LONDON COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE SURVEY: WEEK TWENTY FOUR/TWENTY FIVE

FIELDWORK 21st – 30th October 2020

CITY INTELLIGENCE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Community Response Survey

The COVID-19 Community Response Survey asks civil society organisations who work in London a small number of questions to understand the impact of COVID-19 and associated policy measures, such as social distancing, on vulnerable populations in the capital.

The first week of the survey focused on asking baseline questions to capture organisational profiles, and included a small number of questions relating to the immediate impact post-lockdown of COVID-19.

Surveys from week two onwards are shorter, and ask organisations a number of questions about changes they have seen in the last week.

This week's survey collected data over two weeks.

Results from the survey are shared with responding organisations and with decision-makers supporting the pan-London response to COVID-19.

Cohort details

The questions were sent to more than 360 Civil Society organisations who have agreed to take part. The organisations were recruited through existing contacts and mailing lists held by the GLA Community Engagement and Equality & Fairness teams.

In addition, larger organisations and infrastructure providers were asked to cascade the invitation down to their networks.

A total of 92 organisations responded in full or in part to the week seven questions, which were live between Monday 21st and Wednesday 30th September 2020.

Note: due to the relatively small sample size and the targeted way in which recruitment was conducted, it is important not to extrapolate from any findings in the weekly survey to all civil society organisations in London or any particular population of Londoners. Results from the weekly survey should be used alongside other sources of intelligence to understand the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable communities.

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CHANGE IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE SEEKING SUPPORT

This week 44 per cent of responding organisations (40) saw an increase in the number of people seeking support in the last two weeks.

46 reported little change in numbers and 6 reported a decrease

Increase in numbers seeking support

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey (n=121)

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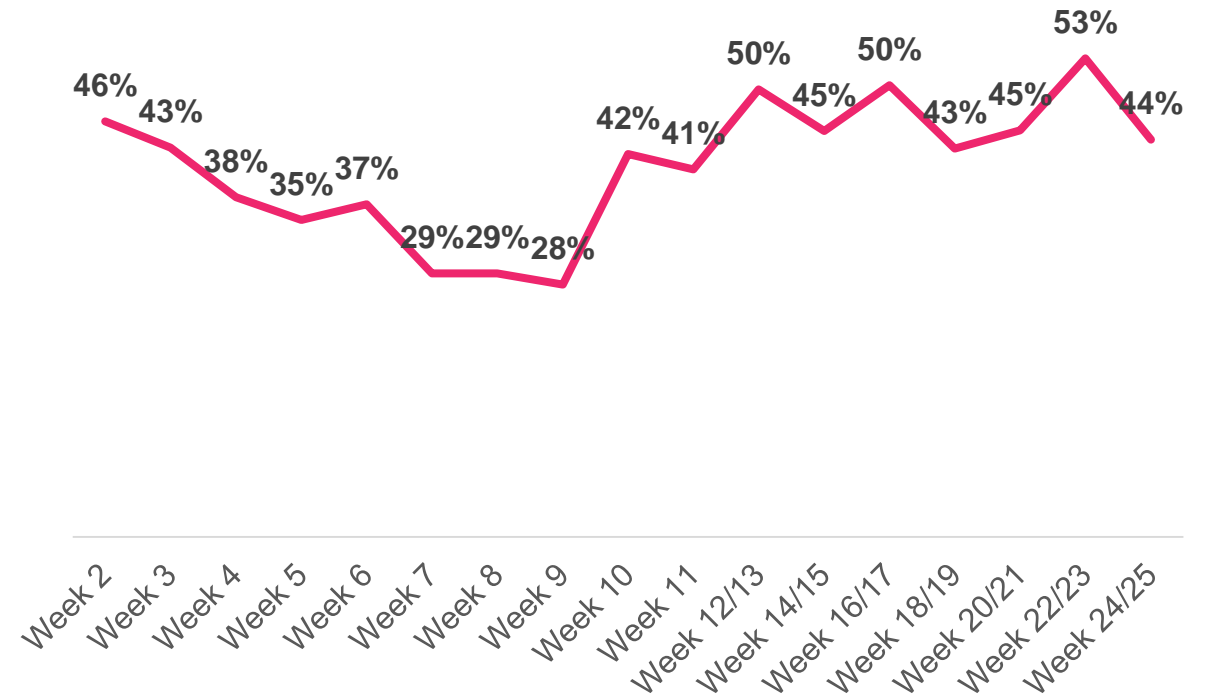
CHANGE IN NUMBERS SEEKING SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC ISSUES

We asked responding organisations to tell us whether the number of people seeking support for a range of specific issues was higher, the same or lower compared to last week. We asked them to only answer if they deal with and have seen each of the issues. The issues with the highest proportion reporting higher demand are housing, mental health, poverty and debt issues. This week we have seen a noticeable (>10pp) increase in the proportion of organisations experiencing an increase in demand around access to care and bereavement support.

Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses	Issue	Proportion reporting higher demand	No. of responses
Housing	61%	36	Domestic violence	41%	29
Mental health	60%	63	Access to food	41%	56
Poverty	58%	36	**Access to care**	**38%**	**39**
Debt issues	58%	40	**Grief bereavement**	**38%**	**26**
Employment	54%	48	Childcare or Parenting	36%	25
Digital connectivity	53%	45	Access to benefits	35%	43
Capacity Building/organisations or volunteers	52%	33	Access to health	33%	43
Education	51%	37	Immigration issues	31%	32
Physical health	51%	43	Hate crime	29%	24
Homelessness	50%	34	Victim support	28%	18
Isolation and loneliness	49%	51	Discrimination	27%	22
Substance misuse	43%	21			

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

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WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR ORGANISATION IS FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges they were facing last week. The top three issues identified were funding sustainability, delivering services whilst following social distancing guidance and capacity due to increased demand.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Funding – sustainability beyond the crisis	35
Delivering services whilst following social distancing guidelines	23
Capacity - due to increased demand	21
Funding – general	17
Staff wellbeing and mental health	14
Reaching vulnerable groups	13
Capacity - general	12
Planning for recovery/easing of lockdown	12
Digital or tech equipment	10
Capacity - due to reduction in volunteers	10

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Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOUR BENEFICIARIES ARE FACING THIS WEEK?

We asked responding organisations to tell us the three biggest challenges their beneficiaries were facing in the last week. This week the top issues remain loss of employment, mental health and low income.

Challenge	Number of organisations
Loss of jobs or lack of employment opportunities	36
Mental health	36
Low income	29
Access to food and essentials	21
Social Isolation	20
Social distancing rules	18
Digital exclusion	16
Inadequate accommodation	10
Access to benefits	9
Domestic violence	8

Source: COVID-19 Community Response Survey

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RISKS IN RELATION TO END OF THE JOB RETENTION SCHEME (n=51)

The two most prominent themes were high levels of job loss (12) and increased unemployment amongst beneficiaries, and concern about needing to make redundancies (12) at a time of increasing demand.

"Many low paid, low skilled workers are likely to become unemployed and will struggle to find work. Many will turn to charities and community groups for help at a point when these organisations are themselves struggling.   XXXX has been supporting people to access English to improve their employability. Most of our funding ends today so our capacity to provide effective signposting to the rising number of referrals from job centres and elsewhere is about to drastically reduce."

"We will have to make some difficult decisions, which will result in staff redundancies. We are also anticipating that families we work with will lose their jobs."

"We expect that their will be an increase in job losses amongst our adult beneficiaries, many of whom were already in low income, insecure positions."

"Our biggest costs are property and staff. Without the JRS, we will have to start a restructure process, as our revenue streams have not had time to recover enough to support our current staffing structure. This resturcture will come at the same time as big funding application deadlines, audits, and other pressures on an already small and overstretched team.   We cannot restart our programme under current government guidelines so we can not fully support our beneficiaries."

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RISKS IN RELATION TO END OF THE JOB RETENTION SCHEME (n=51)

This was followed by concern about capacity to meet increased demand (11), and running at a loss due to lack of funding or increasing costs of delivery due to social distancing.

"Although we are dealing with an increasing number of enquiries, only about one or two a month fall within the scope of legal aid which means that we are having to respond without any fee income."

"For our organisation, this puts pressure on our commercial work as the commercial entities are only partially open and may have to close again due to further Government restrictions."

"The community will experience more debt, more mental health unwellness.   Organisations many not be able to sustain the rise in demands for their services. Councils may direct funds to lesser know organisations working at grass roots level."

"We have 28% less learners than same time last year due to covid and social distancing requirements. We have to run small classes that are not financially viable to save jobs and meet learner needs."

"Increased demand that we are unable to meet for food parcels. Beneficiaries having to choose between heating and food due to loss of income. Food insecurity."

ANY OTHER ISSUES

The most common issue raised by respondents related to mental health (7), in particular the impact on carers and older people.

Followed by issues relating to housing and homelessness (6), including challenges in supporting individuals in poorly supported temporary accommodation.

"We are worried about carers mental health and a rising need for mental health for those who have not had issues before but isolation/Covid has impacted- ie: new demand."

"So many of our members, particularly those aged over 80 are reporting real concerns about Covid and their health. The constantly changing government guidelines are not helping their mental health and the longer that this situation goes on, they find themselves more and more socially isolated, relying more on others for help so becoming less independent and even their physical mobility is suffering as they are not able to go out as they normally would "

"Still concerned for people who have a disability and their carers affected by covid restrictions - increasing isolation and poor mental health."

"Our clients are often waiting long periods for mental health support."

"There is a growing issue of asylum seekers being housed for long periods in hotels. We are considering how we can support them, given the intended temporary nature of their stay versus the reality of potentially months of being accommodated in poorly supported places."

"We are overwhelmed by the needs of people placed in hotels by the local authority and the Home Office. People are given no money at all and the meals they are given are mostly either insufficient or unvaried. The lack of money means they cannot travel or buy food or toiletries or top up phones. We are trying too support as many as we ca but our hardships costs are getting very high."

"A number of enquiries have related to wanting to end tenancies during fixed term contracts because tenants can no longer afford the rent."

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ANY OTHER ISSUES

Digital exclusion (4) and its impact on existing inequalities was raised by a number of groups.

Confusion about social distancing guidance, and the challenges of managing demand within current restrictions remains an issue for frontline organisations.

"Digital exclusion remains a big issue for the Gypsy & Traveller community we work with. This is only going to be exacerbated by the advice to continue working from home today and the fact so many public service and charity staff are working from home. There doesn;t seem to be much in place to support those with no digital access and/or skills, even this long into the pandemic."

"The digital divide remains a big issue with the experiences of lockdown etc, for those with online access being very different to the experiences of those without. We have provided a range of devices and support, but the cost of data remains a huge challenge."

"More support and information for BAME elderly people to access technology."

"Because many other walk-in front doors are closed. EG charity offices, children's centres, etc we are seeing many emergency walk-ins. It is increasingly difficult to make good referrals to partners who are working from home or have long waiting lists. Including for housing advice, legal advice and domestic violence advocacy."

"We are unclear on some aspects of the new guidelines as we run a youth provision and the rules are not clear on a number of issues."

"As in previous weeks, owing to massive uncertainty about restrictions, ESOL provision and learner ability to access it (especially online owing to digital exclusion) is making it very difficult to manage demand."

NEXT STEPS

The next survey will cover two weeks, being in the field between 5th – 14th October

Results available on Monday 19th October.