

The Equalities and Human Rights Committee

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Equalities and Human Rights Inquiry

Summary of Engagement Call

The Committee asked Community Outreach to contact community organisations/stakeholders re: the [Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Equalities and Human Rights](#) and to have a discussion based on the call for views for this Inquiry.

RNIB Scotland – Conference Call Wednesday 29 July 2020

Questions Asked

1. how have groups of people been affected by the virus?
2. which groups have been disproportionately affected by the virus and the response to it?
3. have there been specific equality or human rights impacts on groups of people as a response to the virus?
4. 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?
 - in the medium to long term?

Notes of the discussion

Q1. how have groups of people been affected by the virus?

Q2. which groups have been disproportionately affected by the virus and the response to it?

I feel like my social life has been ended. I like meeting with groups of people and I can't do that now.

The lockdown has had more of an effect on me because of my epilepsy rather than my visual impairment. One of the triggers for my epilepsy is a sudden change in routine. Also, my regular support has been removed and the things I would do to cope haven't been available.

It's difficult now we are coming out of lockdown and lots of café's and bars have moved furniture out on to the street it is making it harder for us to walk around town as the layout is less familiar. It is hard access information on how the street layouts have changed. Especially if you can't get online.

The advice we've been given has been to go out and exercise and to active travel, but I can't cycle, run or safely walk so that message being repeated constantly is quite disheartening. We should've been told explicitly that we are allowed to go out with a guide or to go out cycling with others. People with visual impairment couldn't safely go on daily walks and/or guarantee social distance and cycling was almost impossible despite several tandem groups being available. There has been nothing online in terms of online workouts for blind and partially sighted people.

I have been offered help from supermarket staff with my shopping and they can go around the shop with my list, but they aren't allowed to go around WITH me so it's harder to be offered alternatives etc. People with visual impairments weren't included in the priority list of vulnerable shoppers so that was less of an option. Many people with visual impairment have relied on online shopping for years and suddenly we were unable to get delivery slots.

Severely impacted on visually impaired people's equality and human rights.

Impact on daily exercise, can't go out on daily walks, not allowed to use tandem bikes, tandem bikes still in lockdown. Leaving Blind and partially sighted people out of the picture.

Anyone with a Mental Health condition or disability that rely on routine to prevent further impacts on Mental health have been particularly affected.

People are being encouraged to move online more rapidly and this is problematic for people who can't get online. I usually do things by telephone and this has been less available.

Dramatic changes to our street scapes. Don't have access to these changes and information. Need access to information if you are not online, put out in accessible format in a timely way, so people are made aware of these changes.

Not many exercise/workouts online for Blind or partially sighted people. This would have been good at the beginning of lockdown,

People with sight loss who are usually significantly independent have in many ways been more affected than more vulnerable people who will likely already have lots of support around them. As mentioned above many of the things we usually do to support ourselves has been unavailable or removed.

It has been especially difficult for people living in care homes who may have been unable to have visitors.

There was a great emphasis on those who may be vulnerable to catching the virus, but we are vulnerable to the response to the pandemic in terms of how much we have been excluded from involvement in the changes that have been made.

Q3. Have there been specific equality or human rights impacts on groups of people as a response to the virus?

In terms of human rights, it really feels like some of us have just not been thought of at all. It feels like disability rights has gone back 40 years.

Surely, we have a right to move about safely and feel relatively confident and safe in our towns and cities but if the information about the changes in town layouts isn't available in accessible format then we can't do that so either risk injury or remain isolated.

Too much dependence to 'see' the changes, we are denied this right. We find out by mistake by bumping into things.

We get about by using public transport, how do we get about? We can't drive. Feel vulnerable fall out of the virus. Measures taken to make everybody safe, made us unsafe.

I looked forward to the evening when they had the 'Clap for carers' got a chance to meet people. Social interaction, different things each week and then this stopped.

Right to choice – The only way we can make choices is if we're given the right information and in a way that is accessible and meaningful. Guidance on guiding came late that it was OK to do that, but others had just been doing it. If this had been safe to do so then this would've made things a lot easier a lot earlier.

Right to health Care – The impact on Mental health. I don't think any assessment was made at the start of lockdown on the impact on Mental health on those who were unable to take part in physical activity.

Technology – I have been using Zoom/Teams for meetings which has been very good with one or two people but once you get multiple people on the video call at the one time it becomes very stressful for blind and partially sighted people.

The rate of expansion of public transport services has been appalling. People in cars have been able to take advantage of travelling further for a while now. But public transport travel remained at essential/necessary so people who can't drive are by default still being told that they must only travel further if essential/necessary. Traveline Scotland has also been unreliable during this but car drivers haven't had disruption to Google Maps for example. Traveline Scotland is our Google Maps.

Q4. 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?

All the stuff we have spoken about is urgent because the levels of confidence among blind and partially sighted people varies a lot. During lockdown we weren't going out and using transport so that remained stagnant but as people start to go out again and try and move around their communities all these issues need addressed urgently or

you will have a large community of blind and partially sighted people who become increasingly isolated and losing confidence.

Information needs to be put out in a timely manner and in accessible formats. Especially around things like changes to town/city layouts. The changes are happening quickly and as a matter of urgency but the information going out about it isn't.

Important if you are not online, that you are not left behind, excluded.

Support services for people with additional support needs need to be resumed as a matter of urgency including things like MyBus services and community transport. There are a lot of people who don't have family to rely on for support.

Social Care needs to get up and running now as a matter of urgency.

One-way systems and mask wearing can be problematic indoors. It's hard to follow one-way signs and masks can affect peripheral vision. People also are reluctant to guide. If RNIB guidance on guiding could be made more public then people might have less difficulty. The Government need to push this message out urgently as well that it is OK to guide people. Could this be mentioned in the First Ministers briefing? It is more important for sighted people to know about this than us as it's sighted people who are doing the guiding.

The expansion of public transport and the messaging needs to keep up with the general messaging around permitted travel.

- in the medium to long term?

There is a lack of joined up information especially around the encouragement to cycle or walk and people who can't cycle/walk being made to feel like we are doing something wrong.

We often rely on mapping services to guide us around town and I think these mapping services need to be able to pull information from local authorities about changes that have been made to town lay outs, bus lanes, taxi stops etc.

Right to be out and about like everyone else and a right to know what to expect

Information, Information and Information. Not just signs and notices. An app to alert us of any information or any changes.

Email in plain text, no pictures, just text.

Health authorities need to increase their Mental health capacity to make sure that this doesn't get overloaded. Even people who haven't previously suffered with their Mental health may suffer now.

Community engagement – Local authorities should be engaging with us as communities, so we can be meaningfully involved in decisions that are being made that may affect us.

Possibility of a second wave of the virus, more urgent now for these things to be in place.