

£3.1 million for support to those representing themselves in court

- new grant will enhance access to free legal advice and support
- jointly delivered by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Access to Justice Foundation
- full £3.1 million now awarded to a range of local, regional and local services

A new MOJ and Access to Justice Foundation joint initiative has now awarded all of its funding, working with 11 new projects that cover more than 50 different organisations across England and Wales – providing advice and guidance to those without legal representation.

This marks an important milestone in the [MOJ's Legal Support Action Plan](#), helping those who are representing themselves in court. The grant is working with partnerships of not-for-profit organisations, providing new routes to support at local, regional and national levels.

At the regional level, funding has been targeted at areas of England and Wales where it can have the most impact. As a result, MOJ has awarded just under £1 million to three new partnerships:

- North and Mid-Wales, where seven Citizens Advice branches in the region have partnered with Bangor University to increase access to legal advice and support.
- the North East of England, where 13 local organisations will set up two virtual support hubs, sharing their expertise and allowing people to access specialist advice from anywhere in the region.
- Devon and Cornwall, where nine organisations have come together to establish a network of specialist support across both counties.

At the local level, we are working with frontline organisations to increase the reach and impact of their services, targeting the issues they know need to be focused on in their communities. MOJ has awarded just under £1 million from the new grant to 5 new partnerships:

- Suffolk and Norfolk, where a new service will take mobile, free legal advice out to people who cannot normally access it.
- Mid and North Yorkshire, where the capacity of specialist legal advice will be expanded, including a rural outreach service.
- Greater Manchester and North Lancashire, where two new community hubs will be set up to help people work through a broad range of issues.
- the East and West Midlands, where access to support will be strengthened and expanded into new parts of the local area.
- Dorset and South Somerset, where 9 organisations will work together to provide more access to specialist advice and share their expertise to train more advisers.

Setting up all of these new projects follows the [£500,000 investment already awarded by MOJ](#) through the new grant to three national projects.

Justice Minister, Alex Chalk said:

I am delighted to see this funding going out to so many vital frontline projects across England and Wales, providing support to people navigating the justice system.

Our partnership with the Access to Justice Foundation to successfully deliver this funding has gone from strength to strength, and our work together will have a significant impact on the lives of those who need advice and guidance.

Lord Goldsmith QC, President of the Access to Justice Foundation, said:

This important initiative with the MOJ will increase the support available to litigants in person and ensure that key resources are in place at a local, regional, and national level to help people facing the legal process alone to access free and affordable advice.

The Foundation has identified areas in England and Wales where funding will have the most impact and we look forward to further supporting our grantees over the next 2 years as they develop these significant projects.

Audrey Ludwig, Director of Suffolk Law Centre (who lead the Suffolk and Norfolk partnership), said:

We are delighted to be partnering with Norfolk Community Law Service on this MOJ funded project, which builds on and shares each of our organisation's expertise in providing legal advice to people unable to afford lawyers.

Covid and the closure of some other advice agencies has seen an increase in vulnerable, isolated clients with clustered issues, that can be resolved or dealt with by early legal advice interventions like those we will deliver through the new funded project.

Nottingham City Council: Chair of the Improvement and Assurance Board appointment letter

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Letter to Sir Tony Redmond appointing him as Chair of the Nottingham City Council Improvement and Assurance Board.

January 2021 findings from COVID-19 study published

- Over 142,900 volunteers were tested in England from 6 to 15 January 2021 as part of one of the most significant COVID-19 studies.
- It remains paramount everyone stays at home and follows the rules to protect the NHS and save lives.

The [interim findings from the eighth report of REACT](#), one of the country's largest studies into COVID-19 infections in England, have been published today by Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI.

Over 142,900 volunteers were tested in England from 6 to 15 January to examine the levels of infection in the general population. The findings show infections in England have plateaued at the highest level recorded by a REACT study, with suggestions of a potential uptick. The report does not yet reflect the impact of national lockdown.

Prevalence from 6 to 15 January was highest in London, with 1 in 36 people infected – more than double compared to the previous REACT report in early December. Infections had also more than doubled in the South East, East of England and West Midlands compared to the previous REACT report in early December.

The main findings from the eighth REACT study show:

- national prevalence increased by 50% from 0.91% in early December to 1.58%, or 158 per 10,000 infected
- national R was estimated at 1.04
- regional prevalence was highest in London where it had more than doubled from 1.21% to 2.8%. It had also more than doubled in the South East (0.75% to 1.68%); East of England (0.59% to 1.74%); and West Midlands (0.71% to 1.76%). It increased in the South West (0.53% to 0.94%) and North West (0.92% to 1.41%). There was a decrease in Yorkshire and The Humber (1.39% to 0.84%). It was stable in the East Midlands (1.04% to

1.16%) and North East (1.26% to 1.18%)

- prevalence increased nationally in all adult age groups and was highest in 18 to 24 year olds at 2.51%. Prevalence in the over 65s more than doubled from 0.41% to 0.94%
- large household size, living in a deprived neighbourhood, and areas with higher numbers of black and Asian ethnicity individuals were associated with increased prevalence; healthcare and care home workers, and other key workers, were more likely to test positive compared to other workers
- the report contains mobility data for the first time showing peoples' movement decreased at the end of December and increased at the start of January and helps explain change in prevalence

While prevalence has decreased in Yorkshire and the Humber and has remained stable across the East Midlands and North East, infection numbers remain high in all of these regions.

The figures demonstrate everyone must stay at home to reduce infections, protect the NHS and save lives.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

These findings show why we must not let down our guard over the weeks to come.

Infections across England are at very high levels and this will have a knock-on effect on the already significant pressures faced by our NHS and hospitals.

It is absolutely paramount that everyone plays their part to bring down infections. This means staying at home and only going out where absolutely necessary, reducing contact with others and maintaining social distancing.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the programme at Imperial, said:

Our data are showing worrying suggestions of a recent uptick in infections which we will continue to monitor closely.

To prevent our already stretched health system from becoming overwhelmed infections must be brought down; if prevalence continues at the high rate we are seeing then hospitals will continue to be put under immense pressure, and more and more lives will be lost. We all have a part to play in preventing this situation from worsening and must do our best to stay at home wherever possible.

There has been increasing pressure on the NHS with 15,000 people admitted to hospitals since Christmas Eve – over 20 hospitals' worth of new patients. While the vaccine programme continues to accelerate and expand to protect as

many people as possible, with over 4 million people vaccinated, we do not know whether being vaccinated stops someone from passing the virus on to others. It will also be some time before the impact of the vaccination programme reduces pressures on hospitals.

It is critical everyone continues to follow the rules, stays at home, reduces contact with others and maintains social distancing – remembering hands, face, space.

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director of Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

As we reach a milestone of over a million people in England having COVID-19 at any one time of our study, the real time tracking of COVID-19 across England is more important than ever. Our study's ability to find individuals who have the virus, but do not display symptoms, is due to the millions of members of the public that have taken part, who I would like to thank for volunteering, helping to provide the Government with an invaluable tool as we fight this pandemic.

This report is the latest from the REACT study which was commissioned by DHSC and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

Read [more information on the Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission \(REACT\) programme of work](#)

This study falls under Pillar 4 of the COVID-19 National Testing Programme, which focuses on mass surveillance in the general population.

[Ensuring humanitarian access and a political solution to end crises in Syria](#)

Thank you, Mr President. Let me also start by marking Ambassador Craft's final meeting with simply saying how much I have appreciated her honesty, integrity, her compassion and her friendship on her time on the Council. And I have no doubt that she is proud of that too.

I want to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and I want to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

Now, Mr President, I listened carefully to the Russian ambassador's

statement, as I always do, and I think he would be the very first to admit that it was a lengthy statement – longer than the five minutes that we, as Security Council members, recommend to each other in Note 507. And I in no way wish to be impolite about this – it's an issue we all have, not only he. And that tells me, as winter bites in Syria and as Geir Pedersen seeks action on the Constitutional Committee, we need to take the proper time as a Council to consider these two issues and return to separate meetings, as has been our practice over many years.

Mr President, as the Syrian conflict approaches its eleventh year, the situation continues to deteriorate. Over 500,000 people have died during the conflict, the vast majority civilians.

The conditions for the millions of civilians displaced by the conflict are dire. Since the beginning of the crisis, the United Kingdom has given over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid in Syria and in surrounding countries. And I encourage others – especially those who support the Syrian regime and who say they are so worried about the impact of sanctions – do more themselves to support the Syrian people.

COVID-19 continues to compound the humanitarian situation, with confirmed cases having now passed 42,000. The true figure is undoubtedly much higher. All donors will need to work together to ensure the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines across Syria, ensuring that those in most acute need of a vaccine are prioritised. The United Kingdom is committed to working with the United Nations to lay the groundwork for delivery of vaccines and longer-term pandemic preparedness. There are complex challenges to overcome, but the World Health Organization and other UN delivery agencies have the UK's full support.

Efficient, effective cross-border and cross-line access, as we have heard from the UN and from NGOs for many months now, remains essential to meeting the needs of the Syrian people. Over the course of 2020, we saw the loss of three border crossings and a further increase in humanitarian needs by over two million people. Cross-line access alone is sadly not enough to sustain the humanitarian needs of 30 million people – about three quarters of the population.

Aid running through Bab al-Hawa has never been more important, and the rationale for renewing the cross-border mandate in the summer has not diminished. Indeed, with the prospect of a vaccine, the delivery of which may well require complex storage and supply chains, it only grows stronger. .

Mr President, in order for the humanitarian response to keep up with growing needs, the volume and frequency of aid being delivered via Damascus to northeast Syria needs to increase, including to those areas outside of regime control. This means alleviating bureaucratic hurdles and ending arbitrary denials of access for aid workers, an abhorrent example noted by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock last month of the blocking of food aid to 220,000 people in Raqqa is simply unacceptable.

We are also concerned about the recent water crisis in regime-controlled

Syria. As with many serious problems, rampant corruption has played its role, with regime diesel supplies designated for the city's water pump generators being sold illegally. The food, fuel and economic crises – all of the regime's making – sadly continue.

An improvement in the humanitarian situation is only possible with a reduction in violence. We remain deeply concerned by ongoing violations of agreed ceasefires, with routine violence in the northwest, including shelling and sporadic air strikes; an escalation in tensions in the northeast; and a surge in attacks claimed by Daesh.

Now, Mr President, the political settlement envisaged in Resolution 2254, which this Council adopted unanimously just over five years ago, remains the best means of resolving Syria's multiple crises. It is vital that the parties engage constructively on the substantive issues of the Constitution during the fifth meeting of the Constitutional Committee this month.

Progress to date has been too slow, but there is a sense that we are approaching a watershed moment. We hope the regime delegation will arrive in Geneva willing to engage in good faith in the talks.

Without a new constitution, free and fair elections involving all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, cannot take place as envisaged in Resolution 2254. Plans to hold elections according to the previous constitution would contradict the political process by this Council. The UK will not recognise elections which are neither free nor fair.

Free and fair elections should involve all Syrians, including members of the diaspora. If the Syrian regime wants refugees to return, they need to ensure that the conditions set out in paragraph 14 of Resolution 2254 are met and that Syrian citizens will not be returning to the status quo that led to and sustained this conflict.

Mr President, let me turn to the subject of sanctions. The Syrian regime and its Russian backers blame 'Western' sanctions for the failing economy in Syria. In reality, the regime has devastated its own economy through nepotism, corruption and by funding brutal violence against its people. It must bear responsibility for this. On 1 January, the United Kingdom's autonomous Syria sanctions regime designated 353 individuals and entities responsible for repressing civilians in Syria. It is the UK's most extensive sanctions regime. I want to be clear: UK sanctions target those individuals in the regime responsible for civilian suffering and prevent those who support and benefit from the regime from entering the UK, channelling money through UK banks and profiting from our economy. Food and medicine are not subject to sanctions, and exemptions are in place for humanitarian aid and the COVID-19 response.

Mr President, as we have said so often, the path to the removal of sanctions is clear. Rather than interfering with aid, bombing schools and hospitals and detaining and torturing its people, the Syrian regime must heed the calls of its population, engage seriously the Special Envoy Pedersen and the UN-led political process, and achieve a peaceful end to the conflict.

Thank you, Mr President.

Severe flood warnings issued in parts of Greater Manchester as Storm Christoph brings more rain

News story

Two severe flood warnings have been issued, meaning there is a threat to life and significant disruption.



A flood warning sign on a closed country road

Heavy rain from Storm Christoph falling on already saturated ground has continued to affect parts of Greater Manchester and flooding is expected in East Didsbury, West Didsbury and Northenden.

Two severe flood warnings have been issued (as of 8pm, 20 January), meaning there is a threat to life and significant disruption. Flood warnings mean that flooding is expected, and flood alerts mean that flooding is possible. It is expected that numbers will continue to increase in the next 24 hours.

People living in the North West are being urged to prepare for the risk of significant flooding for the rest of this week. The public should sign up to flood warnings and check the latest safety advice as heavy downpours are likely to fall on saturated ground.

The Environment Agency is working with the emergency services to keep communities and people safe. Teams are operating flood defences, flood storage reservoirs and putting up temporary barriers where needed to help protect communities.

Sally Sudworth, Environment Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

More heavy rain falling on already saturated ground will bring significant surface and river water flooding in parts of Greater Manchester today, tomorrow (Thursday) and into the weekend, which could cause damage to buildings in some communities.

Environment Agency teams are out on the ground clearing grilles, screens, deploying temporary flood defences and closing flood barriers. We urge people to keep away from swollen rivers and not to drive through flood water – it is often deeper than it looks and just 30cm of flowing water is enough to float your car.

People should check their flood risk, sign up for free flood warnings and keep up to date with the latest situation at via [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) or follow [@EnvAgencyNW](https://twitter.com/EnvAgencyNW) on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

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