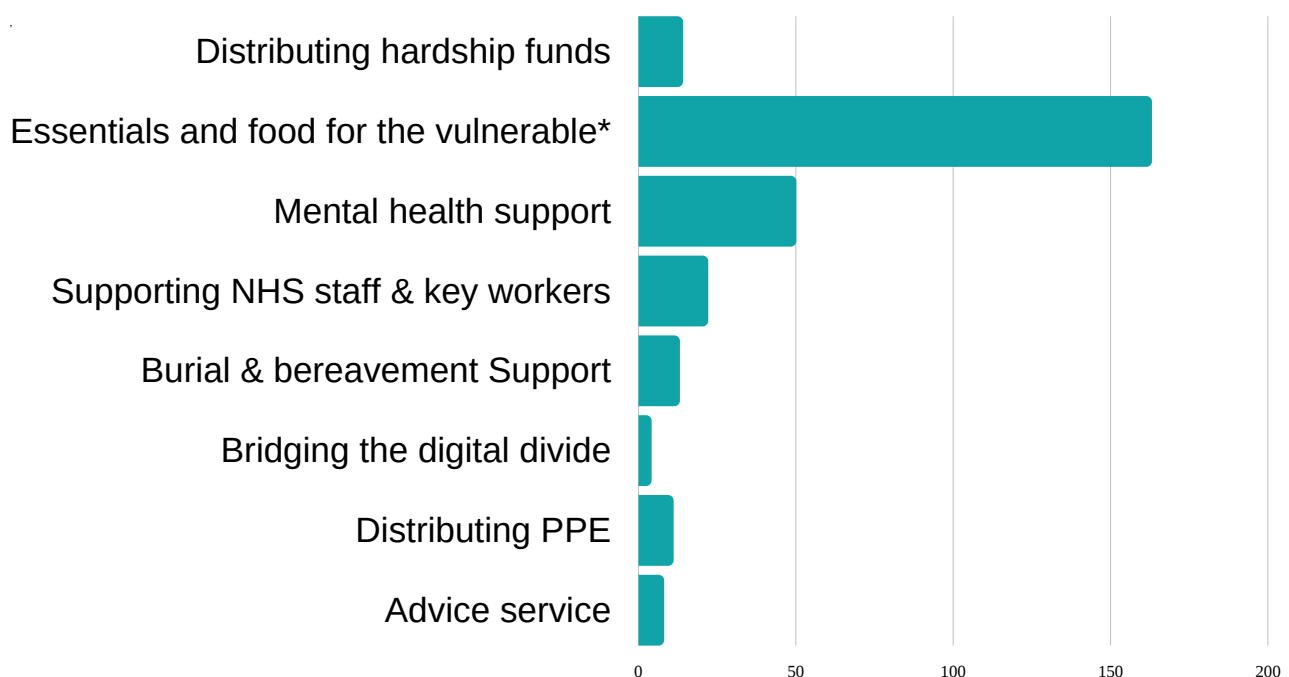
\* Zakat is the third pillar of Islam and requires Muslims to give 2.5% of their wealth every year. The Zakat goes to Muslims in need. Many Muslims (and non-Muslim) charities offer to take Zakat donations and distribute them to Muslims in need via their organisation's Zakat programmes.



**Figure 2: Where the Muslim organisations responding to COVID-19 are based**  
 The map illustrates Muslim organisations, that MCF has identified so far, who have responded to COVID-19.

# Responses to COVID-19 by the Muslim charitable sector and community

The team at MCF were able to carry out a thorough mapping exercise, although by no means exhaustive, of the varied work that has taken place within the community. Our conversations with groups throughout the country highlighted the severe strain placed on charities, the needs that desperately required attending to and how the Muslim charitable sector rose to the challenge with very minimal external support. MCF were receiving reports of needs from both the charities themselves but also from individuals who we spoke to that are struggling due to this crisis.



**Figure 3: Activities of Muslim organisation responding to COVID-19**

*\*this includes a range of vulnerable individuals such as the elderly, refugees, asylum seekers, single parents, the homeless, international students, the disabled etc*

As the chart demonstrates, most organisations attended to the emergency needs of essential provisions for individuals who have suffered due to the health and economic impact of the crisis. In addition, many groups set up local befriending services to aid the mental wellbeing of those self-isolating. While the next most common activity came in the form of supporting key workers. In the emergency phase, there was little attention paid to issues that are going to have a long-term impact such as the digital divide for some groups in society.

We have listed below the various types of needs, with summarised facts and details of the challenges faced by individuals. Each response has been followed up with one or more examples of a delivery of a service. We are proud that our community has always risen to the challenge our country and the worldwide community faces, at every juncture our response has been swift and impactful.

## Hardship funds

COVID-19 has shocked and strained the world economy. As a result, many individuals and households have fallen into financial difficulty. Working adults who live from hand to mouth, individuals that work in the informal cash-based economy or those with precarious legal positions – have no protection against being forced to sit at home with no work and no pay. Even low-paid formally employed workers will struggle to survive several months of being forcibly furloughed on ‘unpaid leave’.

BAME communities and large sections of the Muslim community are in greater levels of poverty in comparison to the wider society[1]. Whilst some households in the UK have a double income, many do not. Many studies, such as the recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and others, have stated the potential for buffering incomes within the household depends on partners’ employment rates, which are much lower for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women[2]. As a result, 29% of Bangladeshi working-age men both work in a shut-down sector

and have a partner who is not in paid work, compared with only 1% of white British men.

Hardship funds distributed by charities has been an effective way to support individuals. Beneficiaries have stated that they have used funds to pay essential bills, rent or purchase food, without which they would go hungry. There are a number of NGOS/INGOs that have partnered together to distribute hardship grants to individuals that have been affected by COVID-19. Hardship grants are known to be very effective and this programmatic response has been proven by various studies to have the following effects[3]:

- Funds ease pressure, enabling recipients to focus on other areas of their lives that need addressing.
- Recipients of grants report a significant improvement in wellbeing as it enables them to make changes in their life that provide a greater sense of control, trust and security.

## Case study

The National Zakat Foundation (NZF), a charity that provides grants to individuals nationwide has seen a spike in applications. They are currently receiving one application every 15 minutes. We have seen tremendous collaborative work in facilitating this stream of response. The likes of Islamic Relief UK (IRUK) have partnered with NZF, whereby NZF is acting as their delivery partner. IRUK has a domestic programmes unit that funds various delivery partners to carry out essential work in attending to poverty in the UK.



[1] [https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BMINBriefing7\\_Jan16.pdf](https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BMINBriefing7_Jan16.pdf)

[2] <https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality/are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-covid-19-than-others/>

[3] <https://www.family-action.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/03/About-us-Stronger-Together.pdf>

## Support with food poverty and child poverty

Across all contexts, children are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 response measures. The provision of meals at school has been a source of financial relief to many parents and represents a vital part of daily food intake for millions of children across the UK[4][5]. This has widely come to a grinding halt, leaving millions of children at risk of going hungry. In 2019 UK food poverty was stated as being a public health emergency. Food insecurity has been rising year on year in the UK, with some of the worst records in Europe. Nearly one in five children under 15 is living in a food insecure home[6]. The knock on effect of food poverty is severe, leading to health problems, affecting achievement in education and also putting children at greater risk of psychosocial stress and abuse[7].

Due to a campaign led by prominent public figures, notably Marcus Rashford, the Government put into place a summer food programme for children[8].

Although this will capture a large section

of the community that are in financial difficulty, there will be many that will slip through the net, as many may not meet the criteria, will not be documented or will have a source of income but still are in financial difficulty.

A number of different charities have risen to this challenge by delivering food packs directly to households. This has been useful especially for those that are not able to venture out to access support services, such as the elderly and the disabled. Many are, for the first time, facing such dire circumstances. Some may feel embarrassed due to their experience of poverty and this is a consideration that needs to be taken into account. The drop off service allows people to maintain a feeling of dignity whilst receiving support. We have found from our research that many local councils are referring families to local charities. Local food banks have seen an unprecedented demand on their services, charities have assisted in replenishing a diminishing supply of food.

### Case study

Muslim Charity have been delivering hot meals to individuals who are in self-isolation, struggling financially and have little support by partnering up with different takeaways across the UK. They have provided takeaways with an initial grant of £1000 to allow them to begin making meals. Muslim Charity then helps them with setting up a fundraising page and encourages the takeaway to reach out to their local community for donations to keep the takeaway meal service continuing. The takeaways are aware of the standard procedures and measures to be taken for the delivery. This initiative is not only supporting individuals most vulnerable at this time, but also takeaway businesses who may have otherwise had to reduce output.

The food is distributed by ordering online on behalf of the vulnerable community members facing financial

hardship. Muslim Charity raises funds through volunteers sharing the fundraising page and, in many cases, the extended members of the vulnerable family are also raising funds which are helping to grow the circle of support.

This initiative has had a positive impact on different local communities across the UK with many Muslim Charity volunteers/support groups receiving a significant number of calls from older people and families facing financial hardship in distress because they have not got enough food and hygiene material at home and are too nervous to go out.



**MUSLIM CHARITY**

[4] <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Childrens-Future-Food-Inquiry-report.pdf>

[5] <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/16/boris-johnson-faces-tory-rebellion-over-marcus-rashfords-school-meals-call>

[6] <https://www.endhungeruk.org/2019/02/07/uk-food-poverty-now-public-health-emergency/>

[7] [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/177031/CM-8061.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/177031/CM-8061.pdf)

[8] <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/16/boris-johnson-faces-tory-rebellion-over-marcus-rashfords-school-meals-call>

## Case study

Muslim Hands and FareShare (the UK's longest running food redistribution charity) partnered to provide 4,000 meals everyday across the UK during the Coronavirus pandemic. The meals are reaching those most vulnerable and consist of nutritional food items to ensure that disadvantaged communities in the North, Midlands and South are being fed.

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 5 people in the UK struggled to put food on the table. The implemented governmental lockdown and soaring spread of infection over the last few weeks has resulted in many unable to work, losing their jobs or facing financial difficulty, putting lives at serious risk.

Muslim Hands donated to support this vital lifeline over an initial two-month period, with the aim to reach out to as many people as possible, including children, shelters, the elderly and community groups.

The partnership entails combining on different areas of the food distribution process such as depot work, distribution, sorting, driving and delivery. FareShare provided Muslim Hands volunteers with PPE and safety training.

Not only this, Muslim Hands provided disaster response advice, which is normally applied to international disasters, to local mutual aid groups so they were equipped and had the skills required to ensure an effective response during the crisis.





## Support with mental and physical health

Beginning on the 23rd of March 2020, large numbers of people across the UK were in imposed isolation for a significant periods of time due to COVID-19. This is the largest enforced isolation in living history, and whilst we do not know the full-scale impact it will have on the health of individuals, there is ample research that indicates this may have devastating consequences.

Research has shown, isolation has adverse effects on physical health, including increases in coronary heart disease and stroke[9]. Studies conducted during other virus outbreaks have found that factors such as boredom, inadequate supplies and information, financial loss, and stigma can have negative psychological effects lasting up to three years after an event[10]. Moreover, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people, and people with lower educational qualifications appear to be especially vulnerable. These negative effects are especially concerning as they occurred after just 7-30 days of isolation[11].

### **Source of comfort**

Personal relationships that help us cope with stress may be gone for many. Studies have shown that short periods of isolation can cause an increase in anxiety or depression within very short number of days. We are social creatures, people have family structures, people congregate in groups, we crave and rely on that interaction with others. When we do not have that, it is a huge void in the way that we go about our normal lives. Masses have resorted to using technology to keep in touch with friends and family. Unfortunately, this is not a luxury that all have. Older people for example, who are more at risk of Covid-19, may be less technologically astute, and may have fewer

connections to begin with. They might not be able to do video calls or even send a text message.

Islam is very much a communal religion, the solidarity of the congregation at the local place of worship has been stripped away. Friends and family are not able to meet and greet each other, taking away our freedom to leave our place of discomfort or even abuse for some. Unfortunately, there has been a rise of domestic abuse and victims have limited options in getting to safety.



### **Existing health conditions**

In addition to the above, mental health researchers have found that social isolation can have a profound effect on people's physical health. Research has found that social isolation and loneliness are associated with depression, cognitive decline, poor sleep quality, a weaker immune system, and potential heart problems[12].

Prolonged isolation can increase the risk of premature death. This is also being called a "social recession" such that any economic downturn caused by the growing pandemic may also have profound physical and psychological effects[13]. Indeed, the Muslim Youth Helpline received 300% higher

[9] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5831910/>

[10] <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/covid-19-social-study>

[11] Ibid

[12] <https://practicebusiness.co.uk/how-isolation-can-impact-physical-and-mental-health/>

[13] Ibid



demand for their services than they normally do during the month of Ramadan.

People are also worried about their loved ones, especially those that are key workers that are working in the front line. Those friends and family that have been tested positive for the virus have to self-isolate and it becomes difficult to support them in any way.



## Case study

Based in South London, MindworksUK offer Counselling and Psychotherapy services to anyone in need of help. They are now offering an emotional support service during COVID-19. They would normally offer face to face sessions, however, the way they work has slightly changed, so they are offering a telephone or video-based service due to the lockdown. They have extended their usual services to those affected by COVID-19. They are a low-cost service, so it is very easily accessible to those on low income.

As COVID-19 is now the main feature of everyday conversations, their aim is to reach out to those who

have had to make a change to their working environments, as many are now having to work from home.

Many people have been furloughed or let go from their jobs making it hard to meet the financial needs of their families. Through offering support in over six different languages including English, Arabic, Somali, Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, French and Czech, they have had a positive impact in their local community in this difficult time.

**MindworksUK** 

## Supporting the NHS and its staff

Health care providers face physical and psychological challenges, such as physical exhaustion due to heavy workloads, a lack of personal protective gear, the fear of becoming infected and infecting others, and feeling powerless to handle patients' conditions. For many on the frontline, they are fast burning out. These pressures can lead to mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, denial, anger, and fear, which not only affect health-care providers' attention, understanding, and decision-making ability,

but could also have a lasting effect on their physical and psychological wellbeing after the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Whilst they are at the front line, many of the staff are not able to even attend to some of their basic needs. Such as having lunch or go to the local supermarket to buy essential items for their house.

### Case study

Ummah Welfare Trust committed large funds (reportedly to be £1 million) in supplying PPE supplies to the NHS. Masks, coveralls and gloves were delivered to nurses and other front line staff.



In the UK, a large proportion of NHS staff come from ethnic minorities, alarming statistics show they are dying at a much higher rate than white staff[14]. A study in April 2020 found that, of 119 NHS staff known to have died in the pandemic, 64 per cent were from an ethnic minority background (only 20 per cent of NHS staff are from an ethnic minority background). This disproportionate toll is shocking[15]. An independent think tank The King's Fund said "Minority ethnic group staff are systematically over-represented at lower levels of the NHS grade hierarchy and under-represented in senior pay bands"[16].

BAME medics and healthcare workers say "systemic discrimination" on the frontline of

the coronavirus outbreak may be a factor in the disproportionate number of their colleagues who have died after contracting the virus[17].



[14] <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2020/04/ethnic-minority-deaths-covid-19>

[15] Ibid

[16] Ibid

[17] <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-05-13/discrimination-frontline-coronavirus-covid19-black-minority-ethnic-bame-deaths-nhs-racism/>

## Supporting victims of domestic abuse

Shocking statistics revealed that domestic violence has surged since the start of the coronavirus lockdown. The UK's largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, has reported a 700% increase in calls to its helpline in a single day[18], while a separate helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of the COVID-19 lockdown[19].

The science is very clear, trends have always shown that domestic violence goes up whenever families spend more time together, such as the Christmas and summer vacations[20]. With families in lockdown, hotlines are inundated with reports of abuse. Victims are unable to take refuge or go outside, with violence intensifying and becoming even more frequent.

In addition to physical violence, which is not present in every abusive relationship, common tools of abuse include isolation from friends, family and employment; constant surveillance; strict, detailed rules for behaviour; and restrictions on access to basic necessities, such as food, clothing and sanitary products.[21] Many charities that are set up to protect women from domestic violence are now struggling to respond to the increased demand and many struggled with under funding prior to the crisis.



But as the confinement drags on, the danger will only intensify. Studies show that abusers are more likely to murder their partners and others in the wake of personal crises, including lost jobs or major financial setbacks. With COVID-19 ravaging the economy, such crises are predicted to become much more frequent.

### Case study



The Muslim Women's Network (MWN) have been supporting women suffering domestic abuse in a time of crisis. Two-thirds of the enquires to the MWN Helpline are about some form of abuse or violence such as domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence, rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, stalking and harassment.

Worries over women being abused at home have increased with the nationwide lockdown that has been imposed. Women living with extended families may now have no safe space or time to call as they may be in more regular contact with their abusers. MWN has adjusted to operating from home quickly and their confidential and non-judgmental approach has helped service users to access support when they need it the most.

[18] <https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-sees-700-increase-in-website-visits/>

[19] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/12/domestic-violence-surges-seven-hundred-per-cent-uk-coronavirus>

[20] <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/sns-nyt-coronavirus-domestic-abuse-rises-worldwide-20200407-6kd46ga4hrfizoxmh4dmijgja-story.html>

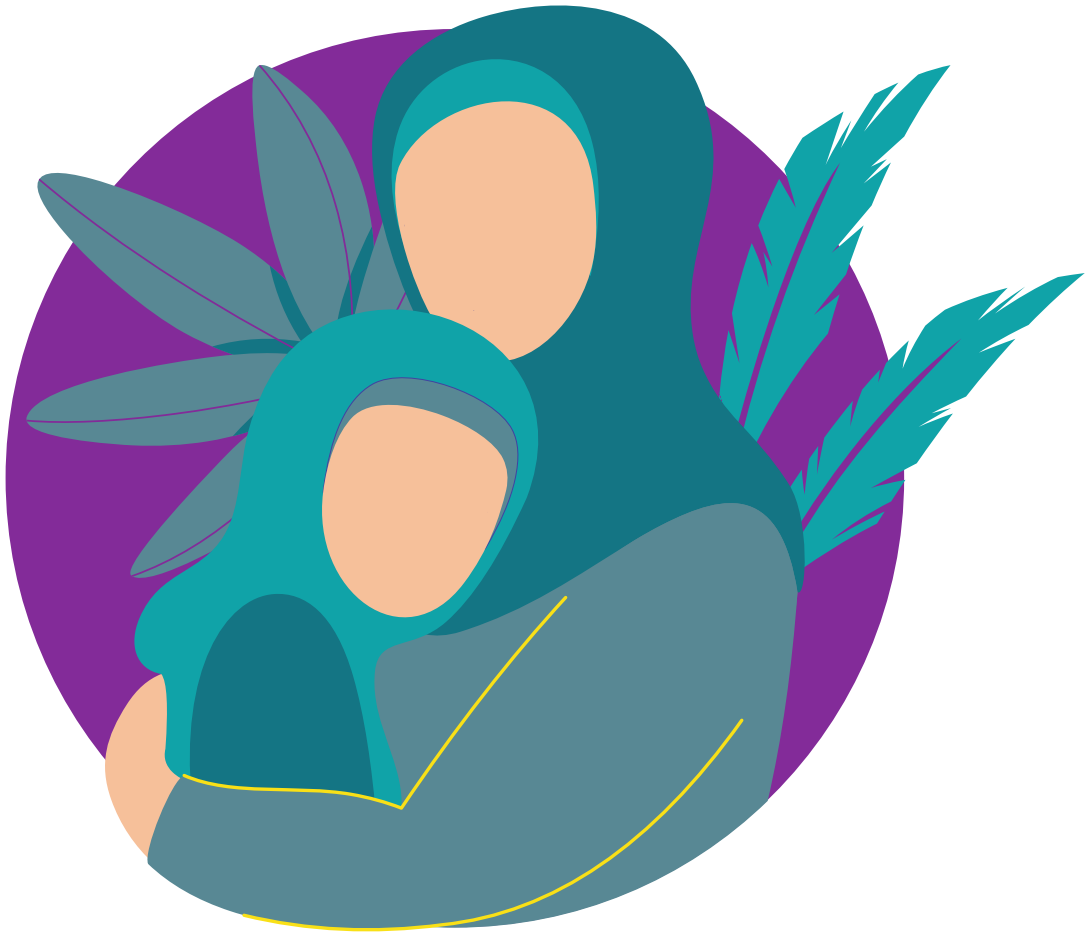
[21] common tools of abuse include isolation from friends, family and employment; constant surveillance; strict, detailed rules for behaviour

## Case study

Victims of domestic abuse have been seeking help in growing numbers and some victims have been temporarily relocated, but in this scenario, they may need support with food and essentials to maintain a decent standard of living. Human Appeal has stepped up to support some of these individuals.

As part of their hot food distribution project, they are working with a caterer to provide hot food to a range of organisations across Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leicester and Bradford. One of the organisations they work with supports victims of abuse.

The organisation they work with offer a variety of services to help and support women, men and children who are affected by domestic abuse. Human Appeal is supporting their beneficiaries with access to hot meals on a weekly basis.



## Supporting stranded students

Current estimates indicate there are 60,000 cases of stranded or at-risk students nationwide since the start of lockdown. An average of 121,000 students travel to the UK to study each year. So, we are working on the basis there are 60,000-100,000 stranded students in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland[22].

Students who had part time jobs have lost their income overnight. Many students are currently at risk because of social distancing measures, with many struggling to pay their rent as they are unable to work. With tenancy agreements coming to an end, this is an added worry for students who are stranded in the UK with dwindling funds.

### Case study

MAB Youth Birmingham have set up an outreach project called MABY COVID-19 support. They have set up an online google form for beneficiaries to outline the support they require. This includes supporting international students who are stranded in the UK, thousands of miles away from their homes with some not living with individuals of a similar culture.

MAB Youth are supporting them by delivering essentials if necessary, but primarily befriending services such

that the students can stay connected in this period of social distancing. They are also regularly hosting webinars to keep the youth positively engaged during the lockdown.



Student groups from across the UK have been coordinating emergency food drops with local community groups and charities.

There have been stories of international students contemplating suicide as they do not know where their next meal will come from[23].



[22] <https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/health-support/meet-charity-helping-international-students-left-homeless-covid-19>

[23] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/01/indian-students-trapped-in-uk-by-coronavirus-actually-starving>

## Burial and bereavement support

In 2019, the average cost of a funeral in the UK was £3,785[24]. This is a substantial amount of money which many people do not have in savings. Furthermore, if a person is not able to afford this cost, there are very few options available to them, especially if they are bound by religious and cultural rights. This inability to pay is commonly known as funeral poverty. It is a growing national crisis mostly affecting those on the lowest incomes[25]. There are some pots of funding that are available to bereaved friends and family, such as via local council, but often the funding does not come through on time and requires paperwork to be completed at times of distress.

When combined with bereaved people's sense of disorientation, potential inexperience in arranging funerals, and a natural desire to make timely arrangements, this can all result in many people buying funeral packages they cannot afford and taking on unmanageable and devastating debt. The average debt taken on by people who struggled to pay for a funeral in 2019 was £1,990. This figure has increased by 14% since 2018, and 53% since 2013[26].

Funeral poverty can also have a hugely detrimental impact on people's emotional wellbeing. Whilst arranging a funeral, bereaved people can experience a broad range of emotions, including a need to provide the person who has died an appropriate funeral. This can lead to anxiety about 'getting it right' and, if there are limited funds, an overwhelming sense of guilt, distress and shame is experienced by many. Funeral poverty can get in the way of a person's ability to grieve.



### Case study

Before the virus outbreak, Eden Burial Fund received on average three or four referrals a week. At times during the crisis they dealt with eight a day. They ensure the religious practices of the individual are adhered to and provide dignified services. Often staff from Eden Burial Fund are the only few attendants during funerals as the individual sometimes has no family or other family members are self-isolating. They have dealt with cases where the breadwinner dies leaving a large family behind and or the family has limited visits meaning it is the last time the children can see their loved one.



[24] <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/pensions/article-7423249/A-basic-funeral-costs-3-785-average-cut-bill.html>

[25] <https://fairfuneralscampaign.org.uk/content/what-funeral-poverty>

[26] The average debt taken on by people who struggled to pay for a funeral in 2019 was £1,990

## Respite support to single parents

The COVID-19 pandemic will not affect us all equally. Existing inequalities and vulnerabilities are being heightened. Families with dependent children are likely to be negatively affected by the financial, emotional and physical implications of the pandemic. This is especially serious for families living in poverty.

Evidence from Child Poverty Action Group's Early Warning System, which gathers information from advisers about how changes to the social security system are

affecting the lives of children and families, suggests that families are struggling with the additional costs of raising children during a pandemic, most notably because of school and nursery closures and the subsequent loss of financial and social support[27]. Whilst measures have been taken to fulfil the unmet needs, the packages of support such as the voucher scheme to replace free school meals in many cases have failed to work. This is further driving families into deeper levels of poverty as a result of the pandemic.

### Case study

Himmah charity has teamed up with Sisters of Noor to provide food and hot meals for single-parent families. The women they are supporting have either fled domestic abuse, been divorced or widowed or are on refugee status or seeking asylum. Women generally, like most people, struggle to come forward due to stigma and the feeling of failure. They need to feel supported and valued as well as knowing their issues will be dealt with sincerely, confidentially and dignity.

The current crisis has depleted many support networks for these women leading to difficulties with shopping, job insecurity, ill-health and delays in receiving universal credit. Therefore, they are desperately relying on support from the food bank and hot meal provision Himmah provide.



[27] <https://discoversociety.org/2020/04/23/researching-covid-19-and-its-impact-on-families-some-ethical-challenges/>



## Support for the homeless

Between 2009 and 2019 there were huge increases in the numbers of rough sleepers. Official figures show that rough sleeping increased in England by 141%<sup>[28]</sup>. Following the announcement of lockdown, the government realised that rough sleepers were physically unable to follow government advice to stay at home. They were not only at enhanced risk of contracting the virus, but also a huge potential risk to the rest of population.

In response local authorities in England, procured rooms in hotels that were empty due to the lockdown, and as well as rehousing the estimated 6,000 rough sleepers, have also subsequently arranged packages of support for them. The government has even paid for the accommodation and support of those without recourse to public funds (NRPF).

Funding for these initiatives is drying up fast, although the government has committed to further funding, the worry is how long will this support go on for<sup>[29]</sup>.

Once lockdown is eased, hotels that are being used to house rough sleepers, will start to open up for business.

COVID-19 has also changed the profile of potential rough sleepers. We are seeing more young people turning up at homeless shelters who were “sofa-surfing” between various friends’ houses and can no longer do so. More people are also coming forward following the breakdown of relationships. Domestic violence, already one of the top three causes of homelessness in the UK, has seen an increase during the lockdown.

## Case study

In a time where there is great focus on individuals who are deemed physically vulnerable to COVID-19, we must not forget about individuals in our society who have been vulnerable for some time. Penny Appeal have partnered with a number of local community-based organisations in the Midlands and Yorkshire to support homeless individuals.

Through Penny Appeal’s work with their partners they have reached over 200 individuals who are at risk of homelessness or have been recently housed by the government via local councils in order to protect them from COVID-19.

By providing them with essentials to live their daily lives, these individuals do not need to go outside to sustain a sufficient standard of living, therefore putting themselves at greater vulnerability and risk of exposure. One of the organisations Penny Appeal has been supporting is the Salvation Army in Birmingham. Together they have been providing vital support to the

homeless in Birmingham, showing the impact that can be achieved when different faith institutions come together in support of those who need it.

pennyappeal



[28] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/27/covid-19-got-rough-sleepers-off-englands-streets-the-question-is-what-happens-next>

[29] Ibid

## Case study

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hand on Heart has been active to help the homeless who have been forgotten and left with little or no support. In addition, the group is supporting other vulnerable categories such as deprived families and the elderly.

It has formed a collaboration with other charities (Beta Charitable Trust, Sufra, Who is Hussain, Nishkam SWAT and WF-Aid), and distributed mini essential packs to the homeless in London. In addition, the group has also sourced cases of essential food supplies for food banks as well as laptops and printers for home schooling children from deprived families.

On Easter Sunday, Hand on Heart assembled 250 Easter Essential Packs for the homeless.

Each drawstring bag contained hand sanitisers (donated by WF-Aid and Stanmore Jafferys), wet wipes, deodorants, socks/underwear, t-shirts and polo shirts.

In addition, 250 Easter Eggs were donated as well as cupcakes which were hand made by various patisseries including Dessert First and Caketastic. To mark Easter celebrations, the packs were distributed to the homeless by Nishkam SWAT at London's iconic, now deserted, Trafalgar Square.



## Support for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers

Thousands of people with insecure immigration status are in grave circumstances after being deprived of most public funds. Compounded by being deterred from seeking medical help they are put at even greater risk of abuse. Data-sharing between the NHS and the Home Office is putting them off from accessing help, potentially leading infected people to remain untested and out of hospital. Emergency help from charities is drying up and movement restrictions have left many trapped in exploitative situations. There are reports of heart-rending stories of homelessness, exploitation and hunger[30].

Under current rules, those with insecure immigration status are subjected to the “no recourse to public funds” policy, meaning that they are prevented from accessing the support from the welfare state.

Many of those they help rely on informal support from friends for accommodation but are finding that they are being asked to leave during the pandemic, just at a time when affordable food is scarce and charities are stretched.



### Case study

With the innovative ‘Here for You’ initiative, Al Khair Foundation have been providing 60 cooked meals seven days a week to refugees that have recently arrived in the city. They are housed in a hostel, have no recourse to public funds and are in need of food aid. Essential hygiene packs are needed and provided.

This is a project assigned to them by Glasgow Council and other partners in a city-wide coordinated response. Ingredients for the meals are donated by local businesses, the meals are then cooked in a different volunteer household each day – there are seven volunteer households altogether. There is no budget required from Al Khair, the team co-ordinate and deliver the project. It is a grassroots community initiative that helps the most vulnerable and gives local residents the opportunity to help the needy.

Such is the spirit and quality of this and other projects delivered by the branch that the Scottish Government have awarded charities grants to continue their valuable work. Al Khair Foundation Glasgow, was the only Muslim charity recognised.



[30] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/03/give-refugees-temporary-leave-to-remain-during-covid-19-crisis>

## Case study

Bradford Council for Mosques and Bradford Foundation Trust have co-ordinated a community response which includes fifty local businesses and thirty voluntary sector organisations with a purpose of ensuring that the efforts around Covid-19 response are done in a co-ordinated manner.

They are mainly supporting refugee and asylum seekers as they are the most vulnerable, whilst other organisations were supporting people with mental health needs.

The impact has been phenomenal. Working with other voluntary organisations and Bradford Council, they

have recruited over a thousand volunteers. Some volunteers have been helping with food distribution, others have been picking up medicines or befriending people. Some of the businesses have given an incredible amount of support.



## Support for the vulnerable: the disabled, elderly and the marginalised

Research from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on disabled people's lives. More disabled adults said they were "very worried" about the effects of COVID-19 on their lives than non-disabled adults (45.1% compared with 30.2%). Nearly two-thirds of disabled people said coronavirus-related concerns were affecting their wellbeing, from loneliness and problems at work, to worsening mental health[31].

This is all too predictable when you consider that disabled people are more likely to be in low income and insecure work, isolated, and at higher risk from the virus itself. The risk is increased even more so if you're disabled and BAME [32][33].

We have seen Universal credit has been increased by £20 since the lockdown to pay for the extra costs of the pandemic, but millions of disabled people on older out-of-work benefits such as the employment and support allowance (ESA) will not receive the extra financial support. A survey by the Disability Consortium found nine out of 10 disabled people are struggling with additional food costs, with others unable to pay for medicine collections or their rising utility bills as they shield at home. [34] [35]

According to the ONS, one in ten adults with a disability reported often or always feeling lonely, compared with less than one in twenty non-disabled adults[36]. Unlike the general population, many disabled people are not able to venture out for fresh air and exercise, while others may not be technologically savvy, so accessing Facebook or Zoom is a massive challenge. In a survey by Glasgow Disability Alliance, only

just over a third of disabled people reported having home broadband during the pandemic.

### Case study

Human Relief Foundation's office in Manchester has formed a partnership with Manchester Pharmacy to aid in distributions of essential prescriptions and medications to vulnerable and self-isolating households across Greater Manchester.

Since March, HRF has been freely distributing essential supplies – such as hand sanitisers, masks, paracetamol, multi-vitamins, and prescriptions – to households containing high-risk, elderly and otherwise vulnerable people who have been forced into self-isolation. This means that NHS staff can continue their work on the front line whilst HRF teams & Manchester Pharmacy help the community!

HRF staff and volunteers fulfil two roles. First, a telephone-based questionnaire has been developed to gather information on households calling to request assistance, and a vulnerability criterion developed to determine which households are in greatest need of assistance. HRF teams also operate a same day delivery service, covering the entire Greater Manchester area, to get these supplies out to affected households as quickly as possible.

Since the partnership began, HRF has been making distributions at an average of 30 per day. Since March 23rd, over 460 distributions have been made in total, ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members in the Manchester community maintain their health and safety during a highly disruptive and uncertain period.



**HRF**  
Human Relief  
Foundation

[31] <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/april/nearly-two-thirds-disabled-adults-say-covid-19-related-concerns-affecting-their-well>

[32] <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/29/coronavirus-disabled-people-inequality-pandemic>

[33] Research Institute for Disabled Consumers

[34] <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/29/coronavirus-disabled-people-inequality-pandemic>

[35] Research Institute for Disabled Consumers

[36] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsondisabledpeopleingreatbritain/2020-04-24>

## Case study

As a community, we do not expect anyone to be left hungry or deprived, but COVID-19 has led to an unprecedented global emergency with the most vulnerable struggling for food or access to food. These vulnerable communities are the focus of Islamic Help's support during these difficult times.

Islamic Help has forged partnerships with community organisations, including the Bahu Trust in Birmingham and the Ghulam Trust in London, to serve those most in need in their neighbourhoods. With donations from individuals, retailers and other groups, the charity's volunteers have been delivering food and hygiene packs to the doorsteps of residents who are in isolation or unable to leave their homes due to illness or infirmity.

The beneficiaries have included those in some of the cities' poorest areas, along with NHS staff, the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable groups. More than 100 families in Birmingham and dozens more in London have already been served through this initiative. It demonstrates how working together can alleviate the burdens on the hardest-hit in society, and by providing them with food and hygiene essentials it also ensures they do not need to put themselves or others at risk of exposure or vulnerability by going outside



## Case study

In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, Muslim Women's Council launched the MWC Helpline on the 23rd March in conjunction with MyLahore and Islamic Relief.

Their services include emergency food provision (through hot meal food packs), signposting to relevant services, updates & advice on Coronavirus in additional languages, befriending and emotional support.

The helpline operates from 10am to 8pm seven days a week, to support those members of the Bradford community who are vulnerable or elderly. Many people are having to self-isolate due to the virus symptoms or underlying health conditions, and are therefore struggling with meals.

Anyone in need can contact their helpline and their staff will ascertain their needs - if they require meals MWC arrange hot food delivery through their catering partners MyLahore, if they require basic food parcels or mental health support MWC signpost them to one of the appropriate service providers.

Also, Muslim Women's Council has been delivering the Curry Circle, their weekly food initiative for the destitute, since December 2013. Due to the unprecedented effects of COVID-19, the sessions have been changed to a hot meal takeout service from the same location, Carlisle Business Centre, from 6pm to 8pm on Thursdays. This will ensure both their volunteers and service users are kept safe while enabling us to continue providing as much support as possible





## Bridging the digital divide gap and exclusion

The pandemic has widened the fault lines when it comes to the digital exclusion in the UK. The crisis is pan-generational, effecting those from the elderly to the youngest in our population. Prior to the pandemic 22% of the UK's population lacked basic digital skills[37]. The poorest will be hit the hardest, as the likelihood of having access to the internet from home increases along with income. Due to the lack of access to appropriate technology some of the most vulnerable children and young people in society cannot stay in touch with important support networks[38].

Only 51% of households earning between £6000-10,000 had home internet access compared with 99% of households with an income of over £40,001. There is a direct link between poverty and digital exclusion: if you are poor, you have less chance of being online[39].

Data shows that 1.9 million households have no access to the internet and tens of millions more reliant on pay-as-you-go services to make phone calls or access healthcare, education and benefits online[40]. Those already struggling to make ends meet, will be having to make stark choices, whether they can afford the internet versus food for example.

The education gap will further widen with disadvantaged children as they been having to pick up their education via a digital means. Children living in poverty are already having to work against the tide compared to their wealthier peers. Of those who have been eligible for free school meals, or who have been in care or adopted from care, only 25% achieved grades 9-5 in GCSE English and Maths in 2019 , compared with 50% of all other pupils[41].

### Case study

The Lady Fatemah Trust has joined forces with Sufra NW London and a number of other local foodbanks to launch a drive to support children with digital exclusion.

The target of the campaign is to provide the children of 100 families who rely on food banks with a refurbished laptop so they can carry in with online studies and access educational material as well as get emotional support.



[37] <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide>

[38] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52654426>

[39] <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide>

[40] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/digital-divide-isolates-and-endangers-millions-of-uk-poorest>

[41] <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide>



# Recommendations and concluding remarks

Whilst the nation has united in tackling this pandemic, with the ease of lockdown slowly creeping in, individuals will start to forget about the challenges many are facing as a result of COVID-19. Those left behind will yet again be heavily reliant upon the services various charities provide. The UK ranks among the most unequal nations in Europe<sup>[42]</sup> and the United Nations has raised serious concerns<sup>[43]</sup>. As a result of the pandemic, those who were in poverty, will be pushed to even higher levels of deprivation. The demands on the charities will be higher than ever before. Half of the Muslim population in England are living in poverty and unfortunately due to a number of barriers, Muslims do not have access to institutional funding that is available. Muslim charities are taking up the responsibility of supporting large sections of the community, the strain on them will be felt very quickly. Muslim charities are heavily reliant upon community donations - if the community itself falls into greater financial difficulty, so will the charities.

## Financial Vulnerabilities of Small/Medium-Sized Charities

The COVID-19 crisis period has been difficult for small/ medium size community-based frontline charities. Many of these groups are strongly embedded within their communities and were among the first groups to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. They're financially exposed and vulnerable, placing their valuable work at risk. Most have been relying solely on community donations to meet the increased need in their community, but these funds may dry up once the initial crisis is over, and as people's incomes fall for an extended period. The impact of this will be felt for some time particularly as the

COVID-19 situation is likely to continue for a prolonged period. They need urgent support to continue their vital services.

This is a particularly pertinent issue with the likely occurrence of multiple 'waves' of COVID-19 leading to further lockdowns in local areas, or even nationwide. If charities on the frontline have had to use up their reserves in dealing with the initial phase of lockdown, some may struggle to serve their communities as effectively in future lockdowns.

## Accessing Funding

BAME led charities are known to not be accessing institutional funding in comparison to their counterparts in the mainstream sector. Indeed, only 16% of Muslim led local<sup>[44]</sup> charities have so far received institutional funding for their COVID-19 response. There are a number of different barriers, but these must be tackled in a time when there is such widespread desperation.

non-members in the British Muslim charitable sector, they have highlighted a few barriers:

- Language used in funding applications is often not accessible for most, the technical language is not very clear and vague.
- Most institutional funders have high standards and expectations of charities, very few charities meet the various quality markers.

In speaking to our members and non-

[42] <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/sep/05/qa-how-unequal-is-britain-and-are-the-poor-getting-poorer>

[43] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48354692>

[44] Groups operating in only one locality.

- Requires specialist skill sets in making grant applications, often charities are not in a position to fund such positions.
- British Muslim charities are not well networked with the wider sector.
- Those that make funding applications, they are not always given constructive feedback. This either results in charities not making second applications or they keep on repeating the same mistakes in forthcoming applications.

- Whilst affordable and free training is available, many organisations are not aware of it.
- Capacity building is needed, the likes of MCF and other umbrella bodies are not well resourced to facilitate training and workshops.

Historically, little effort is made by institutional funders to reach out to BAME led charities, as a result they are underrepresented.

## The Need for Greater Collaboration

The sector would benefit from greater collaboration, this will undoubtedly allow skill sets to be shared, greater reach and more importantly the exchange of good practice. As a result, many charities across the sector will vastly improve their services that is being accessed by beneficiaries both here in the UK and abroad. The power of reach within marginalised and vulnerable communities cannot be understated. Certain charities have the trust marker that others cannot breach. It requires decades of work, ploughing through cultural and religious sensitivities. Certain sub sections of the community will only turn to their trusted organisation. When institutional funding is not spread amongst the wider sector, it only results in subsections of the British community being neglected, often the most marginalised and vulnerable.

The last few years we have unfortunately witnessed a number of disasters, through trial and error our sector has invested in resources, leadership and skill sets. This takes time and money, replicating this exercise every time a disaster takes place, only chips away at valuable time that is needed for an urgent response. It would be prudent for us to have greater relationships and better collaboration, so that mistakes are not repeated, and resources not wasted.

In particular, INGOs looking to expand their support for UK causes must research and collaborate to support those in need with clarity. Their involvement may be direct or indirect through local partners, but this needs to be done in a mission-led, purpose-driven approach with little duplication.

Coordinated by:  **mcf**  
Muslim Charities Forum  
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**Support our COVID-19 Emergency Appeal**  
[WWW.LAUNCHGOOD.COM/NATIONALSOLIDARITY](http://WWW.LAUNCHGOOD.COM/NATIONALSOLIDARITY)

*A poster with the logos of the charities, umbrella organisations, and companies that came together to support MCF's collective Campaign for National Solidarity. It was an unprecedented show of unity and collaborative action.*

## Adapting to Medium to Long Term Challenges

As demonstrated earlier, at the onset of the crisis, most organisations supported a wide range of vulnerable individuals to the crisis. Given limited resources and the sheer scale of the crisis, local charities may struggle to continue supporting such a large group. These organisations should conduct a needs assessment of their area and have a much more targeted response whilst collaborating with other community partners to ensure no-one is left behind.

Assessing who needs support is important to

understand, but what type of help they need must also be considered. Relief efforts provided essentials and food packs, but greater focus is needed in helping individuals access state support they are entitled to. A key aspect of this is bridging the digital divide, which few groups have addressed so far. Some individuals either do not have the technology or basic digital skills to help them gain access to Universal Credit or apply for jobs. Tackling this issue would certainly build up the community's resilience to future shocks.

## Volunteers

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in the UK, there was an outpouring of compassion from the public with a desire to volunteer and serve their communities during this unprecedented time leading to many voluntary sector organisations having long volunteer waiting lists. However, as the lockdown eases, and individuals get back to work, the number of volunteers may fall despite the need to support the community not diminishing. This may particularly impact Muslim led charities due to the number of Muslims who typically work in the hospitality sector beginning to get back to work now.

Voluntary sector organisations should begin planning how the work of volunteers adjusts as the communal needs adjust over time,

and how those going back to work can continue to be involved despite having less time available. These plans should be considered by engaging with volunteers to understand how they can volunteer in a way that meets their personal needs.

In the longer-term, the upskilling of volunteers and staff within the sector is needed. Whenever a national or international incident takes place, Muslim Charities will always respond. That is why, we need our personnel to be trained, prepared and protected for any future disasters. There also needs to be an element of 'training the trainer', allowing the sector to pass on this knowledge to another generation of volunteers and staff.

## Positive stories

Finally, our sector needs to celebrate the valuable contribution it makes, without which many beneficiaries will be left unattended to, struggling in silence. There is unfair coverage of our sector, often accused of malpractice or lengthy unfair investigations that is disproportionate.

This depletes valuable time and resources. If training is given to our organisations, mistakes and pitfalls can be avoided. As a result, the need for investigations will only take place when there is a need to do so in most serious cases.

The Muslim Charities Forum is the UK network for British Muslim charities working for social good in the UK and abroad. Through our network, we aim to collectively build a more accountable, transparent and efficient British Muslim charitable sector, in order to improve our ability—both as individual organisations and as a sector—to contribute to a more just and sustainable world.



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