

Multi-million support for vulnerable children during COVID-19

Vulnerable children most at risk of neglect, violence or exploitation will benefit from extra support to keep them safe during the Coronavirus outbreak.

More than £12 million will be spent on 14 projects across the country to tackle the increased risk some children and young people are facing as they stay at home to reduce the spread of Coronavirus. This will include money to pay for individual support for families at risk of domestic abuse, community volunteers to work with families, and continued support for teenagers at risk of exploitation.

The money will benefit children in care and care leavers, and will be used to also support vulnerable children's mental health and to provide practical and emotional help. This includes a package of funding to give young people in some project areas unlimited data on their phones for three months so they can stay connected and prevent them suffering from isolation.

The funding builds on the Government's work to protect vulnerable children and young people's wellbeing, that includes working with schools, social workers and local authorities to encourage them to continue attending school wherever appropriate.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

I will always put the care and safety of vulnerable children first, especially at this time as they face unique challenges due to COVID-19. For many of these children, social distancing measures may present additional risks, whether from neglect or abuse at home or from strangers online.

We are working hand in hand with all the professionals supporting these children to prioritise their wellbeing during these unprecedented times. These new projects will prevent children suffering from isolation or exploitation as the country continues to respond to COVID-19.

The £12 million package includes work on:

- **Adolescent exploitation:**

For teenagers across North London who experience multiple risks, bringing together NHS, social care, police, criminal justice and third sector services under one roof – a “child house” to support children and families affected by child sexual abuse and exploitation

- **Domestic abuse support:**

Through a domestic abuse programme in Newham that works with whole families, to reduce the chances of it from happening in the first place through early intervention, and where a designated social worker will work intensively with families if risks escalate

- **Children in care:**

Various programmes around the country to build lasting support networks for children and families in the care system including foster parents, to prevent social isolation at this time, as well as finding homes for young people leaving care;

- **Mental health support:**

Families in Camden will receive a range of services from which families choose the ones they want to rely on, including mediation, mentoring, family therapy and youth support

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families Isabelle Trowler said:

It's never been more important for children and their families to receive the support they need. In the true spirit of dedicated public service it is so heartening to see these projects adapting and continuing to deliver services in times of unprecedented challenge.

Education is a strong protective factor for many vulnerable children and young people, which is why the Government is also ensuring there is a place in nursery, school or college for them.

Alongside this, the Government has also set out significant support for services benefitting these young people and their families, including:

- Additional funding of £3.2 billion for local authorities, helping them meet additional demands including within children's social care services at this time;
- £1.6 million to expand and promote the NSPCC's helpline, offering advice and support on how to raise concerns about children at risk;
- £8 million from the [Adoption Support Fund](#) to help families under pressure as a result of the outbreak;
- Better data sharing between all safeguarding partners, making sure the NHS, police, social workers, school nurses and health workers have the information they need to protect children at risk of abuse;
- New teams of Department for Education and Ofsted staff leading work around the country to gather data on vulnerable children's attendance at school or other settings, providing a overall picture of the risks

facing these children so that councils can follow best practice;

- Tackling the barriers that many of them face, providing laptops and tablets for children with social workers and care leavers to help them keep in touch with the services they need;
- Providing continued funding for free school meals, so that eligible children benefit from this even if they are not in school; and
- More than £33 million for the Staying Put programme, supporting young people leaving care to continue living with their foster parents past age 18 and preventing the risk of becoming homeless, and a further £9 million to provide personal adviser support for care leavers through to 25, helping them into employment, education and training.

This comes after the Education Secretary asked local authorities to ensure that no one has to leave care during this difficult time.

Part of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, the funding announced today builds on investment worth almost £270 million since 2014, driving innovation and sharing best practice to improve outcomes for children by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of children's social care services.

Response to 9 April direction from Secretary of State for Education

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

£17m government package to protect freight routes to Northern Ireland

- New scheme will support ferry operators on 5 routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- UK government continues to work closely with NI Executive and the aviation industry to agree funding to protect air passenger services between NI and GB

Vital ferry routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland have been safeguarded, thanks to a multi-million-pound government scheme to help ensure critical freight can continue to move into and across the Union.

The package, worth up to £17 million, is being funded by the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive and will be made available to operators so that they can continue running freight services on five sea routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today that further funding, worth tens of millions of pounds, will also be made available to support more routes across the UK, subject to discussions with operators.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Essential supplies are continuing to flow well, but operators are facing challenges as fewer people travelling means less capacity to move goods.

Today's action will help ensure we have the freight capacity we need across the UK. This funding will help ferry operators protect our supply chain and maintain the flow of critical goods across the Irish Sea and throughout the Union.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, said:

This is excellent news for Northern Ireland and the connectivity of the entire United Kingdom.

Although this coronavirus outbreak has reduced travel demand, this support package from the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive will ensure that essential ferry routes are kept open and vital transport links across the entire UK are safeguarded – guaranteeing the continued supply of critical goods, such as food and medical supplies.

I am pleased that a further support package is also being developed to help ensure crucial air passenger services to and from London, Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport are maintained. And we will continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland

Executive to help deliver that.

In addition to the funding announced today, the Department for Transport is working closely with the wider transport sector and devolved administrations to monitor the situation on air routes which are vital in helping maintain transport links across the union.

The Secretary of State for Transport also confirmed that the Department has been working with the Northern Ireland Executive to develop a support package which will ensure passenger flights from Belfast and Derry-Londonderry, to Great Britain are maintained during the pandemic.

The Department is in discussions with the relevant airlines, airports and the Northern Ireland Executive to finalise this package guaranteeing lifeline air passenger services remain in operation.

All operators on the following 5 routes between GB-NI are in the scope of this scheme:

- Cairnryan-Larne
- Heysham-Warrenpoint
- Heysham – Belfast
- Liverpool – Belfast
- Cairnryan-Belfast

The funding package for maritime freight services to Northern Ireland is for up to 2 months. It is time-limited to help maintain services during the Covid-19 crisis. It will be made available only to roll-on, roll-off freight operators, which move freight by transporting haulage vehicles across sea routes.

[Ramadan message from the British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia](#)

World news story

On the occasion of the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan, the British Ambassador sends his warmest wishes to Muslims across Saudi Arabia and the world.



British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Neil Crompton, in his message said:

In the coming weeks, Muslims in Saudi Arabia and around the world will mark the Holy Month of Ramadan. This is my first Ramadan as British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. It is a time for fasting, prayer, charity and family gatherings. I was looking forward to meeting and hosting Saudi friends over iftar and suhoour.

But this Ramadan will be different from any before, as we all face a new threat. This is a time when the festivities are replaced by concerns for our loved ones and we have to adapt to a strange and unique situation. At this time, I find it helpful to take inspiration from the spirit of Ramadan.

I am inspired by stories of people looking out for one another, and sharing with those less fortunate. Ramadan is a time to reflect and pray for peace and coexistence. And to remember those in conflict zones, displaced or homeless, without essential medical and healthcare facilities.

As Ramadan starts, I want to thank all those who are working to battle coronavirus here and around the world to keep us safe.

Let us have faith and remain hopeful for future celebrations when we will be reunited with family and loved ones. At the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, I am pleased to extend my warmest wishes to the people of Saudi Arabia, and all those observing Ramadan. Ramadan Karim.

Published 24 April 2020

Prioritising peace and cooperation in the Middle East in the midst of COVID-19

Mr President, as others have said this morning, COVID-19 is a global crisis with testing implications for us all. The virus does not respect borders, nor political, cultural or religious differences. Cooperation must therefore be our first instinct and we should work to combat this unprecedented challenge together.

We therefore welcome the formation of a national unity government by Israel. This is an important step, demonstrating the need to put political differences aside in the fight against COVID-19.

We continue to welcome the ongoing cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Government of Israel in their respective responses. This is an example of the responsible approach we need at this difficult time, and particularly in the spirit of the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

The UN has played an important part in ensuring ongoing coordination between the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the UN agencies, and we hope this will continue.

It is clear that UNWRA has an important role to play in helping to respond to the crisis brought about by COVID-19. The virus and its impact on Palestinians and basic services will put additional pressure on UNWRA. The UK remains firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, providing over \$80 million for 2019/2020. And we are reviewing our contributions in the light of the COVID-19 challenge.

And the UK is also providing vital support to help respond to COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Our \$1 million funding contribution will enable the World Health Organisation and UNICEF to purchase and coordinate the medical supplies, treat critical care patients, train frontline public health servants and scale up laboratory testing capability.

We must also be mindful of the impact of the virus on the Palestinian economy and economic development. The Palestinian Authority's revenues, which come mostly from levies on trade, are expected to decline by between 60 and 70% as a result of the crisis. The Occupied Palestinian Territories are excluded from most international mechanisms, including the World Bank's \$14 billion COVID-19 fund. The Palestinian Authority does not issue a currency and cannot adopt the measures many countries are taking to increase liquidity.

We welcome the Palestinian Authority's emergency budget and Israeli agreement to guarantee minimum levels of monthly revenue. And we look to Israel to ensure that the Palestinian economy is permitted to function and to support

the Palestinian Authority's economic stability.

During this fragile period we call on both parties to avoid any provocative action, which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical. This includes incitement, settlement activity, demolitions and settler violence.

The UK is particularly concerned that demolitions have continued, including of temporary health centres, which weaken the capacity of Palestinians to respond to COVID-19. Under International Humanitarian Law, an occupying power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the occupied territory to the fullest extent of the means available to it. That is why continued cooperation is so vital.

It is also with regret that we have heard about the deaths of two Palestinians who were shot by Israeli forces during clashes near Nablus in March. It is important that Israel Defense Forces investigate in an independent and transparent manner, and if any wrongdoing is found, that those responsible are held to account.

Finally, we are deeply concerned by reports that the new Israeli government coalition has reached an agreement which paves the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and would be contrary to international law.

Mr President, the United Kingdom's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process has not changed. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Thank you, Mr President.