

Community Life COVID-19 Re-contact Survey

Headline measures

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Contents

[Contents 1](#_Toc54701587)

[1. Introduction 2](#_Toc54701588)

[1.1 Aims and objectives 2](#_Toc54701589)

[1.2 Methodology and fieldwork 2](#_Toc54701590)

[1.3 Limitations and interpretation 3](#_Toc54701591)

[2. Research Findings 5](#_Toc54701592)

[2.1 Volunteering 5](#_Toc54701593)

[2.2 Neighbourhood and community 8](#_Toc54701594)

[Appendix A – Technical summary 10](#_Toc54701595)

# Introduction

## Aims and objectives

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned the Community Life COVID-19 Re-contact Survey (CLRS) to provide data on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected volunteering, charitable giving, social cohesion, wellbeing and loneliness in England. The aim of the survey was to provide an insight into the dynamics of change between the period before the COVID-19 pandemic and the period during the pandemic.

The CLRS is a follow-up to the Community Life Survey (CLS), an annual household self-completion survey of adults aged 16+ in England. The CLS provides nationally representative data on social cohesion, community engagement and social action.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This headline measures report provides cross-sectional analysis on a subset of new and adapted questions included in the re-contact survey, covering formal volunteering, informal volunteering, and neighbourhood and community behaviours. The main report, due to be published in December 2020, will provide analysis of gross change between the pre COVID-19 pandemic period and the period during the pandemic. The main report will build on the areas covered here, and will also cover charitable giving, wellbeing and loneliness measures.

## Methodology and fieldwork

The principal value of this research is that it provides data from the same person at two time-points. This provides an insight into the dynamics of change between the pre COVID-19 pandemic period and July 2020 (the time of the CLRS fieldwork). The large CLS samples, which collect data on volunteering, giving, civic action, and social attitudes provided a unique opportunity to understand what happens to these behaviours and attitudes during an unusual national crisis.

While the annual CLS can be used to make comparisons between two time-points, it cannot demonstrate change among sub-populations whose composition is more unstable. For example, someone who is classified as a volunteer at one moment in time might not be at another if they stop volunteering. The net number of volunteers in the population may be the same at two time points but could be compositionally different. The annual surveys are cross-sectional and can therefore only detect this net level of change.[[2]](#footnote-2) They cannot detect gross level of change. The CLRS, based on a longitudinal sample, provides an opportunity to do so, delivering complementary data to the annual survey at a critical time. In addition, the CLRS questionnaire contains a number of questions relating specifically to COVID-19.

This headline measures report presents cross-sectional analysis on a subset of new and adapted questions included in the re-contact survey, covering formal volunteering, informal volunteering, and neighbourhood and community behaviours.[[3]](#footnote-3) The full report will present analysis on gross and net change.

A more detailed summary of the CLRS methodology can be found in Appendix A. Further information on the annual CLS methodology can be found in the CLS Technical Report 2019/20.[[4]](#footnote-4)

### Government guidance during fieldwork

To help place the findings in context it is important to understand the restrictions in place during the fieldwork period.

Fieldwork took place in July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, just as lockdown restrictions were starting to ease. Previous lockdown restrictions were relaxed under the Health Protection Regulations 2020 on 4th July, allowing almost all non-essential public facing businesses to re-open over the course of the month (by 24th July). Travel was no longer restricted, although social distancing rules remained in effect. Mask use was required in more settings over the course of the month, becoming mandatory in shops on the 24th July. Fieldwork for the CLRS closed on the 26th July.

Furthermore, a number of questions included in the CLRS asked respondents to think about the last four months; therefore respondents who completed the survey on the first day of fieldwork were asked to think back to the 7th March 2020. The government in England advised social distancing over the course of March, declaring a full lockdown on the 23rd March which lasted for six weeks and restricted most activity outside the home. The period from mid-May to the end of June included a gradual lifting of national lockdown restrictions, for example the opening up of the hospitality sector, to allow for increased movement, interaction, and commercial activity, combined with local lockdowns to address new outbreaks.

## Limitations and interpretation

It is important to note that respondents were invited to complete the CLRS online or via telephone, while the CLS invited respondents to complete online or via paper questionnaire. Telephone interviewing was used over paper questionnaires as it was important to complete fieldwork for the CLRS in as narrow a timeframe as possible (given the dynamics of the pandemic). Sending out paper questionnaires and waiting for their return would have extended fieldwork considerably relative to telephone interviewing.

The reference period for a number of key measures was amended from the original twelve month reference period (included in the annual CLS) to four months.[[5]](#footnote-5) This means that respondents were asked to recall their activities and behaviours over a shorter period of time in the CLRS than in the CLS. Consequently, some volunteering measures covered in this report are not directly comparable with their CLS counterparts. As the CLRS reference period (four months) is shorter than the CLS reference period (twelve months), the CLRS will not identify those who volunteered very infrequently, that is less than once every four months but at least once in the last twelve months, leading to a risk of under-representing infrequent volunteers and over-representing non-volunteers. This limitation affects measures covering overall rates of volunteering, but not those covering monthly rates of volunteering.

This report focusses on the cross-sectional analysis of key measures from the CLRS, which can be used to provide a snapshot view of what happened in England between the 7th March and 26th July 2020. Analysis on gross and net change will be presented in the full report.

 The tables refer to the percentage for any given measure. Confidence intervals are included and are referred to as the ‘upper estimate’ and ‘lower estimate’. The upper and lower estimates have been calculated using a 95% confidence interval. This means that if the survey was conducted 100 times, a finding of the same nature would be found in at least 95 cases.

# Research Findings

All findings are presented as percentages among adults (16+) in England.

## Volunteering

### Formal volunteering

In the Community Life COVID-19 Re-contact Survey (CLRS), formal volunteering refers to those who have given unpaid help to groups or clubs, for example, leading a group, providing administrative support or befriending or mentoring people.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The headline measures for formal volunteering are listed below. Findings are based on all respondents.

* In the last four months, 27% of respondents reported taking part in formal volunteering at least once.
* Over the same period, 21% of respondents reported participating in formal volunteering at least once a month.

Respondents were also asked about their participation in formal volunteering in the last four months that involved helping people affected by COVID-19 or associated restrictions. Findings are based on all respondents, not just those who had taken part in some form of formal volunteering.

* Overall, 13% of respondents reported taking part in formal volunteering in the last four months that specifically related to helping people affected by COVID-19 or associated restrictions.
* Seven percent of respondents said that they signed up to do new formal volunteering activities since the COVID-19 outbreak.
* Six percent of respondents reported doing formal COVID-19 related volunteering in the last four months, which was organised through an independent local community group such as mutual aid groups, community forums or neighbourhood groups.
* Around half (53%) of respondents said they would like to start volunteering, spend more time volunteering or continue to volunteer formally when COVID-19 restrictions end and life starts getting back to normal.

Table 1.1 Participation in formal volunteering

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Estimate** | **95% Confidence Interval** |
| **Lower** | **Higher** |
| **Participation in formal volunteering at least once in the last four months** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 27% | 25% | 29% |
| No | 73% | 71% | 75% |
| **Participation in formal volunteering at least once a month in the last four months** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 21% | 19% | 23% |
| No | 79% | 77% | 81% |
| **Participation in formal volunteering in the last four months specifically related to helping people affected by coronavirus or current restrictions associated with this** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 13% | 11% | 14% |
| No | 87% | 86% | 89% |
| **Participation in new formal volunteering, since the coronavirus outbreak, in the last four months that specifically related to helping people affected by coronavirus**  |  |  |  |
| Yes | 7% | 6% | 8% |
| No | 93% | 92% | 94% |
| **Participation in formal volunteering in the last four months, specifically related to helping people affected by coronavirus current restrictions which was organised through an independent local community group (e.g. mutual aid group, community forum, neighbourhood group)** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 6% | 5% | 7% |
| No | 94% | 93% | 95% |
| **Whether respondents would like to spend (more) time helping groups\*** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 53% | 51% | 55% |
| No | 47% | 45% | 49% |

Base: All respondents – 2,812

\*Base: All respondents (excluding don’t know responses) – 2,788

### Informal volunteering

In the CLRS, informal volunteering refers to those who have given unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Please note that there may be a degree of overlap between formal and informal volunteers, so it is important not to conflate the separate measures.

The headline measures for informal volunteering are listed below. Findings are based on all respondents.

* In the last four months, 57% of respondents reported taking part in informal volunteering at least once.
* Over the same period, 47% of respondents reported participating in informal volunteering on a regular basis, defined as at least once a month.

Respondents were also asked about participation in informal volunteering over the last four months that involved helping people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic or associated restrictions. Findings are based on all respondents, not just those who had taken part in some form of informal volunteering.

* Three in ten (30%) respondents reported taking part in informal volunteering in the last four months that specifically related to helping people affected by COVID-19 or associated restrictions.
* Around two in ten (21%) respondents said that they signed up to these informal volunteering activities since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Table 1.2 Participation in informal volunteering

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Estimate** | **95% Confidence Interval** |
| **Lower** | **Higher** |
| **Participation in informal volunteering at least once in the last four months** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 57% | 54% | 59% |
| No | 43% | 41% | 46% |
| **Participation in informal volunteering at least once a month in the last four months** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 47% | 45% | 50% |
| No | 53% | 50% | 55% |
| **Participation in informal volunteering in the last four months specifically related to helping people affected by coronavirus or current restrictions** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 30% | 28% | 32% |
| No | 70% | 68% | 72% |
| **Participation in new informal volunteering, since the coronavirus outbreak, in the last four months specifically related helping people affected by coronavirus**  |  |  |  |
| Yes | 21% | 19% | 23% |
| No | 79% | 77% | 81% |

Base: All respondents – 2,812

## Neighbourhood and community

The headline measures on people’s views and experiences of their neighbourhood and local area are listed below.[[8]](#footnote-8)

* Half (50%) of respondents said that people in their local area are doing more things to help others since the start of the virus outbreak, while 43% said there has been no change, and six percent said people are doing less since the start of the virus outbreak to help others. Findings are based on all respondents.
* Within the last four months, 37% of respondents who had used the internet stated they had participated in online community activities (e.g. as part of an online community group, online chat group, street or neighbourhood social media or WhatsApp group), with nine percent stating they did so every day or most days.

Table 2.1 Neighbourhood and Community experience

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Estimate** | **95% Confidence Interval** |
| **Lower** | **Higher** |
| **Whether respondents think people are doing things to help others more, about the same, or less since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak** |  |  |  |
| More | 50% | 48% | 53% |
| About the same | 43% | 41% | 46% |
| Less | 6% | 5% | 8% |
| **Participation in online community activities in the last four months \*** |  |  |  |
| Yes | 37% | 35% | 39% |
| No | 63% | 61% | 65% |

Base: All respondents (excluding don’t know and refused responses) – 2,756

\*Base: All respondents who use the internet (excluding not applicable responses) – 2,740

# Appendix A – Technical summary

### Sampling

The CLRS used a mixed-mode approach to maximise coverage of the re-contact population. Data was collected through online self-completion questionnaires and telephone interviews. The sample for the CLRS was drawn from respondents who participated in the CLS from July 2018 to February 2020. Fieldwork for the CLS is split into four quarters, with each quarter divided into two batches. Fieldwork for the first batch begins at the start of the quarter, and the second begins midway through the quarter. The sample frame for the CLRS included:

* 2018-19 CLS quarters two to four
* 2019-20 CLS quarters one to three and batch one of quarter four.

This comprised 17,209 respondents in total. Of these, 7,435 (43%) had agreed to be re-contacted for related additional research, so long as it was for DCMS and carried out by Kantar.

Overall, 916 cases were removed from the sample due to duplication or missing contact information.[[9]](#footnote-9) Consequently, 6,519 cases were issued for the CLRS.

Subsets of the 6,519 cases also provided an email address (4,027) or a telephone number (3,160) to add to the postal address. The sample of 6,519 was divided into four groups, with different recruitment approaches. The make-up of the four groups was determined by: the contact details provided, the mode of completion of their original CLS interview, and online proficiency levels. The four groups were:

* **Group 1 (online):** Consisted of 4,027 respondents who completed their original interview online and gave a valid email address. These respondents were sent an email invitation to take part in the survey online. A reminder email was sent to non-responders (2,746) three days after the initial invite.
* **Group 2 (online, with telephone follow-up):** Consisted of 762 respondents who completed their original interview online but did not provide a valid email address. These respondents were sent a letter invitation to take part online. Respondents with a valid telephone number who had not completed after a week were invited to take part via telephone instead.
* **Group 3 (telephone):** Consisted of 1,299 respondents who completed their original interview via paper questionnaire and provided a valid telephone number. These respondents were issued to telephone and did not receive any prior correspondence.
* **Group 4 (online):** Consisted of 431 respondents who completed their original interview via paper questionnaire, did not provide a valid telephone number, and were deemed to be proficient online. These respondents were sent a letter invitation to take part in the survey online.

### Questionnaire

The CLRS questionnaire largely replicated the annual CLS questionnaire and included the following eight sections:[[10]](#footnote-10)

* Opening demographics
* Social contact and neighbourhood
* Formal volunteering
* Informal volunteering
* Charitable giving (web survey only)
* Wellbeing and loneliness
* Closing demographics
* End of interview admin.

Seven new questions were developed to capture respondents’ behaviours in relation to COVID-19, and four new questions were added to the demographics section at the end of the questionnaire to capture any economic change as a result of COVID-19. It was important to keep the terminology of any new questions as generic as possible to account for any law or guidance changes throughout the fieldwork period.

For example, the questions on formal and informal volunteering were adapted so they asked about the time period when restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were put in place. The original questions in the CLS had a reference period of twelve months, while the CLRS had a reference period of four months.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The term ‘coronavirus’ was used rather than ‘COVID-19’ in the survey. This terminology was used as it is more widely recognised by the public and is used in media reporting of the pandemic.

A number of questions from the annual CLS were not included in the CLRS in order to keep the average questionnaire length to 15 minutes. A small number of new questions were added to capture behaviours specifically related to COVID-19, for example whether people volunteered to help people affected by the pandemic. A full copy of the CLRS questionnaire can be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

### Fieldwork

Fieldwork for the CLRS ran from 7th July through to 26th July 2020. In total, 6,519 cases were issued, and 2,812 questionnaires were completed, representing a 43% conversion rate. Of these, 2,469 (88%) were completed online and 343 (12%) by telephone.

Conversion rates were higher for respondents who completed their original CLS interview more recently, ranging from 33% (2018-19 Q2) to 56% (2019-20 Q4). This reflects erosion over time in the accuracy of contact details but also a possible lag effect where respondents have lower ‘commitment’ to do additional research due to the longer interval between contacts.

The gross response rate (conditional on having completed the CLS questionnaire in the eligible timeframe) was 16%.

The left three types of attrition (84%) between the CLS and the CLRS:

* Refused to be re-contacted about additional research when completing the original survey (57%)
* Non-provision of either an email address or a full name (5%), and
* Survey non-response (22%).

Non-response to the CLS should also be taken into account when evaluating the CLRS respondent sample.

The weighted CLS response rate from the period covering July 2018 through to February 2020 inclusive was 20%. Therefore, the total CLRS response rate was approximately three percent therefore 16% of the original 20% CLS response rate.

Although this is low, the availability of highly relevant CLS data for both the CLRS respondents and non-respondents allows for a sophisticated weighting protocol. This substantially reduces the risk of additional bias, despite the sharp reduction in response rate from 20% (CLS) to three percent (CLRS).

### Weighting

In total, 2,812 questionnaires were completed and passed a quality control test.[[12]](#footnote-12) The majority 2,469 (88%) completed the survey online, and 343 (12%) by telephone interview. The data was weighted to compensate for net attrition between the CLS and the CLRS. The weights ensure that the CLRS respondent profile matches that of the CLS with respect to the full range of characteristics recorded in the CLS, both demographic and topical, as outlined below. A separate weight was also computed for online responders because some items within the CLRS questionnaire were not included in the telephone version.

Attrition weight

To compensate for attrition between the CLS and CLRS the respondents’ CLS weight was divided by their estimated conditional probability of subsequent response to the CLRS (mean (either mode) = 16%). The conditional probability of subsequent response was estimated using a logistic regression model with nine predictor variables selected via an iterative process. These variables comprised CLS reports of (i) involvement in civic action, (ii) involvement in formal volunteering, (iii) frequency of internet use, (iv) ethnicity, (v) provision of informal help to others, (vi) charity donation, (vii) region, (viii) highest educational qualification, and (ix) sex/age category. Some trimming of outlier attrition weights was done to improve statistical efficiency.

For the cross-sectional analyses featured in this report, the attrition weight was further refined to ensure that the weighted CLRS respondent sample matched the current population distribution on the same range of dimensions as used for the standard CLS. The same generalised linear model-based method was used for this calibration as for the CLS.[[13]](#footnote-13)

1. For further information on the annual Community Life Survey, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-201920> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, the net change would be 0% if 20% of people volunteered in the original CLS and 20% volunteered in the CLRS. The people who volunteered at both waves may be different. The gross change would be 0% if the same people volunteered at both waves, but 100% if the same people volunteered at one wave but not the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cross-sectional analysis involves looking at data from the relevant population at a specific point in time, in this case people in England during July 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899706/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_-_2019-20.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The possible reference period of the CLRS covered the 7th March to the 26th July. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The annual Community Life Survey uses the same definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The annual Community Life Survey uses the same definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Neighbourhood is defined as the area within a few minutes walking distance from your home. This definition is used in the CLRS and the annual Community Life Survey. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Anyone who did not provide at least one of the following in the national CLS were removed from the sample: An email address or full name. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A copy of the annual Community Life Survey’s online questionnaire can be found in Appendix A of the Community Life 2019-20 technical report: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899706/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_-_2019-20.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, the question on formal volunteering in the CLS asked respondents to consider the last 12 months:

“In the last 12 months, how often have you helped [this/these] group(s), club(s) or organisation(s)?

Respondents in the CLRS were asked to consider the last 4 months:

“In the last four months, how often have you helped [this/these] group(s), club(s) or organisation(s)?” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 131 cases were removed following a quality control test looking at sex and age; one case was removed for completing both online and via telephone. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For further information on the GLM-based method, please see Chapter 7 of the Community Life 2019-20 technical report: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899706/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_-_2019-20.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)