

# What can we learn from COVID-19 about supporting migrant and minority ethnic populations in Scotland?

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Credit: University of Glasgow

A new University of Glasgow report highlights useful learnings from the pandemic response for future service provision in Scotland.

When COVID-19 struck and a national lockdown was introduced in the U.K., many essential public services, such as local council offices, GP practices or advice bureaus, had to close doors to the public and shift to remote service provision.

While this change affected the whole society, some groups were hit harder than others. This was the case for migrant and minority ethnic communities, for whom pre-existing barriers to accessing public services were exacerbated by the pandemic.

"Addressing the needs of Scotland's migrant and minority ethnic populations under COVID-19: lessons for the future" was funded by the COVID-19 Learning and Evaluation Oversight Group, set up by the Scottish Government to bring together evidence to inform the country's recovery from COVID-19. The study found that third sector organizations in Scotland were able to respond quicker and more effectively than the [public sector](#). Public services, which were focused on a whole-population emergency response, were not seen to adequately cater for migrant and minority ethnic populations.

The expert review was carried by academics from the University of Glasgow, Dr. Paulina Trevena, Dr. Anna Gawlewicz and Professor Sharon Wright in collaboration with the charities Feniks, Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) and the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC)

A strategic approach to increasing inclusivity of public service provision is needed, and this can be informed by pandemic learning, the review

says. The third sector led the way in communication and outreach to migrant and minority ethnic populations during COVID, with numerous examples of innovation and best practice to build on in improving public service provision.

Dr. Paulina Trevena, the lead author of the report who is based at the University's School of Social and Political Sciences, said, "COVID-19 has shown us clearly that the grounding for an effective crisis response is built before a crisis. Having established relationships of trust, outreach channels and using targeted communication are essential in supporting minority communities. That's why, aided by necessary funding from the Scottish Government, voluntary organizations were able to step in quickly and hit the ground running straight away.

Dr. Anna Gawlewicz, a Lecturer in Public Policy and Research Methods at the University's School of Social and Political Sciences, said, "Third sector organizations reached out to the communities they serve in every possible way during the pandemic, making sure urgent needs were met and essential public health messaging got to communities. They were very creative in doing so, from producing and widely sharing short information videos to using WhatsApp audio for messaging clients. There is a lot we can learn from them."

Professor Linda Bauld, Chief Social Policy Adviser and Chair of the COVID-19 Learning and Evaluation Oversight Group, said, "I welcome this research and the recognition within this report of the important role played by the third sector in supporting migrant and minority ethnic populations.

"The report makes a number of suggestions of how we can learn from the pandemic and how public services can better address the needs of Scotland's diverse populations during times of crisis."

Dr. Trevena continues, "What was positive about COVID-19 were the innovations in service provision resulting from it, especially in the third sector.

"For instance, many organizations developed a hybrid model of service delivery. It appeared that remote provision is more accessible for some clients as it cut out travel cost and time, especially in rural areas, and issues around childcare."

"It was also amazing how charities moved many of their activities online. These included learning, social and creative activities, such as literacy and numeracy lessons, yoga sessions or befriending meetings. I was particularly impressed by Big Noise who managed to move their music lessons for young people online and even virtually record and put together a whole orchestral concert! It is important to recognize the role of such creative activities in mental health support."

The review focused on:

- inequalities in accessing support spanning issues of access to food and essential products, healthcare and public health information, employment, income and [social security benefits](#), immigration information, housing, education and digital technology and resources;
- the effectiveness of service provision during the pandemic by looking at statutory services, the third sector and the role of the Scottish Government; and
- examples of innovation and best practice for COVID-19 recovery and in future crises.

The review made a number of recommendations for action to improve public service provision for migrant and minority ethnic populations in Scotland. These include:

- Fund operational, needs-based partnerships and collaborations across sectors to enable a holistic approach to service provision and build relationships of trust and channels of communication with the communities.
- Provide communications and support in community languages, including mental health support.
- Ensure ethnic minorities' voices are heard and involved in service design through outreach and inclusion.
- Review funding principles for third sector organizations to foster collaborations and ensure longer-term funding.
- Foster useful innovations resulting from service adaptations during the pandemic.

**More information:** The report is available online:  
[migrantessentialworkers.com/wp ... -C19-Innovations.pdf](https://migrantessentialworkers.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/C19-Innovations.pdf)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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