



COVID-19 Impact Assessment Framework

**Risks and responses for people in the UK
immigration system**

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Our Approach

- Identifying potential risk factors
- Assessing risks for cohorts within the immigration system
- Analysing the socio-economic and health impacts
- Drawing conclusions and recommendations



A framework for COVID-19 risk factors

Alongside demographic factors, there are several factors that impact an individual's risk of:

- contracting the COVID-19 virus;
- having a more serious illness or worse clinical outcomes following COVID-19 infection;
- experiencing greater indirect health impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- facing more severe socioeconomic consequences due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many people in the immigration system will experience a number of these risk factors simultaneously.

Key risks for contracting and worsening COVID-19

- **Language barriers** – health information sometimes only appears in English.
- **Housing** – living in poorly maintained, overcrowded accommodation or with **multiple generations** increases risks of contracting COVID-19.
- **Occupational exposure** – key workers are exposed daily.
- **Travel** – using public transport, not private cars, increases exposure.
- **Geographic location** – in some areas, less money is spent on services e.g. public health messaging and signage; less sanitising and cleaning.

And of having a more serious illness or worse clinical outcomes following COVID-19 infection

- **Inclusive health care** – many people living in the immigration system struggled to access ‘universal’ GP services.
- **Deterrence from healthcare** – the ‘hostile environment’ towards people who have migrated to the UK breeds a distrust of public services.
- **Fears** - of charging, immigration enforcement, and discrimination.

Factors increasing the health impact of COVID-19

- **New or existing health conditions** Previous poor mental health, and the increase in surveillance during the pandemic, may exacerbate a sense of exclusion.
- **Domestic Violence** Increased during lockdown. Women with insecure immigration status, unable to access support, are at particular risk.
- **Destitution** Increased during lockdown - causing toll on mental health. People unable to access public funds due to their immigration status struggled most.
- **Exacerbation of societal exclusion** Reports of COVID-19 related racism e.g. attacks against people of Chinese ethnicity. Increased marginalisation can also prevent people accessing health and social care.

Factors increasing socio economic impact

- **Debt** Previous NHS debt, or debt from immigration costs, means income is fragile – then COVID-19 means some jobs are also lost.
- **Immigration status** COVID-19 induced delays may cause ‘overstayers’, who may lose jobs and access to services.
- **Dependents** Parents who are sole carers, or individuals supporting dependents abroad will face additional financial pressures.

Conclusions and recommendations

- **Short Term**

- Certain government policies (data sharing, NHS charging, restricting access to benefits) undermine public health and must be paused.
- Grassroots organisations need money and urgent assistance.
- Nationally coordinated aid efforts must include needs of migrant communities.

- **Medium Term**

- Need targeted investment for mental health and related services within the immigration system.
- Monitor changing labour market, to prevent exploiting migrant workers in response to higher levels of unemployment
- Monitor COVID-19 enforced delays and inflexible immigration rules

Conclusions and recommendations

– long term

- UK needs ‘inclusive and equitable’ health policies and access to healthcare.
- A new strategy must address the structural and policy failings of government’s ‘hostile environment’ approach.
- Future planning for public health emergencies must include:
 - the potential barriers to following public health advice
 - the impacts of immigration policies affecting access to benefits and public services
 - the importance of specialist healthcare support and training