At Home in London During COVID-19

Policy recommendations and key findings

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Stay Home Stories

This report presents policy recommendations and key findings from the project '"Stay Home": Rethinking the Domestic in the COVID-19 pandemic' ('Stay Home Stories'), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation rapid response to COVID-19.

This project is based at the Centre for Studies of Home, a partnership between Queen Mary University of London and the Museum of the Home. It has been led and conducted by researchers at Queen Mary University of London and University of Liverpool in partnership with the Museum of the Home, National Museums Liverpool and the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers).

www.stayhomestories.co.uk

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Front cover image: Thames Ink by Amber Perrier, completed during lockdown. Reproduced with permission from the artist.
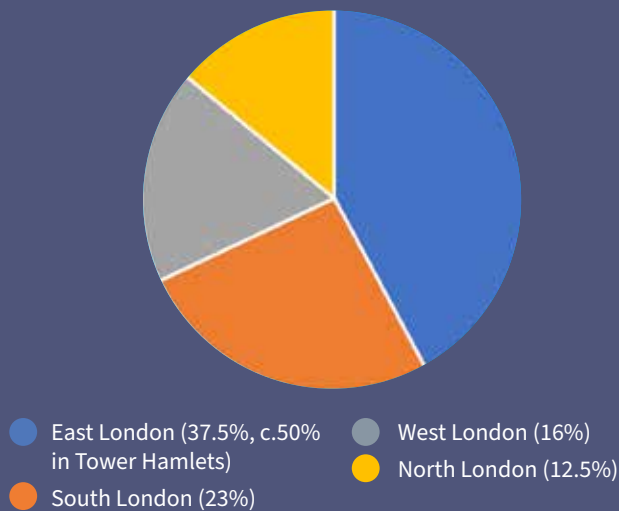
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Hackney Council coronavirus warning. Photograph by duncan c on Flickr, Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC 2.0)

1. Introduction

This report provides **policy recommendations, key findings** and **personal testimony** about people's diverse experiences of home in London during the COVID-19 pandemic. It outlines the impact of COVID-19 on London before focusing on: home and housing; living in a hostile environment; religion and home; and access to green space.

Figure 1: Location of Participants

- East London (37.5%, c.50% in Tower Hamlets)
- South London (23%)
- West London (16%)
- North London (12.5%)

All pie charts in the report are for 57 interviewees and do not include some of those interviewed because of their work in migrant, community and faith organizations.

The report draws on interviews with **67 Londoners** from a range of ages, ethnicities, faiths and migration backgrounds conducted as part of the 'Stay Home Stories' project. It also features a selection of maps by children in London in Key Stage 2 (aged 7-11) depicting their lives under lockdown, which were submitted as part of the UK-wide 'mapping home' strand of the project (see Brace, 2021, Endfield and Waldock, 2021, and Waldock, 2021 and our **online gallery of maps**).

Interviews were carried out by postdoctoral researchers Dr Miri Lawrence and Dr Annabelle Wilkins and by community researchers based in London: Abigail Agyemang, Yasmin Aktar, Julie Begum, Filiz Emre, Sheekeba Nasimi, and Kay Stephens. Our participants included 43 women, 22 men, one trans and one non-binary person aged from 18 to 73. They came from a wide range of communities and backgrounds, including **African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Brazilian, Chinese, Congolese, Filipino, Ghanaian, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Nigerian, Singaporean, South African, Sri Lankan, Turkish, Vietnamese and mixed heritage** and lived across London (see Figure 1).

Participants worked in a wide variety of sectors, including charity work, creative arts and design, education, energy, health and social care, hospitality and religion. Some participants worked from home or were furloughed during the pandemic, whilst others, including keyworkers, continued to work beyond the home. Some participants have lived in London for all or most of their lives, whilst others have moved to the city more recently. Participants lived in a variety of housing types (including terraced, semi-detached and detached houses, flats, and student accommodation) and tenures (including social housing, rented and privately owned accommodation). Some faith leaders lived in housing attached to their place of worship. Participants lived in a range of household and family arrangements, with some in single-person households and others living with family members or others such as flatmates (see the section on housing and home for further information). Faith was important to those of our participants who identified as **Buddhist, Christian (Anglican, Anglo-Catholic, Baptist, Black Majority Church, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witness, Quaker and Roman Catholic), Hindu, Jain, Jewish (Liberal, Orthodox), Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian.**

'Stay Home Stories' is a collaborative research project in partnership between Queen Mary University of London, University of Liverpool, the Museum of the Home[1], National Museums Liverpool and the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers). Other project outputs – all available at **www.stayhomestories.co.uk** – include a report entitled 'At Home in Liverpool During COVID-19' (Burrell et al. 2021), short films, podcasts, an online gallery of maps, learning resources, and blog posts. Future outputs include policy reports on the impact of the pandemic on artists, museums, and access to open space and an interfaith toolkit about lessons learned from the pandemic.

Reports	**Burrell et al.** (2021) At Home in Liverpool During COVID-19, QMUL: London
Films	**Eid Textile Tales**, with Praxis, a charity for migrants and refugees
	Our Home, Our Stories, with project artist-in-residence Alaa Alsaraji
	My Place, My Space, with Write Back, a charity working with young people in Barking and Dagenham
Podcasts	**Episode 1:** Museum of the Home 'Stay Home' Collection
	Episode 2: Religious belief and practice at home during the COVID-19 pandemic
	Episode 3: Migration, COVID-19 and community support in London and Liverpool
Online gallery	**Maps** submitted by children and young people aged 7-16
Teaching resources	**Stay Home teaching resources** for KS1 and 2
Blog posts	**Blog posts** across the work of the Stay Home Stories project

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1   The Stay Home Stories project has been taking place at the same time as ongoing protests about the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye on the buildings of the Museum of the Home. See the project website for a blog post about the impact of the statue on the project, links to other resources, and the current position of the Museum's trustees.

Policy recommendations

- Recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 should address long-term housing inequality and precarity in London.

- Future housing policies and developments should prioritise adequate space for home-working and access to domestic and/or neighbourhood green spaces.

- Any future stay home directives should support the needs of single-person households, LGBTQ+ families and dual-household families. Increased support should be provided for people in poor quality and/or overcrowded housing and for vulnerable households.

- Community, migrant-led and faith organizations have provided vital local support during the pandemic and are key for post-pandemic recovery. We recommend:

- (i) strengthening coordination, communication and consultation between government and on-the-ground organizations;

- (ii) prioritizing core funding for translation services and digital training and access;

- (iii) creating structures within and across community and faith groups to support leaders, particularly those working primarily alone.

- The inability to say goodbye, mourn and honour the rituals and traditions surrounding death and dying need to be addressed. We recommend the formation of a working party to develop ongoing pastoral support and memorial practices for all faith groups and none.

- Access to green spaces has been vital for well-being, social connection and belonging. We recommend:

- (i) foregrounding access to green spaces within policies on physical and mental health, neighbourhood cohesion and children's welfare;

- (ii) making parks and other green spaces safe, welcoming and accessible for all;

- (iii) building on improved environmental competencies to deepen children and young people's learning about local places.

- To address the digital divide for children and young people and recognize the importance of personal spaces at and close to home, including green spaces, for their well-being.

Key findings

Housing and home

- Participants' experiences of home during COVID-19 were shaped by their housing conditions and (in)security of tenure. These circumstances are related to wider inequalities in housing in London.

- People in overcrowded housing conditions experienced difficulties in combining work, education, care and leisure activities. The lack of space often caused tensions within family and household relationships.

- People in precarious housing described feelings of isolation and did not feel that the home was a safe or secure place during the pandemic.

- People living alone were particularly vulnerable to loneliness during lockdowns. While people living with family members or friends faced different challenges, they often emphasised the home as a place of care and support.

- Neighbourhood networks and community organisations offered crucial support throughout the pandemic, and involvement in voluntary activities helped people to feel more at home in the community. However, access to support, amenities and opportunities to participate are also impacted by long-standing inequalities.

Living in a hostile environment

- Popular and (social) media responses to COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing racial tensions, and triggered new anti-Asian racist abuse.

- The pandemic had an immediate and negative impact on administrative and logistical migrant support services, making it more difficult to reach and help those most in need. However, civil society organisations, migrant-led organisations and faith groups provided vital support to migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum. These organisations were well-placed to understand the needs of migrant and minority ethnic populations, but often lacked capacity and resources.

- 'Hostile' or 'compliant environment' immigration regime regulations left the most vulnerable in society especially exposed to the worst dangers of the pandemic.

- These factors deepened an already entrenched mistrust of the police, the NHS and other authorities among some migrant and ethnic minority populations, impacting on the reach of government communication and health initiatives and access to health services when required.

Religion and home

- Faith organizations have provided vital local support but had uneven access to technical resources and skills when worship moved online. Lack of funding for technical resources and training posed a risk of closure for some faith communities.

- The most difficult outcome of the pandemic has been coping with death and mourning when people have been unable to visit their loved ones, say goodbye, attend funerals or receive face-to-face pastoral support.

- Faith leaders reported that supporting their communities, particularly in their pastoral role, has come at a great personal cost. Some retired early or changed jobs because of tiredness and stress. Few had support structures in place, especially lone faith leaders.

- Despite these challenges, online religious worship during the pandemic provides examples of resourcefulness, creativity and inclusivity.

Access to green space

- Access to outside – and particularly green – space has (i) improved physical and mental health and well-being; (ii) deepened neighbourhood, social and family connections; and (iii) enhanced local environmental competencies and a sense of place, including for children and young people.

- Uneven access to green space (whether private gardens or public spaces) reflects wider structural inequalities. Parks, for example, are neither accessible nor able to offer sanctuary for everyone.

- Maps by children and young people reveal their resilience in finding and creating 'special places' within the home (including gardens and other green outdoor spaces) to express spatial autonomy.

2. London during COVID-19

London has been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. At the time of writing in August 2022, over 3 million cases of COVID-19 have been identified in London since March 2020, comprising 15.4 percent of the total number of cases in England (GLA, 2022). The pandemic has had devastating human costs, with almost 24,000 deaths in London due to COVID-19 (UK Government, 2022)[2].
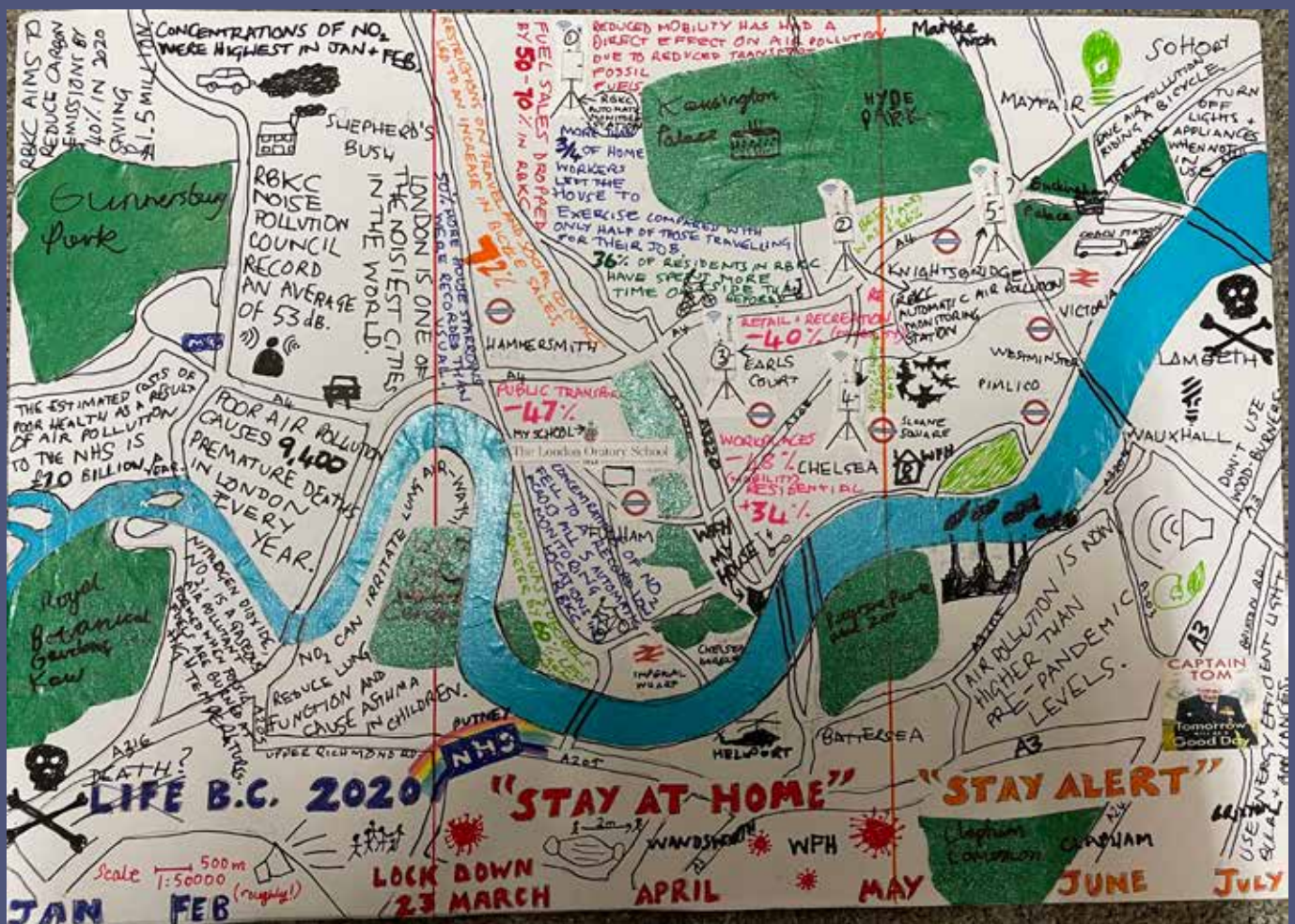
This detailed map by James shows a time-line and changes from pre-pandemic 'life B.C. 2020,' through 'Stay at Home' under lockdown, to the 'Stay Alert' phase. These changes include the changing levels of air pollution and air quality through the three phases of the pandemic, noting the cleansing effect of lockdown and high levels of pollution in the 'Stay Alert' phase that exceed pre-pandemic levels. Images of a skull and cross bones in the far right and bottom left of the map point to the perceptions of danger.

2   Defined in terms of deaths with COVID-19 on the death certificate.

After adjusting for differences in age, London had the highest regional COVID-19 mortality rate in the UK in 2021 (see Figure 2).

- London's age-adjusted COVID-19 mortality rate: 263.8 per 100,000 people.

- The North West's age-adjusted COVID-19 mortality rate (the second highest in the UK): 231.2 per 100,000 people.

- England average: 186.6 COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people (London's Poverty Profile 2021).

Figure 2: Cumulative age-standardised COVID-19 mortality per 100,000 population (March 2020-January 2021)

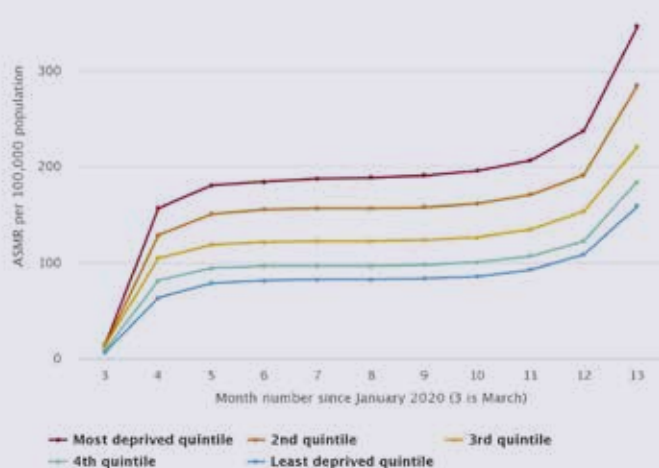Source: London's Poverty Profile, 2021
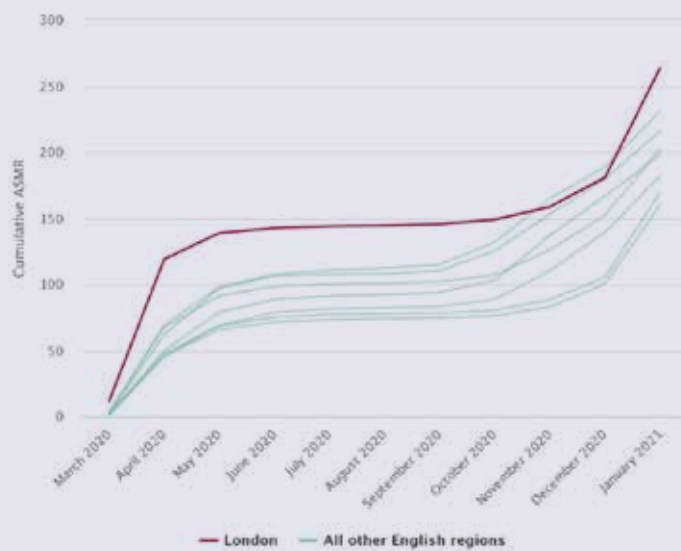
London was particularly badly affected during the first wave of the pandemic. By 23 March 2020, 47 in every 100,000 Londoners had tested positive for COVID-19, compared with an average of 14 people per 100,000 across the rest of England (ONS, 2020/Trust for London, 2021). Between 1 March and 17 April 2020, London had the highest age-standardised mortality rate with 85.7 deaths per 100,000 persons involving COVID-19; this was statistically significantly higher than any other region and almost double the next highest rate (ONS, 2020).

COVID-19, deprivation and inequalities in London

Figure 3: Cumulative COVID-19 mortality rates per 100,000 population in London by neighbourhood deprivation quintile (March 2020 – January 2021)[3]

Source: London's Poverty Profile, 2021

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on particular areas and communities in the city. After controlling for a range of neighbourhood characteristics, mortality rates in 2021 were 23% higher in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods than in the least deprived 20% of neighbourhoods (see Figure 3). They were also higher in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Black residents (London's Poverty Profile, 2021). In London, as elsewhere in the UK, Black people and minority ethnic groups are more likely to contract, to become severely ill, and to die from COVID-19 (Public Health England, 2020).

3   Data source: Deaths due to COVID-19 by local area and deprivation, ONS; Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, MHCLG

By January 2021 cumulative COVID-19 mortality rates were:

- 2.2 times higher in the most deprived 20% of London neighbourhoods than in the least deprived 20%.

- 2.94 times higher in the worst impacted London borough (Newham – 441 deaths per 100,000 people) than the least impacted borough (Camden – 150 deaths per 100,000 people) (London's Poverty Profile, 2021).

Housing and COVID-19 in London

The personal testimony in this report show the crucial importance of housing in people's experiences of the pandemic. Participants living in overcrowded conditions described how lockdown created difficulties for home-working and home-schooling, and/or led to tensions among family members or fellow residents. Domestic outdoor spaces including gardens and balconies were highlighted as being important for wellbeing, but access to private outdoor space is uneven across our interviewees, reflecting wider housing inequalities in the city.

Overcrowded and/or poor-quality housing conditions raise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and have been identified as a significant factor in infection and death during the pandemic (Marmot et al., 2020). Areas of London with high levels of overcrowding are strongly correlated with higher death rates from COVID-19. As shown in Figure 4, between March and May 2020, the highest mortality rate (144.3 deaths per 100,000) and the highest level of overcrowding (25.2% of homes are overcrowded) was in Newham in East London (Barker, 2020). Overcrowding also overlaps with racialised inequalities: while 2% of White British households experience overcrowding, 24% of Bangladeshi households are affected, as well as 18% of Pakistani households and 16% of Black African households (UK Government/English Housing Survey, 2020).

Economic and social impacts of COVID-19

London's economy was particularly badly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Workforce jobs fell by around 229,000 in London between March and September 2020, with the greatest falls in the Arts & Entertainment, Accommodation & Food and Construction Sectors (GLA, 2021; see Figure 5). In July 2021, London's unemployment rate was the highest among the UK regions (6.4 percent for the three months ending June 2021 compared to 4.7 percent nationally). Eight of the ten local authorities with the highest furlough take-up rates were in London, with Newham and Hounslow among the highest (Mayor of London/London Councils, 2021: 14). In March 2022, London's unemployment rate had fallen to an estimated 5.0%, compared to a UK average of 3.9% (GLA Economics, 2022). While this provides some evidence of recovery, the damage from the pandemic is likely to be long-lasting.

As with other effects of the pandemic, the economic impacts have been felt unevenly. Black and ethnic minority people, young people, people aged 50 or over and people with no or low qualifications have experienced higher levels of unemployment than other groups (GLA, 2021: 14). People in precarious work have faced higher risks of contracting COVID-19 and often lack the financial support needed to self-isolate.

COVID-19 has resulted in major changes to how and where people work. In April 2020, 46.6% of people in employment did some work at home, rising to 57.2% in London (ONS, 2020/GLA, 2021). However, as the interviews in this report show, many people face barriers to working at home, including lack of access to digital technologies and/or an appropriate environment for remote working.

The pandemic has resulted in severe social as well as economic impacts. The need for food banks increased dramatically, with a 129% rise in food parcels being distributed in London in 2020 (Trussell Trust, 2020). While government support was initially provided to prevent rough sleeping, there are concerns about the long-term risks of homelessness in the city (Whitehead et al., 2021).

Organisations have highlighted the risks of destitution faced by undocumented migrants and those with no recourse to public funds (Khoury, 2020; Boswell, 2022). The pandemic has magnified inequalities related to immigration policy and the long-term impacts of austerity.

The interviews cited in this report clearly show the damage inflicted by the pandemic on individuals, families and communities across London and how these are intertwined with wider structural disparities. However, participants also describe how neighbours, faith groups and local organisations have come together to provide informal and formal support, highlighting the crucial importance of community in recovery from the pandemic.

Media coverage of home and COVID-19 in London

Stay Home Stories has analysed over 100 newspaper articles about home and COVID-19. In articles focusing on London, key themes include: housing conditions, home-working and home-schooling, all of which are shaped by wider urban inequalities.

The influence of housing conditions and wider inequalities on infection and mortality rates has been dominant across media coverage of the pandemic in London. Focusing on Newham, the **Independent** observed that 'this unloved patch of the old east end – packed with neglected 1960s high-rises and run-down Victorian terraces – has seen the second-highest coronavirus death rate in England since the beginning of March'. The report described how Newham 'has become notorious for rogue landlords squeezing their properties for every last penny – installing bunk-beds into living rooms; cramming families into basement storerooms; renting out jerry-built garden sheds and back-lane garages' (Forrest, 2020). A **Financial Times** article referred to the 'COVID Triangle' of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Newham. It noted that this area of East London has been affected by precarious work and a shortage of affordable housing, but also described how it has 'long been a magnet for outsiders' and has seen an 'influx of people' migrating from South Asia and Eastern Europe. While such reports have drawn attention to inequalities, at times the narratives could contribute to the stigmatisation of areas and communities.

Media reports have highlighted how the rise of home-working has affected people's home lives and the London property market. **The Observer** reported on 'the biggest "great escape" from the capital since 2007 as the coronavirus pandemic drove people to seek more space to comfortably work from home'. It focused on a couple who moved from a South Kensington flat to a six-bedroom house in Sussex, describing how 'lockdown had taught them that more space, a garden and easy access to wide open natural spaces is "more important to us than the buzz of the big city"' (Neate 2021). The **Evening Standard** covered the 'pandemic-inspired boom' in sales of homes with 'granny flats', quoting an estate agent who claimed that the demand 'comes from people seeing working from home as the new future, and from buyers keen to have children or other relatives still under one roof but in separate spaces'.

While reports on home-working have tended to focus on more advantaged homes, occupations and areas, coverage of home-schooling has highlighted the impact of inequalities on young people's experiences of the pandemic. These include the challenges faced by young people in **Hackney schools during lockdown**, where students were severely affected by limited access to digital devices and a lack of space to work at home. A deputy head reported that some young people were vulnerable to poverty or abuse at home, describing how 'their world retreated to the insides of their bedroom'.

3. Housing and home

The home has become a place of heightened importance during COVID-19. Lockdowns restricted people to the home, which became the location for work and education for many people. Our interviews highlight the crucial impact of housing conditions and circumstances on people's experiences of the pandemic.

This 3D model of a home under lockdown by Christian, with a detailed construction of a three-storey house. Annotations reveal the concern over the threat posed by COVID-19 in the outside world with details about hand washing on different floors of the house providing a contrast to the routine comfort offered through violin practice, reading, eating and watching television. The annotation on the top floor – 'I was coming here to look through the big windows' – suggests the importance of, but distance from, the outside world during lockdown.

Whilst some people described their home as a safe or comforting place, others described feeling trapped or lonely. These experiences were intertwined with housing-related inequalities, including overcrowding, poor quality housing and insecurity of tenure. The importance of neighbourhood and community relationships comes through strongly in people's experiences of home, yet community life was also affected by wider inequalities.
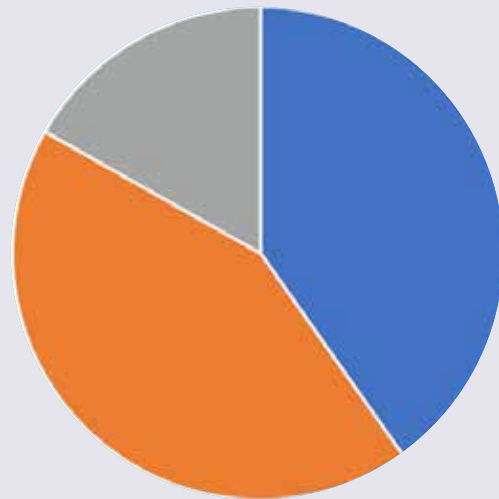
Our participants lived in a variety of housing types, tenures and households (see Figures 6-8).

Figure 6: Housing type
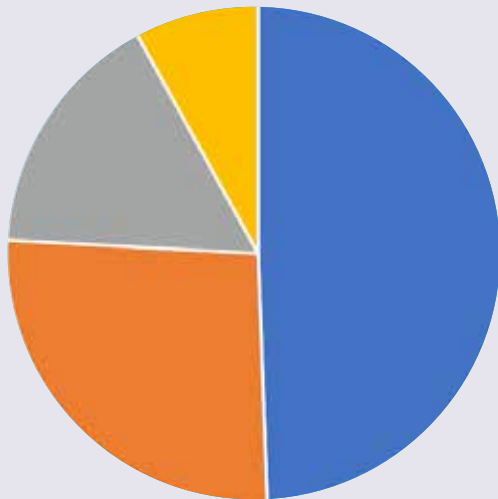
- Flat (43%)
- Detached house (20%)
- Terraced house (23%)
- Semi-detached house (14%)

Figure 7: Housing tenure

- Owner occupied (30%)
- Social housing (12.5%)
- Private rented (32%)

Figure 8: Household structure
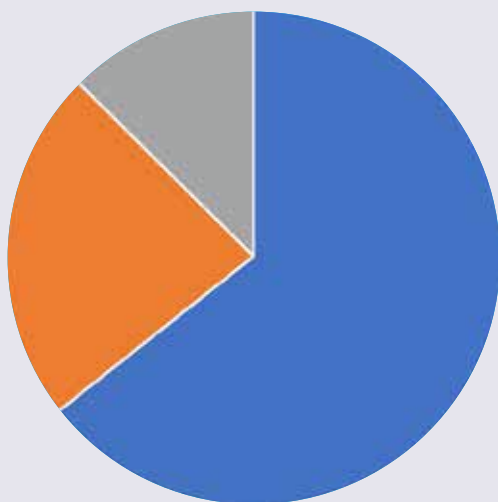
- Family (64%)
- Lived alone (12.5%)
- Shared (incl. student) accommodation (23%)

Our interviewees included people who had temporarily moved in with shielding or vulnerable family members to provide care and support. Others included students who had moved out of their student accommodation to return to their family homes. As David explains,

> *So, what happened is, in the March 2020 lockdown, because it was a national emergency announced for the first time, everyone was advised to move back to their homes...There was a lot of fear and shock and worry everywhere, so everyone just wanted to go back, to reunite with their families. And so…I moved from my uni home to my actual home in Streatham.*
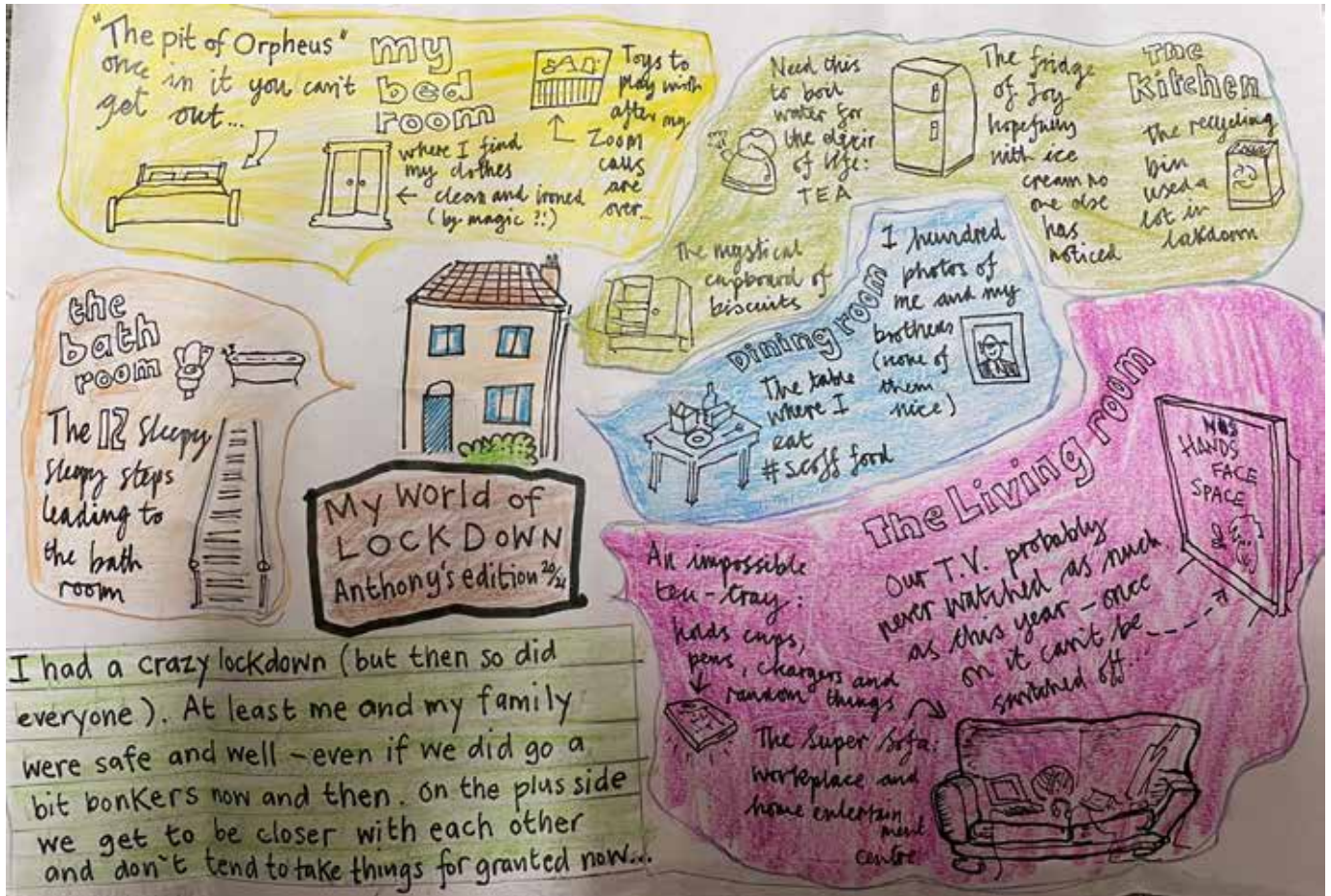
Many children and young people submitted maps with a house at the centre and bubbles distinguishing distinct zones of activity. This map by Anthony includes a focus on the television in the lounge, which is fixed with a picture of Boris Johnson and the words 'NHS - Hands, Face, Space.'

Housing conditions and space

Participants' experiences of home were significantly affected by their housing conditions and (in)security of tenure. Akther, who lives in Tower Hamlets, has been on the waiting list for social housing for 16 years. He described the difficulty of securing affordable accommodation because of the number of people competing for housing in the borough. Xinyan, a student from China, had been evicted from her flat during lockdown and would soon be forced to find another place to live. Rogelio, who was seeking asylum, described his room as a 'temporary dwelling place' rather than a home, because he feared he could be relocated or detained at any time. For these and other participants, home was not a safe or comfortable place to stay during the pandemic.

Several participants were affected by overcrowded housing conditions. This was particularly the case for people who had been joined by other relatives during lockdowns. Participants, including Sophia, described the difficulties and tensions of sharing a small space with multiple family members:

> *I've got younger siblings who still live with my parents because they're still going to school. And I didn't have a bedroom anymore at home, so I had to stay in, like, my younger brother's bedroom and sleeping in a bunk bed so that was a bit weird… my room was right next to my parents' room, so I just felt like, in a lot of ways, like I didn't have a lot of privacy.*

During the pandemic, many homes had to accommodate work and home-schooling as well as domestic activities. While many people found the intrusion of work into the home challenging, it caused particular strains for people affected by overcrowding and/or lack of space. For Alia,

> *…we realised we needed more space because my room was too small to set up the work space at that time. So, literally set up in like a corner of my mum's bedroom because we had – our living room wasn't big, our kitchen was very cold. My sister was working in her room, so it was…a bit of a battle finding a space to actually work.*

For many people, domestic outdoor spaces such as gardens and balconies offered a crucial respite from the restrictions of lockdown. However, several participants had no private outdoor space. Zara, who lived in a flat in Canary Wharf, described her lack of green space as 'restricting', particularly when working from home. Access to a garden was something that many participants said that they would prioritise if moving home. Housing conditions and space have clearly been crucial factors in people's experiences of home during the pandemic and are affected by wider inequalities.

John Cameron. A media screen in Putney, London, provides advice to residents, 2020. https:// unsplash.com/photos/ yQoPIaftVXc. Reproduced under the Unsplash licence.

COVID-19 and feeling at home

Several participants viewed their home as a place of safety in the face of the threat from COVID-19. Mukul described how his home became 'a safe kind of sanctuary in a sense… much safer than outside'. Several participants undertook increased cleaning and sanitising in an attempt to secure their home against the virus. As with other aspects of the pandemic, people's feelings about their home were impacted by their housing circumstances. Rogelio shared a house with his 74-year-old landlady and spent 24 hours a day in his room to protect her health, describing his room as 'a slowly contracting place'. Meilin described how being unable to use communal spaces in her shared house made her feel as if she was in a 'prison room'. People living alone also emphasised the isolation of lockdowns. As Zara described, living alone 'definitely felt quite lonely, and kind of frustrating, just being in one space…and the motivation, there was no motivation to work…it was quite a struggle'.

People who lived with family members highlighted increased time together as a beneficial aspect of the pandemic and often discussed home as a site of support and family life. Alia, who moved out of her student accommodation to live with her family, described how lockdown strengthened her sense of home:

> *'Yeah, to me home's obviously my kind of safe space and where my support network is. So I think during the pandemic that just kind of really emphasised that because it became everything to me…I think just it – it just made everything kind of even stronger and my connection to home even stronger'.*

Our interviews demonstrate how people's experiences of home during the pandemic have been shaped by their living arrangements, which in turn are impacted by unequal housing conditions affecting Londoners across the city. As COVID-19 has led to fundamental changes in how we live and work, housing policies should consider the need for adequate space for work and home-schooling in future developments. Any future stay home directives should ensure that support is provided for single- and dual-person households and people living in overcrowded accommodation.

Neighbourhoods, amenities and community life

Many people described how their relationships with local places became stronger during COVID-19. Cuong moved to Woolwich shortly before lockdown and appreciated its shops, library and play centres. He began to view Woolwich as a place to 'live a bit more' rather than 'a place to store clothes and sleep'. Julie valued her Tower Hamlets neighbourhood for its amenities and connections to other places in the city:

> *…although I'm in the heart of the city or the heart of London, I'm also next to quite rural spaces like the City Farm, Allen Gardens and other sort of local parks. I have really good facilities for transport near me so it's easy to get to, also I've got local high streets near me all in walking distance… So it's very connected, and I think this is one of the reasons why lots of people come to live here…because it's one of the most really connected places, it's right on the doorstep of the City of London and yet it's a part of the inner city as well.*

The pandemic has revealed the importance of neighbourhood relationships and community support. Winnie found that her building's WhatsApp group 'creates a very nice kind of community spirit…looking after each other or what kind of problems we're encountering'. Julie valued the support of neighbours who delivered food to her doorstep when she was isolating with COVID-19. For some participants who had migrated to London, opportunities for local connection strengthened their sense of the neighbourhood and community as home. As Farah explained,

> *I really loved the community around which made me feel like with all the mutual aid things, like neighbours helping each other… I think that made me feel like…I do feel like a part of a community, and it does feel home, and made me also think like home is more like a feeling than like a place.*

Whilst community-led initiatives offered an important source of care and support during the pandemic, they are also related to gaps in state provision and long-standing inequalities. Julie, who volunteered at a food bank in Tower Hamlets throughout the pandemic, described how the pandemic exacerbated existing problems of poverty and austerity:

> *I mean even before the pandemic … – because of austerity and poverty really, that lots of local people have needed the food bank, and that's increased over the pandemic…and not having resources to support them has meant that they have had to rely on mutual aid and community support…And I think one of the good things is that we've all found ways to either be supported or support people in our communities whenever there's been need.*

Whilst neighbourhood groups and organisations have helped people to feel anchored within their local community, they have often developed in the absence of more formal resources. It is also important to recognise that not everyone experienced equal access to support or opportunities to participate. For example, Frances, who lives in East London, felt isolated by the lack of support for East Asian communities and queer people of colour in his local area. Addressing long-term problems of inequality and ensuring culturally sensitive support will be crucial in London's recovery from the pandemic.

This map by Ella highlights the importance of green spaces to young people during the lockdown. The buildings are limited and the focus is placed on accessing green spaces and parks including miniature green spaces such as the patch of grass connected to their flat where they 'played on the grass a lot.'

4. Living in a hostile environment

This section focuses on the intersections between pandemic experiences and race, ethnicity and immigration status, especially in light of the UK's immigration regime and wider contemporaneous discussions around race.

Racism

Our research demonstrates the heightened racial suspicion and abuse which was circulating, online and offline, as a direct result of the pandemic. Rogelio spoke about 'a weird perception that, you know, that people of colour are the ones who brought the COVID here.' Frances was afraid to leave the house because of 'corona racism', and Meilin and Youngsook spoke about anti-Asian sentiment directly, with Meilin recounting a frightening encounter by the canal while out jogging. To share Youngsook's words:

> When the pandemic started, apparently, even before the spread in the UK started, there was a huge anti-China, anti-Asian racism. I mean, it was so tense. I experienced it everywhere basically, no one wants to stand next to me. And in the packed bus, no one wants to sit next to me. It was really visible, it was subtle but visible kind of aggression every day.

Interview discussions also indicated that this specific form of racism was compounded by the wider contexts of, and beyond, the pandemic - disproportionate health and mortality impacts on people with ethnic minority backgrounds, and an increased focus on race in public discourse, with heated debates around Black Lives Matter. For Alia:

> I think being an ethnic minority during this time was especially hard in terms of, I think, for various ethnicities. 'Cos there's been some really difficult things to watch on the news over this also, and a lot of conversations have started as a result around racism and everything. But I think it's definitely difficult and then also seeing that ethnic minorities I suppose disproportionately affected by COVID as well, was a bit of a hard pill to swallow, when we all kind of – already being ethnic minorities face a lot, already there was a lot and then also to have that I think was difficult.

Our interviews demonstrate that the pandemic reinforced and exacerbated already sensitive experiences and tensions around race and ethnicity.

Migrant support services

The particular vulnerabilities surrounding immigration and asylum services were laid bare in our interviews. One example was the immediate impact on a range of different targeted support services. Immigration advice sessions had to be hastily reconfigured on-line, in an effort to keep support available, at risk of losing contact with those who were most vulnerable and in need of advice. People working in migrant-facing support services had to work extremely hard, and creatively, to keep reaching out to those in need, without any extra resources or support themselves. Several participants working for different London-based migration welfare and community groups spoke about the deleterious slowing down of Home Office decisions on asylum and visa applications, and the difficulties this caused those waiting for a response, and the organisations' ability to do their work supporting people. Rayah, working at Hackney Migrant Centre, voiced these frustrations:

> The wheels of the Home Office, which are incredibly not round, and rusty and slow, ground about 100 times more slowly during the pandemic. So, people are not getting responses to their applications, whether it's for asylum, whether it's other applications. And so all that slowed down because, you know, the government practically shut up shop, or people worked from home. I wouldn't expect a very inefficient system in an office to improve when it starts being home based.

Photo by John Cameron, Seven Sisters Road, London 2020: https://unsplash.com/photos/-_5IRj1F2rY. Reproduced under the Unsplash Licence.

Ella, working for an asylum support organisation, described how the pandemic prevented people seeking asylum from being able to move out of initial accommodation into longer-term accommodation. Home Office dispersal processes were severely delayed during lockdowns, exacerbating the problem of a general shortage of dispersal accommodation. Similarly, Kayte, working with newly arrived displaced young people, talked about how her service were often left unaware of who was still arriving and where they were being held, with strict quarantine regulations preventing her staff from reaching people to support them and ensure they had what they needed. The pandemic clearly made the administrative and logistical work of supporting and advising migrants much harder. However, the interviews we undertook with a range of different migration-facing organisations underlined how staff and volunteers worked hard to offer legal advice, food deliveries, translation of COVID-19 information and many other avenues of support in this new context. They rapidly shifted their work online and stepped in to fill gaps in vital services, using their local knowledge and expertise to keep communication open and support available.

Immigration regime regulations

Our interviews also strongly illustrate how the longer-term contexts of the UK Home Office's immigration 'hostile' or 'compliant environment' carried on shaping pandemic experiences for the most vulnerable (Blunt and Dowling, 2022; El-Enany, 2020; Goodfellow, 2020).[6] Under this regime, life had already been made harder for undocumented people by a series of initiatives shrinking available support, working, health and housing opportunities. With COVID-19 reducing these kinds of lifelines further, our findings, in line with those of the JCWI (Boswell, 2022), emphasise that those without legal status found themselves in critically precarious and dangerous situations, less able to find work, and unable or fearful to access healthcare in the middle of a public health crisis. Working with undocumented migrants through Citizens UK in Tower Hamlets, Afsana spelt out the catalogue of exclusions people faced:

> they couldn't claim benefits, they could not get food. They were not registered on the NHS; they couldn't have vaccination. They was scared if they go to the NHS they might actually deport them, because NHS is connected with the Home Office. So these are all started during COVID and people came to also realise that, of course, all this injustice connects to one another … they can't even – basic things like they can't do online shopping, just because they haven't the bank card.

Across the board, migration support staff talked about the particular problems with the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) status. Interviews made it clear that this clause was causing problems for a range of people with different immigration statuses: people who were undocumented, but also those who had been granted 'leave to remain,' as this particular status renders people, while 'legal', still unable to draw on any state support in times of crisis. This group – those with leave to remain, but unable to access official support - especially saw the precarities they were already facing, deepen. Rogelio, who was still awaiting, after two years, a decision on his asylum application at the time of interview, spoke about the difficulties of finding work during the pandemic, and new risks that likely available work would bring:

> So we don't have recourse to public funds and we need to work. And, even if there is lockdown we have to find ways on how to make money. So – and we don't have Government support. And, if we have work – if we are going to work, the only work available for us are those who are more prone to get the virus. Like waiter, you know, in the hospital[ity] industry and cleaners.

Rayah worked at Hackney Migrant Centre to help NRPF people throughout the pandemic: :

> I talked to you about undocumented, but there were also people I should have mentioned that are absolutely crucial, who have leave [to remain]. So, they've got the right – but without recourse to public funds. I mean, you know about that. That's very well known. So, a lot of the people we saw were the people with no recourse to public funds, who couldn't manage. You know, like their work stopped… that that was a major thing, that obviously a lot of those people are in the most precarious sorts of jobs, and everything stopped, and they had no recourse to public funds, so they didn't get anything. So, we had to try and help them if they couldn't pay rent, so they could be evicted. So, there's all these things. So, we had to – I mean, there is an organisation in Islington that specialises in helping people lift the no recourse condition, so we had to sort of help people in that situation… I think that there's a danger that a lot of the migrants in these precarious situations will have actually got into worse circumstances.

Overwhelmingly, our research underlines that the intersecting consequences of the pandemic on work, health, and state support, combined to impact especially harshly on those already struggling to survive in a hostile environment.

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6   In 2012, Theresa May (then Conservative Home Secretary and later Prime Minister) announced government plans, which came into law through the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, to create a 'really hostile environment for illegal immigrants' (Hill 2017, quoted in El-Enany 2020). Since 2018, the Conservative Government has used the term 'compliant' rather than 'hostile' environment.

Fear and mistrust

Intensified racism and racialised structural vulnerability helped to create new atmospheres of fear and mistrust among our participants. Here we found a long spectrum of discomfort, from wariness of police COVID checks, all the way through to fears of deportation. People spoke about their fears of being 'caught' by the police, even just when meeting up with family in socially distanced ways. Once breaking lockdown became a criminal offence, Kayte's organisation had to make sure they were giving very careful advice to the young people they were supporting, due to potential problems with the police: 'obviously, police interaction with our young people comes with many, many layers'.

Most of the organisations we spoke to underlined the lack of trust among the different groups they were helping. As Afsana's testimony previously illustrated, much of this wariness was directed at healthcare services, with people too afraid to come forward for any kind of medical support due to fears about having their details passed on to the police. Sarah, also working at the Hackney Migrant Centre, explained these same problems at length in her interview, emphasising how pre-existing hostile environment policies had already shaped these relationships with healthcare provision, leaving people fearful of huge debts or deportation. As COVID-19 emerged, these people were dangerously exposed to the virus' health risks but were too wary to come ask for treatment or trust interventions such as vaccinations. Mariko, working for the Southeast and East Asian Centre, underlined the severity of this fear and its consequences for the people they support:

> *So people were really frightened about not just getting COVID but, "If I get COVID I can't go to hospital and if I go to hospital they will find out about me." So there was a lot of fear around that as well. So people who still had the work to go to, but it was really like very difficult. People had to make choices, work and might get COVID and might get found out by Home Office because they get tested or they get treatment at the hospital, things like that. It was really emotionally difficult and of course in extreme cases, because of that fear, we had a few people who suddenly died at home, not being able to call 111 or to get any emergency services as such.*

Far from helping people rally together and create a national discourse of unity, wider hostile environment and policing policies actively undermined trust, social cohesion and public health across the capital.

5. Religion and Home

Some maps illustrate the importance of religion and spaces for religious practice within the home, whilst others, like this one by Aurelius, reveal places of worship as closed and out of bounds during the pandemic. In this case a church is featured, along with the artist's school and a restaurant, as being out of bounds during lockdown, and shrouded with cloud and rain. These closed off places contrast with the green spaces of Richmond Park, Bishop's Park and Ravenscourt Park over which sunshine prevails.

Religious practice in London was transformed by the pandemic as faith groups were no longer able to gather in person (Lawrence, 2021). The rapid move to online formats points to the importance of worship within many religions and the need to continue community relationships during the pandemic. Analysis from our research presents a range of outcomes, many of which are positive and may change communal worship in the future. At the same time this report recognizes the losses associated with the life of religious communities during the pandemic. COVID-19 was deeply disruptive of many forms of social connection, particularly as people retreated from 'real' and physical spaces, including places of worship, into their homes and the digital realm.

Online worship

Faith leaders and communities had uneven access to technical resources, skills, and support. Some communities began streaming worship with only a handheld phone or tablet, whilst others were familiar with more sophisticated cameras and monitors, and existing technical support and experience. As Charley, a liberal Rabbi, explained:

> There was a big transition at the beginning. So, the majority, I would say, of people managed to move very, very quickly. But the first few months were quite alienating for those people that couldn't use the technology in order to be able to get online.

Lack of funding for technical resources and training posed a risk of closure for some faith communities. Some faith groups experienced a decrease in membership as congregants accessed alternative online religious services, whilst others increased their membership.

A number of outcomes were noted in relation to problems with technical expertise. Even if leaders were able to set up digital services, participation depended also on the technical skills of their congregants, many of whom struggled or did not have access to mobile phones or computers. Faith leaders, usually competent at leading worship, had to quickly learn a range of computer skills and felt a sense of responsibility if there were errors. As a church warden explained:

> When there was no in-person worship I was actually able to just enjoy the service. When the Zoom was working. It was awful when it didn't work. So as church warden I was thinking, oh, what's gone wrong this time? And the problem is, people will complain? They won't say it was good. They will complain.

Whatever medium was chosen, participants universally confirmed that religious practices were sustained during lockdown, even if this required adaptations to worship. Faith leaders and groups would benefit from technical training to enable them to access the technology and skills required to move worship and other aspects of religious communal life online.

Death and mourning

> And so, those times were really, really difficult when the burials had to happen very quickly, and very few people and just choosing who to come and who not to come was a really agonising situation for many, many families. And then, the service itself had to be very quick and so, all of those made things quite difficult for the bereaving family. But also, for their loved ones, the people who knew who has passed and wanted to be there and show their last respects, but also show love and care for their friend whose family is now bereaving were not able to do all of that, so that was very difficult. The only consolation was some of the services were broadcasted on Facebook, Facebook live or on Zoom.
>
> Kofi, an Evangelical Baptist minister

Our research found that the most difficult outcome of the pandemic related to death and mourning. Safety precautions meant that participants could not visit their loved ones, say goodbye, attend funerals, or receive face-to-face pastoral support. Interviewees across different faith groups described funerals as community events. Faizan, a Muslim participant, explained:

> It's a big part of the faith to go, you know, as a congregation to – to the funeral and then obviously bury the deceased person as well. So, I think with the restrictions that was obviously very difficult for a lot of people.

This was echoed by Kofi, an Evangelical Baptist minister:

> Funerals are a community event and the passing of one of our brethren is a community congregational event, both culturally and religiously or spiritually.

Participants missed the opportunity to visit the dying, bereaved and to show physical comfort and support to mourners. As Hasu, a Jain participant, explained about a recently bereaved friend:

> So we still haven't seen her physically– and to just kind of hug her and that kind of thing. I think that's what's difficult, to be able to kind of just comfort them physically.

Faith leaders expressed their disappointment at being unable to see people in person. Funeral services also had to be adjusted so that they were shorter, lessening the risk of potential exposure to COVID-19. Mark, a minister of a Black Majority Church, told us:

> *The officiating was different, one it was shorter, the number of people what were physically present had to be a certain number. So, there was a time where I get a sense that one, they would really wish to preach a full hour sermon. But they couldn't preach a full hour sermon, they had to do it, or even forgo the sermon from time to time to allow the family members time to have their say, their grieving moment. So, there was a total reshuffling of the service in the funeral service as it were.*

Other rituals around death and dying were also compromised. In Orthodox Judaism gathering a *minyan* [quorum of 10 adult males required for communal prayer] in person for a *shiva* [seven days of mourning with prayers in the mourner's home] and leading the mourners' prayer [*kaddish*] was impossible. The rabbis we interviewed gave examples of creative ways to address these challenges, as illustrated below:

> *One of the – particularly within the Jewish setting, one of the biggest losses was being able to have a proper shiva. ..But I think the shiva, whereby people would sit at home and people would come visit and we could usually have a service and people would come, we couldn't do any of that, except over Zoom, which to be honest people found quite good, but there's certain things that it does and there's certain things it doesn't do. What it does do is it allows people from very far away to participate. It also allows people to really kind of speak and say nice things, but it's in front of everybody else, so that's always a bit – of course, you know, for someone to be sitting alone or just with a few of them in their own house was very difficult. While it's not a replacement for that, what we did do, which we hadn't done in the past for members who had passed away, is that I would send out an email and a Google form for people to be able to share their memories of the deceased. Then at the end of shiva, I'd collate all of those together and put it in a nice little booklet and send that to the family, so people had memories from the community. You know, people really appreciated that but, you know, again it doesn't – it's not the same as personal connection, but it's what we could do in the time and I think adaptation is the word. You kind of provide whatever support you can, as much as you can. One other thing was obviously people weren't able to say kaddish, either because there was – you know, the synagogue wasn't open or 'cos they weren't able to get to synagogue for various reasons. So what we did was, first of all, the... synagogue gave an option of where somebody who needed to say kaddish could allocate, so could be allocated somebody who would say kaddish on their behalf in a synagogue which did have a quorum of me to be able to say kaddish.*
>
> Daniel (Orthodox Rabbi)

These examples demonstrate that the inability to say goodbye, mourn, and honour the rituals and traditions surrounding death and dying needs to be addressed. We recommend the formation of a working party to develop ongoing pastoral support and memorial practices for all faith groups and none.

Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona, Covid memorial wall at St Thomas' Hospital, London, 2021. https://unsplash.com/photos/MWmFIFGARFQ. Reproduced under the Unsplash Licence.

Support for faith leaders

Faith leaders have reported that supporting their communities, especially through their pastoral work, has come at a great personal cost. Some who we interviewed retired early or changed jobs, due to tiredness and stress. Few had support structures in place, especially lone faith leaders. As London faith leaders tried to help their congregants through illness, death and mourning, they in turn felt the pressure of being unable to offer face to face support. The pressure on faith leaders has raised questions about the support clerics receive. Where possible, faith leaders tried to address these issues. Nathan, who works for the Council of Christians and Jews, described workshops for faith leaders during the pandemic:

> *We organized one or two webinars. One on burnout amongst religious leaders just to help them be aware of the warning signs of burnout and the typical responses to crisis. Sort of, you know, hero mode, and then burnout, and then a more balanced perspective. But there are typical ways that leaders often, cycles that we just go through. So we tried to just do some education around that to help people get some perspective.*

In addition to the expectations religious leaders placed on themselves, participants also argued that the pandemic blurred several boundaries between religious buildings and home, to the detriment of an already exhausted leadership. As a leader of the Liberal Jewish Movement said:

> *I have a really strong concern about where the mental health of rabbis will be at the end of this period, because pastoral support has never been done in this way. And rabbis, you know, like many caring professionals, find it very difficult to switch off and to take time out. And actually, the pastoral demands on the rabbinate have been – any clergy, has been huge during this time and there's been no way of shutting off from it. So, they've had to reinvent how pastoral support has been done, where they can get into people's homes. And at the same time, you know, congregants are WhatsApping, emailing, phoning rabbis in ways that are kind of, you know, there aren't the same boundaries. I found, you know, even not having a congregation that suddenly I look down at my phone and someone's FaceTiming me, you know, because they have my mobile number. And instead of putting the phone there – like there's an assumption that, you know, you can see people all the time. And I think that's exhausting.*

This testimony highlights the mental health challenges which have been thrown up by COVID-19 for faith leaders and for hospital and mental health chaplains and the need for support structures within and across faith groups to support faith leaders, particularly those working alone.

Resourcefulness, creativity and inclusion

In addition to the challenges outlined above, our research also provided examples of resourcefulness, creativity and inclusivity. Our findings showed that there were several positive outcomes among London's religious communities including increased inclusivity and access to other faith groups. Respondents demonstrated creative ways to worship, teach and support one another which they wish to continue. By gathering ideas and resources we recommend that these are made available to be shared across faith groups. We are currently developing an interfaith toolkit to address this. In conclusion, our research demonstrates that home provides an intimate space for worship. Comfort, convenience and geography have contributed to greater inclusivity. Online worship has been significant for those who struggle to travel to religious buildings and a number of faith leaders noted that online attendance at services during the pandemic exceeded in person attendance prior to lockdown. As communities are returning to their buildings, many of our respondents are experiencing hybrid/multi access worship combining in person and online engagement. This may well be a permanent outcome that will change communal worship in the future.

In conclusion

This map by Niccolo focuses predominantly on places beyond the home – including shops, school, and a church – and places particular emphasis on parks, the river, trees and wildlife. The house is positioned centrally amid these different features of the local environment but the map focuses more on what is beyond the house than what is within, pointing to the importance of outdoor spaces for this individual.

6. Access to green space

Access to green space, whether public or private, became a key issue for Londoners during the pandemic – especially in periods of lockdown and restriction.

Closed park under lockdown. Photograph by generalising on Flickr, Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)

On 25 March 2020 the decision was taken to close indefinitely Victoria Park in East London – a 230-acre park in one of the city's most densely populated districts. The move was prompted by public health concerns about the potential for virus transmission in the context of large numbers of people visiting the park during a period of warm weather, and because social distancing and other restrictions were reportedly not always being observed. But as local media reports reveal, the decision was controversial and divisive: for many people living in high-rise flats nearby, the park was one of the few green spaces they were able to access for exercise. It was pointed out that closure of the park was anyway self-defeating as it displaced the same people into nearby streets and other local green spaces. While the closure of parks was something that happened across the capital (Brockwell Park in south east London was also shut during the early phases of the pandemic), public pressure and the threat of legal challenges led to a reversal of such decisions. Victoria Park reopened on 11 April, albeit for more limited hours, and with police patrols and a team of volunteers with loudhailers to call out any apparent breaking of the rules.[7] It was recognised early on in the pandemic that access to green space was unequal for Londoners: analysis conducted in April 2020 claimed people in deprived areas and those from BAME backgrounds were negatively and disproportionately affected by park closures (Duncan, McIntyre and Cutler, 2020). In the metropolitan context, therefore, reopening public green spaces was immediately recognised as a matter of social – and, specifically, racial – justice.

7   For media coverage of the Victoria Park closure see: Boyle, C. 'Victoria Park closure provokes huge criticisms from Tower Hamlets residents' East London Advertiser, 27 March 2020; Brooke, M. 'Fury over Vicky Park Lockdown as angry families call Ombudsman over "illegal closure"', Hackney Gazette, 7 April 2020; Heren, K. 'Victoria Park reopens with major police presence to enforce social distancing' Evening Standard, 11 April 2020.

This drawing by Aaliya takes the form of a traditional map featuring key London landmarks and indicates places that people could visit and those that were out of bounds during the pandemic, listed under two separate keys. The map represents restrictions in accessing familiar places and spaces during lockdown. Green spaces are important as places that could be visited and where outdoor activities could be enjoyed, potentially more than in pre-COVID times.

Research has subsequently investigated the complex interactions between access to public green spaces, social deprivation and vulnerability to COVID-19 infection in London (see Pan et al. 2021). However, an emerging theme in analyses of the pandemic worldwide has been the importance of access to green space (or blue-green space) and urban nature within cities and among urban populations (e.g. Ugolini et al., 2020, Venter et al., 2020).

There has been a re-valuing of urban green space by those who live in cities who, under COVID-19 conditions, became more conscious of its importance to their physical and mental well-being (Dobson, 2021). In turn, this has raised questions about urban environmental (in)justice and the future importance of parks and similar spaces as necessary elements of urban infrastructure.

Private and communal gardens

As Londoners were told to stay at home, it is perhaps not surprising that many turned to local green spaces to escape indoor settings. The good weather in London that coincided with the first national lockdown in the Spring of 2020 drew many people out of their homes. Our research pointed to an immediate and widely noticed inequality between those who had access to a private garden and those who did not. Respondents were typically very conscious of this inequality. As Lydia, an artist from West Ham, explained:

> I felt very lucky in that first lockdown because there were so many people, particularly in my neighbourhood, which is a very deprived part of London, who were stuck in flats. And they were often stuck in flats with kids and families. I really – I was [sighs] much more aware of how privileged I am to have a garden, and I was keen not to waste that opportunity to make of it.

For Lydia, her garden became both a new creative opportunity and a space to reconnect with nature and to recall her earlier life growing up in the countryside. Professional couple Lidiane and Alex made their 'huge' north London back garden into what was, in effect, a new room of their house, using it for preparing and eating meals, and as a space to do things with their two young children. They even bought a mini swimming pool so that they could replicate 'going swimming' with their son and daughter. Gardens often became spaces for exercise. Kesandu, a student living in Abbey Wood, used his garden to skip and keep fit.

For some people, the garden became place of contemplation and solace. In the first week of the lockdown Amarjit from Hackney describes how she:

> *walked up and down the garden and counted the steps and counted all my weeds and … I also counted how many moths and butterflies were in the garden, and then I decided having weeds is a very good idea because I had a lot more insects and a lot more things. So I thought it's not having the weeds, it's having a diversity of the weeds in it.*

Like others we spoke to who had a garden, she looked afresh at the space and took pleasure from being able to use it to connect with the natural world and was inspired to start growing her own vegetables.

Reflecting on the benefits of having her own garden, one of our respondents Nuala lamented 'how awful it must be [for people without access to outdoor space] to be cooped up inside'. Many of our interviewees live in flats or some kind of shared dwelling. A key theme to emerge from these participants was the value of having access to some collective green space, reinforcing Nuala's observation. Mukul, from Tower Hamlets, resides on the twelfth floor of a block of flats and has no balcony. They appreciated 'the nice small garden which is a communal garden' where they could interact with older residents and 'engage [with the] community'. Shahel, in his final year at school and living in Bethnal Green, similarly appreciated the communal areas of his estate, including a football pitch and children's playground where people could 'just do whatever' they wanted. That said, use of communal green spaces could be a source of anxiety. Julie, who lives in Spitalfields in a flat with a collective garden spoke of 'some disputes with the people living in the building about, you know, we share it'.

Photograph submitted by Tony of his summer balcony to the Stay Home rapid response collecting project, Museum of the Home. Reproduced with permission from the Museum of the Home.

Many of the London maps by children and young people – including others in this report – featured some aspect of the River Thames. The Thames is a focal point in this map by India as a place where this young person spent a lot of time and enjoyed engaging with the wildlife.

Parks

It was the ability to visit a park that many of our interviewees – both with and without access to a private or communal garden – welcomed most, especially during the time of greatest restriction. Londoners who were able to, went to parks for many reasons: for exercise and fresh air, respite and relaxation, to appreciate nature, as well as for forms of social interaction (insofar as rules permitted) (cf Burnett et al., 2021). Many, like Em, from Brockley, spoke appreciatively of the value of visiting parks in terms of passing time, coping with the different pace of life during the pandemic, and maintaining good mental health:

> *I definitely spent a lot of time, a lot, lot, lot more time in my local park. Like there is a whole section of my camera roll which is just filled with images, yeah, just filled with pictures of like the wildlife and the skies at different times of day … And actually I do find – I've been looking back through the pictures that I took like in the summer lockdown compared to the winter lockdown, and like yeah, charting how the seasons changed throughout the year and the*

different – and also my emotions along with it because that November lockdown was like just something else. So yeah, that park and those green spaces definitely, definitely became a sanctuary.

Parks were also an important public site of urban encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic; even if direct engagement with other people was limited or disallowed, witnessing others dealing with challenges of restriction and isolation was important in validating a sense of the pandemic as a collective experience. Interviewees also noted how parks were part of Londoners' efforts to 'rediscover' the neighbourhoods they lived in during the course of the pandemic. As Lydia put it:

> *We were desperate for travel, and while we couldn't put our travel heads on, [we] tried to apply that thinking to a much smaller circuit of where we were. So home became our world in more than one sense.*

The importance of accessing green space for Londoners during the pandemic mirrors trends across many cities in the world, especially in the Global North. Echoing other studies (e.g. Ugolini et al., 2020), interviewees were keen that the significance of green public space to the wellbeing of all urban populations is not forgotten post-pandemic, and that inequalities in access are addressed. This was conceived not only as a matter of ensuring that everyone has green public spaces near to where they live, but also that they can be used by all groups of people regardless of differences like gender, age, class and ethnic background. Indeed, urban planners and politicians might better recognise the importance of access to green spaces as central to how people live in cities. As Peter, one of our interviewees from East London, put it, 'I think one thing that you take from this pandemic is the importance of the outdoors being indoors and having a home where you have access to the outdoors'. That conversations about securing more equitable access to green public spaces in cities have been reinvigorated by the COVID-19 pandemic (see, for example, Mell and Whitten, 2021; Dobson, 2021), is perhaps a positive outcome from an experience that, at least from a London perspective, has been deeply uneven and often unjust.

Mapping what matters: exploring children's environmental competency through engagements with green space

Building on an emerging theme from all three strands of the project work and specifically focusing on access to green space and environmental competency, follow on pilot research with the Greater London Authority (GLA) has explored children and young people's engagement with local parks and green spaces in a context of i. growing popular environmental consciousness and ii. new ways of living and working with COVID.

Working with Community Engagement Officers at the GLA, the researchers have coordinated a series of school-based workshops with primary school children in years 5 and 6 in Chobham Academy to explore children's environmental awareness, and understanding and use of green spaces in the London Boroughs using the same mapping methodology deployed in the Stay Home Stories project. Children and young people have been invited to draw maps of their local area, while discussing what they understand about the environment where they live and how they make use of different spaces.

The purpose has been to explore how children and young people understand, navigate, renegotiate and articulate their local environment and use of green spaces and to use this information to inform policy and practice with the GLA. The work will provide content for the new Community Insights Hub for Policy in the GLA and, through the engagement of policy officers in the work, will provide the basis of training on the value and use of creative methodologies for place-specific community engagement and environmental policy development.

The resultant 134 maps collected so far (and associated narrative accounts of map making) will also form part of our existing online gallery of maps coordinated through our partnership with the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG). We will also support the development of map-based geographical and environmental educational resources to build on the award-winning resources already produced in conjunction with the RGS-IBG as part of the existing project.

Key themes emerging from the early analysis of the maps in this pilot reinforce the value placed on green spaces, and particularly local parks, and also place emphasis on air quality and concerns over pollution and road safety among other themes.

7. London homes in pandemic times: policy recommendations for a fairer future

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and long-lasting impact on London and its residents. Inequalities that pre-dated the pandemic were further exacerbated by it, notably in relation to the quality and (in)security of housing, the challenges facing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers living in a 'hostile environment,' access to green space, and for those on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The 'Stay Home' directive was a key political and public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the clarity of this directive masked the inequalities and complexities of people's home lives. People's diverse 'stay home stories' – including the personal testimony and maps in this report – demonstrate the urgent need for policies at local authority, Greater London and national scales that address persistent inequalities to achieve a fairer future for all.

Policy recommendations from the Stay Home Stories project are as follows:

- Recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 should address long-term housing inequality and precarity in London.

- Future housing policies and developments should prioritise adequate space for home-working and access to domestic and/or neighbourhood green spaces.

- Any future stay home directives should support the needs of single-person households, LGBTQ+ families and dual-household families. Increased support should be provided for people in poor quality and/or overcrowded housing and for vulnerable households.

- Community, migrant-led and faith organizations have provided vital local support during the pandemic and are key for post-pandemic recovery. We recommend:

(i) strengthening coordination, communication and consultation between government and on-the-ground organizations;

(ii) prioritizing core funding for translation services and digital training and access;

(iii) creating structures within and across community and faith groups to support leaders, particularly those working primarily alone.

- The inability to say goodbye, mourn and honour the rituals and traditions surrounding death and dying need to be addressed. We recommend the formation of a working party to develop ongoing pastoral support and memorial practices for all faith groups and none.

- Access to green spaces has been vital for well-being, social connection and belonging. We recommend:

(i) foregrounding access to green spaces within policies on physical and mental health, neighbourhood cohesion and children's welfare;

(ii) making parks and other green spaces safe, welcoming and accessible for all;

(iii) building on improved environmental competencies to deepen children and young people's learning about local places.

- To address the digital divide for children and young people and recognize the importance of personal spaces at and close to home, including green spaces, for their well-being.

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