**Understanding the impact of COVID-19**

ESRC supports research and datasets looking at the social, economic and public health impacts of COVID-19. The evidence is helping to shape the response to the pandemic and its effects now and in the future.

UKRI is playing a key role in convening and catalysing efforts to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, supporting hundreds of projects addressing the challenges. Social science is helping us understand the impact of the pandemic on individuals, groups and institutions in society.

ESRC has funded projects ranging from understanding the impacts on the economy and new ways of working, to highlighting the effects on vulnerable groups and public services, and related issues such as housing, crime and domestic violence.

ESRC are also funding the International Public Policy Observatory to synthesise evidence in relation to COVID-19 and engage the wider community.

Below are a few examples of our work.

### Impact on society

The [UK Data Service](https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/) and longitudinal studies funded by ESRC have played a vital role in enabling us to move swiftly to measure, record and understand the changes that have been happening across the UK as the pandemic unfolds.

For example, our [Understanding Society](https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/) study has been surveying 40,000 households to explore the short, medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on individuals, families and communities. This COVID-19 survey asks about health, relationships and employment. The data is used to underpin research around the effects of COVID-19 particularly how it makes existing inequalities worse.

### Work and the economy

The changes brought by the pandemic and subsequent response have caused a seismic change in the UK economy. Large numbers of people in sectors such as hospitality, tourism and travel have become unemployed while many others have shifted to home working.

We are funding projects looking at the impact of COVID-19 on businesses of all sizes, studying employment and working patterns and supply chains.

The [Decision Maker Panel](https://decisionmakerpanel.co.uk/) – first set up by the Bank of England, Stanford University and the University of Nottingham in 2016 – has been a vital resource for understanding the impact of the pandemic on thousands of businesses across the UK. Data from the study is being used to brief HM Treasury and government departments, banks and other policymakers in order to support the nation’s economic recovery.

Our [Economics Observatory](https://www.economicsobservatory.com/) bridges the gap between academic research, government policy and the general public. It provides balanced and reliable answers to the economic questions that COVID-19 and its aftermath will bring.

### Health, care and mental wellbeing

We are supporting projects looking at the impact of COVID-19 across the full spectrum of health and social care, from the impact on maternity services and dementia care to the ways in which the pandemic has affected the delivery of health services – such as a shift to online appointments. Researchers at the University of Oxford are examining the shift to digital communications between patients and primary care practices through the project [Remote-by-Default care in the COVID-19 pandemic](https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/research/interdisciplinary-research-in-health-sciences/remote-by-default-care/remote-by-default-care-in-the-covid-19-pandemic).

Understanding the impact of the pandemic on mental wellbeing, children, families and personal relationships is another important area of focus. The [Co-SPACE study](http://cospaceoxford.org/) focuses on children’s and young people’s mental wellbeing in relation to the pandemic.

The [COVID-19 Social Study](https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/), led by researchers at University College London, is the largest project of its kind in the UK. More than 70,000 adult participants have reported on the impact of the virus and control measures such as lockdowns and social distancing on their relationships and mental health.

We have also been supporting research looking at the [impact of green spaces](https://www.economicsobservatory.com/ongoing-research/the-impact-of-covid-19-restrictions-on-recreation-and-use-of-green-space-in-wales), neighbourhood environments and [access to nature on physical and mental wellbeing during the pandemic](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/research-projects/people-and-nature-pandemic-studying-nature-engagement-and-wellbeing-pre-during-and-post-covid-19), as well as [investigating psychological resilience](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/psychology-consortium-covid19/about-project) in individuals and communities.

### Education and public services

COVID-19 measures such as lockdowns and school closures have had a [major impact on education in the UK](https://www.ukri.org/our-work/tackling-the-impact-of-covid-19/researching-the-impact-of-coronavirus/covid-19-and-children/), with many children switching to [online learning or missing out on teaching altogether](https://www.open.ac.uk/projects/leading-online-learning/).

We’re funding research to look at the impact of this disruption on children’s education and personal development, and investigating whether the effects on different groups are increasing social inequalities through the project [Mind the Gap: Educational Inequalities during Covid-19](https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/projects/mind-the-gap-educational-inequalities-during-covid-19).

We are also supporting projects looking at the impact of COVID-19 on other public services during the pandemic, including social services, [probation](https://www.cahru.org.uk/research/epic/c19probation/) and prisons, policing, and [welfare provision](https://www.distantwelfare.co.uk/) across the UK, as well as the [role that volunteers have played](https://doit.life/esa/article/md/139132/move) in supporting the pandemic response.

### Society, behaviour and communication

COVID-19 has affected individuals and communities in different ways, running the risk of reinforcing existing social inequalities and perpetuating harms.

ESRC-funded researchers are studying the effects of COVID-19 on various social groups, including [ethnic minorities](https://www.ukri.org/news/researching-factors-affecting-ethnic-minority-groups-during-covid-19/), disabled people and poorer families, and funding research to look at how the pandemic has impacted highly vulnerable individuals, such as children in care and [rough sleepers](https://assets.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/60887e57ff790b5d464bc13c_MOVE%20ON%20Summary%20(1).pdf).

We’re also supporting projects investigating individual and community behaviours and attitudes around interventions such as handwashing, social distancing, mask wearing and vaccination, to help shape public health messaging aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

### Learning and sharing

COVID-19 is a global challenge, and there is much we can learn from other nations about how to respond to the current pandemic and future crises that are yet to come.

We’re funding projects aimed at understanding areas ranging from pandemic preparedness and COVID testing to the impact of COVID-19 on elections and [domestic abuse](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/news/uclan-to-lead-study-on-global-responses-to-domestic-violence-and-abuse-under-covid-19) in countries around the world.

Communicating the findings of ESRC-funded research with decision makers and the public is an essential part of learning from the challenges of the pandemic and building towards recovery. To support this, we are organising a series of seminars together with government partners as well as with the business community to share the emerging findings of this work and provide actionable insights for policy makers and the business sector.

COVID-19 has brought huge changes across all of society that have affected people in different ways, from the economy and work, to education, wellbeing and more. From the earliest days of the pandemic, UKRI and ESRC have invested in researchers studying the impact of COVID-19 on society.

We’re funding extensive research and data collection to look at the social, economic and public health impacts of COVID-19, gathering evidence to shape the response to the pandemic and its effects now and in the future.