

COVID BAME HIGHLIGHT NOTICE

COVID-19 and minority ethnic groups: Understanding the reasons for vulnerability to COVID-19 and the differential social, cultural and economic impacts of the pandemic on minority ethnic groups

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, it has become clear that minority ethnic groups have been among the most vulnerable, both to the disease itself and to other harmful social, economic and other consequences stemming from the pandemic and its impacts. Research that explores the causes and dynamics of these vulnerabilities and impacts, and their ethical and broader socio-economic and cultural dimensions, is urgently required to build understanding of measures that might help mitigate poor outcomes. This is particularly important as the UK eases COVID-related restrictions and in the event of any resurgence of the disease nationally or in local “hotspots”.

To address these issues, this UKRI highlight notice calls for research to understand:

- the vulnerability of minority ethnic groups to COVID-19
- the emerging social, economic and cultural impacts of the pandemic on these groups.

Proposals are expected to **acknowledge the heterogeneity** of the UK’s minority ethnic populations and take this into account in the design of their proposals.

Proposals, which are strongly encouraged to be multidisciplinary consortium bids, must set out a **clear strategy for maximising the potential for knowledge exchange with policy makers, practitioners and with the UK’s minority ethnic communities**. This may include (but is not limited to) how findings might be put into practice to achieve better outcomes for all or specific minority ethnic groups through (for example) health interventions, policy recommendations, and other forms of impact. Projects should demonstrate an awareness of the need for strategies that mitigate the risk of proposed interventions exacerbating other inequalities elsewhere.

Proposals must define the project’s deliverables and outputs at 3, 6, 12 and 18 month milestones. This should include an explanation of how deliverables will provide or lead to benefit(s) relating to the health, social, economic, and cultural impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Research that is **co-designed and/or co-produced with members of minority ethnic** communities is particularly encouraged. While not all projects may be able to demonstrate this, opportunities for collaboration with members of minority ethnic groups should be maximised across the life-course of the research project as far as possible.

UKRI has funded a number of projects focussing on minority ethnic groups and COVID-19. This call aims to highlight the need for research in areas that have not been covered sufficiently to date. Details of all projects funded by UKRI to date can be found [here](#). Details of some projects specifically on the impact of COVID-19 within minority ethnic communities can be found [here](#). Applicants need to consider how their proposed work **complements existing UKRI investments** in this area. The webpages referenced above will be updated regularly and so applicants should continue to check these pages during the application process.

Scope

This highlight notice calls for research that focuses on exploring the range of influences and mechanisms likely to contribute to ethnic differences in COVID-related outcomes (including health, social, economic or cultural outcomes) and on urgently building understanding of what may mitigate these effects to achieve better outcomes for minority ethnic groups in the short and longer term. While we do not expect any individual proposal to necessarily cover all aspects of this call, **we strongly encourage multidisciplinary consortium bids that will be able to demonstrate significant breadth of coverage of these issues**. Further guidance on budget is available in the Guidance for Applicants section.

Applications proposing **comparative analyses** (including between UK nations and between the UK and other countries), which build on the migration histories and socioeconomic characteristics of diverse minority ethnic groups, are welcomed.

Applicants should consider how **existing data resources** (including but not limited to longitudinal population and other cohort studies, administrative and health data) offer potential to explore both physical and mental health vulnerabilities and the broader and longer-term impacts of the pandemic and the UK's response. These resources might be effectively augmented by **new data collection and/or by new data linkages**, permitting analysis across a wide range of domains (e.g. housing, employment, education, community services or healthcare settings) and allowing detailed exploration of the experiences of a diverse range of minority ethnic groups.

Areas of interest

The COVID-related outcomes in scope as the focus for this call are broad and include **social, economic, educational and health outcomes**. Factors that may **influence differences in these outcomes** for minority ethnic groups include, but are not limited to: economic and social factors (including employment, housing, education, income and wealth, welfare support); access to NHS health care; hereditary or other susceptibility to health conditions; social and cultural practices; behaviour; language; immigration status; historical and institutional processes and mechanisms including racism, conscious or unconscious bias and discrimination.

Proposals will need to show an awareness of the complex interplay between these factors, acknowledging the **intersectional nature of forms of exclusion and disadvantage**. We expect research to acknowledge these complexities in the design of recommendations and interventions that can be valuable in the short term. We also expect proposals to more precisely define the fundamental causes and risks that underpin the disadvantage of different minority ethnic groups. We anticipate that existing approaches and models will need to be expanded or updated, given the complex dynamics of institutional, structural and interpersonal racism and discrimination combined with wider social, economic and cultural influences. Additionally, proposals are encouraged to consider the role that the **resources, resilience, and agency of ethnic minority communities** (for example, religious values, familial structures, social/cultural cohesion and networks) in addition to focusing on the socioeconomic precarity and susceptibility to COVID.

The following illustrate the nature and range of areas within scope:

- **Housing and employment circumstances both influence an individual's likelihood of exposure to COVID**, and also interact with ethnicity. Further work is needed to understand this interaction, and to provide evidence with which to assess (for example) whether certain living or working conditions might warrant more nuanced approaches in the event of future COVID outbreaks and the return of social and economic restrictions. Research is needed to better

understand the impact of the pandemic on different employment sectors and how this will affect ethnic minority workers and their dependants.

- What ethnic differences are there in accessing **welfare benefits and support** which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic or on which the pandemic has had an impact? Difficulties accessing support are likely to mitigate against compliance with quarantines and lockdowns, as well as potentially affecting the ability to comply with wider social distancing measures.
- Research is needed on the consequences of the pandemic **for children and young people** from minority ethnic groups. Examples include research on educational access and schools, child poverty and impacts on employment prospects (especially for those transitioning into the job market or higher education) and on health.
- There is a need for research to understand the **trust of minority ethnic groups in institutions and authority figures** (including government and the police as well as schools, employers, media institutions, and health and care settings) and for culturally nuanced and sensitive research with the community groups through which many ethnic minorities encounter the system. Such research could aim to sustain adherence to test, track and isolate, and social distancing policies, especially in advance of any possible second or subsequent waves or outbreaks of COVID.
- Research is encouraged on **community mobilisation and resilience**, and the ways in which minority ethnic communities have mobilised to fill gaps in institutional support, particularly around collective expressions and ritual practices of mourning, grief and trauma.
- **Migrants** represent some of the most at-risk groups, including those affected by No Recourse to Public Funds. These raise important issues in their own right, as well as potentially affecting compliance with rules and guidelines in relation to the pandemic, health-seeking behaviours and healthcare/recovery in the event of infection.
- The **shift of NHS resources and attention away from chronic conditions** during the COVID pandemic may have had unintended impacts on individuals from ethnic minorities. We would like to understand how these impacts relate to differences in health-seeking behaviours within minority ethnic groups, both pre-COVID and now. There is a need to understand how these behaviours reflect knowledge, trust, and ease of access, among other factors in order to design suitable interventions around care pathways and comorbidities. The goal should be to improve care delivery and help individuals of minority ethnic backgrounds re-engage with their care before further outbreaks occur.
- There is a need to research the impact on minority ethnic groups of COVID outbreaks in **care homes** from the perspectives of both the workforce, residents and their respective families and communities.

Out of scope

The following would not be eligible for this call:

- Highly applied healthcare focussed proposals, for example focussed on care delivery for a specific disease.
- Proposals focussed on a specific geographic locale unless a framework for extrapolating broader lessons can be clearly articulated in the proposal.
- Exclusively internationally focussed proposals where no lessons can be drawn for the immediate or longer-term UK context.

- Proposals framed in terms of intersectionality more broadly – the primary focus for applications under this highlight must be ethnic minorities.
- Proposals submitted previously to either the UKRI rapid response call or UKRI/DHSC rolling call unless significantly revised and/or incorporated in new ways into other proposals.

Guidance for applicants

- UKRI's ambition is to fund one or two consortia in this area, with a combined value of up to £5m.
- The highlight notice will **close at midnight on 18 September 2020** and decisions will be taken within 6 weeks of that date after assessment by an interdisciplinary panel. If a proposal requires a more urgent decision then applicants can apply to the standard UKRI rapid response call.
- Co-design and co-production costs, including project partner costs, knowledge exchange and public engagement activities, should be included and clearly justified.
- Applicants should check the [list of funded grants](#) on the UKRI website before applying to check that your research is not duplicating existing projects funded through the call, and/or to clearly articulate differences between the proposal and existing funded projects.

How to apply

- Applicants should follow guidance for UKRI's Agile Research and Innovation Response to COVID-19 on the [UKRI website](#) for applying through Je-S from 31 July 2020. Applications submitted prior to 31 July will not be considered under this highlight notice.
- Please include the phrase 'COVID BAME highlight' at the beginning of your grant title so that we can identify it as a proposal to the highlight notice call.
- As there is a need to ensure complementarity and avoid overlap in urgent research funded on COVID-19, we may share information about applications received with other funders receiving proposals on this topic.