

# Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland Covid-19 Impact Report

Spotlight on civil society organisations  
supporting ethnic minority and newly  
arrived communities

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Report by



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# 1. Introduction

Having been widely-reported throughout the pandemic, as of February 2021, ethnicity and deprivation has been ‘officially’ recognised as a risk factor for severe Covid (Guardian, 2021).

Middlesbrough is the second most diverse town in the North East and has the highest rate of destitution in England (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2020).

This report shines a spotlight on the effects of Covid-19 on civil society organisations (CSOs) in Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland that are led by or focused on ethnic minorities and those from newly arrived communities.

The report’s main focus is organisations based in Middlesbrough, where 12% of the population is an ethnic minority. As the second least ethnically diverse local authority in England, Redcar and Cleveland is less of a focus (98.6% of the population is white British).

To carry out the exercise, [Civil Society Consulting CIC \(CSC\)](#) engaged with organisations through one-to-one interviews and surveys to collect their experiences and views of the impacts of the pandemic and their ideas about ways forward. The *‘Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland Covid-19 Impact Report: Spotlight on civil society organisations supporting ethnic minority and newly arrived communities’* provides foundations for the development of a co-produced blueprint for action for local delivery and infrastructure organisations in the area.

Commissioned by [Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland \(TM&C\)](#), the report will also inform TM&C’s emerging interventions to support local VCSEs more generally, and ethnic minority focused and led civil society organisations in particular.

This report sits alongside a ‘sector-wide’ study into the effects that Covid-19 has had on all social sector organisations in [Middlesbrough](#), *‘Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland Covid-19 Impact Report, The Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise Sector’* in which we spoke with 45 organisations in total.

Several organisations CSC engaged with whilst conducting this research have been supported by ‘Steps to Sustainability’ (S2S). S2S is CSC’s incubator-style programme designed to support ethnic minority-led organisations through mentoring teamed with hands-on support and actionable advice.

## 2. Key observations

- The pandemic has highlighted the needs of ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities in Middlesbrough, and also the fact that those most in social need served by civil society organisations are often also those most underrepresented in services.
- A key challenge for organisations working to support ethnic minority communities in Middlesbrough is to raise sufficient income to maintain core service delivery and to expand services responding to growing need as exacerbated by the pandemic.
- With reduced incomes, many organisations have had to furlough staff, which has slashed capacity to work on fundraising and operations. Again, this has meant many organisations have had to reduce core delivery.
- Organisations have also had reduced volunteers due to lockdown restrictions. Activities which would normally be carried out by volunteers including food deliveries and door-stopping have been taken on by senior members of staff.
- New arrivals need extra assistance to get the support they require. They often face the most barriers accessing support because they often have poor proficiency in English and are less confident and empowered to access support.
- Digital exclusion emerged as the preeminent challenge facing civil society organisations supporting ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities during the pandemic. Fortunately some organisations received funding to provide tablets, mobiles, and data for those with no digital access, however not all individuals could be provided for.
- There is widespread recognition and acknowledgement of the need for culturally appropriate food parcels. However there was a feeling that food aid is not the only type of service that needs to be culturally appropriate. As well as food insecurity, mental health, wellbeing and social isolation, are huge social issues that have been compounded by the pandemic.
- Some of the organisations we spoke to were concerned about a disconnect with local statutory bodies, including the police, health authorities (especially mental health services), and local councils.
- Asylum seekers, refugees, and ethnic minority women were recognised as some of the most vulnerable groups in the community.
- Education and awareness raising is needed to improve the stigmatisation of migrants. Media outlets should use their platform to portray the community's diversity in a positive light.
- Organisations had their own ideas on how to best support their user-base as lockdown restrictions are gradually loosened. These include community forum events and better signposting to community information and how to get involved.

# 3. Background and context

## a) Demographics

For historical reasons largely to do with the local labour market, the ethnic minority population in the North East is small relative to that of the UK's major urban areas. Today Middlesbrough reflects this: according to the 2011 census, the population is overwhelmingly White British (88%). Redcar and Cleveland is the second least ethnically diverse local authority in England (98.6% of the population is white).

Despite this, international migration has been significant to Middlesbrough since the post-war Labour government encouraged migration from the Commonwealth to plug labour shortages in the manufacturing industries. This brought to the region longer-standing ethnic minorities including those of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African Caribbean, Chinese, Black African and Romany origins.

Migration has continued since then - accelerated because (1) Middlesbrough was designated as a dispersal area for asylum seekers and (2) EU migrant workers have moved from rural to urban areas.

In the 2011 census, from the 12% of the population that is non-White British:

- 7.8% of the population were classified as Asian/ British Asian, higher than the North East rate of 2.9%, but in line with the England average
- 1.7% were classes as Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups, again higher than the North East rate. 1.25% were identified as Black/ African Carribbean/ Black Britsh, higher than the North East rate of 0.5%.

According to Middlesbrough Council, the top 10 languages in the most diverse wards are Polish, Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi, Czech, Other Chinese, Kurdish, Persian/ Farsi, French and Tamil.

## b) Refugee and asylum seekers

For a while, Middlesbrough had the highest number dispersed asylum seekers per head of population of any place in the UK. The BBC wrote in 2015:

***'No more than one in every 200 of the local population should be an asylum seeker, government guidance says. Middlesbrough is the only place in the UK that approaches that limit with one in 186.'***

This disproportionately high number of asylum seekers and refugees in Middlesbrough came about as a result of 'the dispersal system', put in place by the last Labour government in 1999. The dispersal system was intended to deal with what was seen as a concentration of asylum seekers in south-east England by redistributing them across the country. In 2012, the Coalition government 'privatised' the dispersal system, using subcontractors such as G4S, Serco and Clearel. This shifted large pockets of asylum seekers to the north to a handful of towns and cities with cheap or unused accommodation, including Middlesbrough.

Although numbers have subsequently fallen, there were 510 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodations (i.e. longer-term temporary accommodation funded by the Home Office) in Middlesbrough as of June 2020, with 20 additional asylum seekers receiving support but not accommodation.

Under current law, these asylum seekers are prevented from working, and are provided with a place to live and £37.75 a week for essentials. 'Failed asylum seekers', who are allowed to stay in the country to exercise the right to appeal, must live on a similar budget. As a result, asylum seekers have very little money to live on and are often siloed in supported accommodation, concentrated 'in locales of multiple deprivation with low-cost housing' as described by Teesside University researchers.

### **c) Community cohesion**

In 2019, local historian Tosh Warwick described Middlesbrough as a town '*defined by immigration*', and as such racial tensions have arisen. In the 1960s, tensions escalated into four nights of riots against South Asian and Black people in the so-called '*Cannon Street Riots of August 1967*'.

More recently, there's been more controversy around the discrimination and racism towards asylum seekers. In 2016, G4S (a private contractor tasked with 'dispensing' asylum seekers) admitted to the Home Affairs Committee that the front doors of their asylum accommodation in the Gresham area had all been painted red by local housing sub-contractors, making residents more vulnerable to racist attack.

Contributors to this Covid-19 Impact Report maintained that Brexit and anti-immigrant rhetoric, has compounded community cohesion issues in Teesside. According to the local Police force (Cleveland Police, which covers Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees), racially-motivated hate crime rose by 34% in 2016 in Middlesbrough. In 2019/20, Cleveland Police was in the Top 10 Police force areas with the highest rate of race-related hate crime. Ethnic minority community leaders have commented that this atmosphere has made it even harder for ethnic minorities to use local services, further isolating and pushing them back into their homes.



## **d) The impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority and newly arrived communities**

### *Risk to Covid-19:*

It is widely recognised ethnic minority and newly arrived communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The factors that make ethnic minority individuals more vulnerable to contracting Covid-19 are varied; all are linked to systemic disadvantages and deprivation. Ethnic minorities are more likely to:

- Live in low-quality and crowded accommodation
- Have underlying health conditions
- Work in occupations that are more exposed. For example, migrants make up 17% of the UK's key workforce (health, social work and residential care, and education). They are also less likely to work in professions where they can work from home, and therefore are more likely to break social distancing restrictions to work.

Other contributing factors are more nuanced. For example, contributors to this report touched on the fact that ethnic minority individuals often work irregular hours which mean exercise is harder to come by; they have bigger families and a more family-orientated culture, where there is more household mixing, and they are culturally less likely to get tested for underlying health conditions.

### *Economic impact:*

In addition, the pandemic is having worse economic impacts on these communities. Ethnic minorities are more likely to lack safety nets, due to being self-employed or on zero-hour contracts. They are also overrepresented in 'shutdown industries' such as the hospitality and retail industries, which means the pandemic is having a greater impact on their often already low and intermittent incomes.

### *Barriers to accessing support:*

There is evidence that ethnic minorities, in particular newly arrived migrants and less established diaspora, have more difficulty accessing and understanding government guidelines on social distancing and economic help due to lack of digital infrastructure and language barriers.

In some ethnic minority communities, there is social stigma attached to accessing statutory support when needed. Contributors to this report also commented that individuals have not accessed support services because of a lack of confidence and trust and a feeling of 'being unwelcome'.

Migrants have faced barriers accessing some elements of statutory support due to their visa conditions, which may limit their access due to the country's social safety net. The impacts of the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) policy have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Nationally, Citizens Advice has seen a 110% increase in the number of people needing advice on issues related to NRPF. Of these, 82% of those who sought NRPF-related advice were people of colour.

National refugee and asylum organisations have been particularly concerned by destitute 'failed' asylum seekers with NRPF being unable to access appropriate accommodation and support. Many of these 'failed' asylum seekers are housed in unsuitable accommodation where they are unable to self-isolate, such as Napier Barracks, which came to national media attention earlier this year.

### Vaccine hesitancy:

Although ethnic minority communities have been 'hit hardest' by the pandemic, they are more likely to be reluctant to take the vaccine. A recent survey carried out by the *Royal College of General Practitioners* demonstrated that people of Black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds are 53%, 36% and 67% less likely to have been vaccinated when compared to their white counterparts (British Medical Journal, 2020).

On the whole, commentators weighing in on 'vaccine hesitancy' put it down to two main reasons:

- **Mistrust** of government and authority, which stems from a long history of discrimination and systemic racism. As stated by WHO, recent racist remarks made by French doctors caught on video suggesting Africa should be a testing ground for coronavirus have been damaging.
- **Misinformation** targeted specifically at ethnic minority communities. Misleading claims tend to be based on: the notion of ethnic minority communities being used as 'guinea pigs' for the vaccine; suspicion around the vaccine ingredients (for example, claims it contains traces of pork and beef); and past cases of mistreatment of black people by the medical establishment in the past (BBC, 2021).

Initiatives are being launched to promote the vaccine within these communities. The Government has allocated £23 million funding to 60 councils and voluntary groups across England to expand work to support those most at risk of Covid-19 and boost vaccine uptake. In Middlesbrough, local doctors from ethnic minority backgrounds and faith leaders have made video messages, and presented, on the benefits of the vaccine over Zoom.

As part of this awareness raising, Public Health South Tees have rolled out a programme establishing Covid-19 Champions in local organisations, a number of which are ethnic minority-led or serving.



## 4. Methodology

A comprehensive network of organisations have been established in Middlesbrough to assist refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and the wider ethnic minority community. This sub-sector comprises a combination of user-led and others community-led organisations tackling issues such as economic hardship, mental health problems and social isolation.

This report sits alongside a 'sector-wide' study into the effects that Covid-19 has had on all social sector organisations in Middlesbrough, '[Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland Covid-19 Impact Report, The Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise Sector](#)' in which we spoke with 45 organisations in total. This 'spotlight' report aims to understand the specific set of challenges for organisations supporting refugee and asylum seekers and ethnic minorities in Middlesbrough in particular, and for the communities they serve.

We conducted one-on-one interviews with [four organisations](#), each with a different approach but all of whom form an integral part of the refugee and asylum seeker support sector in Middlesbrough. *The Methodist Asylum Project (MAP)* and *Investing in People and Culture (IPC)* are established community organisations that work to facilitate the social and economic inclusion of refugees. *Justice First* works with asylum seekers whose appeals have been rejected by the Home Office. *Ubuntu Multicultural Centre CIC* sprung up in response to the pandemic, delivering culturally-appropriate food parcels, and has now established itself as a 'drop-in' centre to provide advice and facilitate access to public services.

We also collected the views and experiences of a further five groups focused on and led by ethnic minority communities, including newly arrived communities and more established diaspora communities. We conducted our survey with the aim of enriching the information provided by the 'deep dive' interviews, but also to give us a broad view of how all social sector organisations have been impacted by the pandemic and to identify their needs for the future.

The impact of Covid-19 has been assessed for each organisation according to the following four critical areas:

**Services**

**Income**

**Staffing and volunteers**

**Infrastructure and logistics**

In the interviews and survey, we also asked organisations their thoughts on the greatest challenges for the community they are serving, including the barriers they face in accessing help, to inform community and cross-organisational support work.

## 5. The impact of Covid-19 on organisations led by or focused on ethnic minority and newly arrived communities

All organisations were interviewed and surveyed between November 2020 and January 2021. Here's a summary of what each of them reported.

### **Methodist Asylum Project (MAP)**

*Methodist Asylum Project provides practical support to asylum seekers, primarily those whose asylum applications are being supported and are being supported by the Home Office. MAP's programmes aim to integrate asylum seekers with the community and public services. Project Manager Ailsa Adamson explained one of MAP's vital services is an 'Orientation' programme for asylum seekers, which includes checks that the Home Office has set them up properly. The organisation works closely with the British Red Cross, Open Door North East and Justice First, which forms the Tees Valley Ariadne Partnership.*

**Impact on services:** MAP report that they are meeting the needs of their existing beneficiaries 'up to a point', but that online services are not a substitute for face-to-face contact and support.

MAP reported they had been unable to run ESOL classes in-person during the entirety of the pandemic. In normal times, 60-70 people would attend the class, however there was no way this could be done in a Covid-safe way. At the beginning of the pandemic, the organisation kept in touch with students and transitioned to online as much they could. Gradually, they were able to develop an online learning programme, which included English lessons and storytelling sessions.

Digital exclusion was a huge barrier to this transition to online. MAP realised this early on, and sought funding from the National Lottery (which was distributing DCMS emergency money) to buy phones and data packages. Having distributed 90 phones and 10 tablets for school children, MAP found that the communities in Redcar and Cleveland were suffering from the most acute levels of digital exclusion. The organisation has now been funded to provide WiFi routers and data for asylum seeker homes in the borough for the next 12 months.

Although it was initially difficult to know what to do in response to the pandemic, MAP described themselves as over time becoming flexible and able to operate under constantly changing guidelines: "*Whatever changes in the rules, we've become nimble and able to make a plan.*" The lockdown brought some positives to service delivery too, for example problem solving of practical issues involving asylum applications. Following up with the Home Office was easier and 'little niggly' issues were being solved more efficiently.

**Impact on income:** MAP reported flexibility from funders, who made concessions for the difficult circumstances. MAP therefore reallocated longer-term grant money for projects for emergency work.

Despite the abundance of short-term emergency funding (especially for food), many organisations have expressed concern about the availability of longer term funding. MAP too expressed this concern around the sustainability of grantmaking trusts. As a result, MAP reported they need to secure more funding for the next 12-24 months.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** The organisation receives help from around 90 volunteers, a third of whom are asylum seekers themselves. Therefore, the majority of active volunteers during the pandemic have been from the asylum seeker community.

**Impact on infrastructure and logistics:** MAP has a license to occupy a Methodist church. Pre-pandemic, this is where Ailsa (Project Manager) and her team normally met service-users. MAP were offered a rent holiday during the pandemic as they weren't using the space.

Working remotely has worked relatively well for MAP. Ailsa commented that she can schedule appointments more readily from home. Like many organisations, MAP will continue to use Zoom beyond the pandemic, finding that online sessions are more focused and efficient. Zoom meetings were also reported to be useful for giving advice, as documents can be looked at together, and interpreters are able to participate in the meetings easily. It is also useful for reaching people in different geographies.

## **Summary:**

*Although MAP has been able to reallocate longer-term grant money for emergency work, they now need to secure funding for the longer term, especially as their rent holiday comes to an end. An organisational priority is tackling digital exclusion, which requires dedicated funds.*

## **Investing in People and Culture (IPC)**

*Investing in People and Culture (IPC) focuses on social and economic inclusion of marginalised communities, mainly through increased mobility, integration and education. Started by a group of ex-refugees over eight years ago, the organisation has three offices (Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Gateshead) and helps around 2,200 people a year. Programmes include support to destitute asylum seekers; martial arts for migrant children (funded by Children in Need); projects for women; training on entrepreneurship; support for refugee doctors to enter local NHS trusts.*

**Impact on services:** When the country first locked down, IPC had to suspend some services. However, the organisation's English programme for refugee doctors had a smooth transition online due to a particularly tech-savvy English tutor who created presentations for Google Classroom and set clients up with Gmail accounts. Although ESOL lessons for refugee doctors were able to continue, unfortunately they could not do this for all refugee learners because of a lack of digital infrastructure.

IPC deems not being able to reach out to the majority of their clients due to digital exclusion, as their biggest challenge. Seeking to improve its digital outreach, IPC recruited a digital inclusion officer. The role includes promoting the value of digital technology and developing clients' digital skills.

Responding to 'vaccine hesitancy' amongst asylum seekers and refugees, IPC have been promoting the vaccine. This has included establishing a WhatsApp group to dispel misinformation about the vaccine.

**Impact on income:** IPC receives various grants from charitable trusts and statutory bodies, both locally and nationally, and places value on building relationships with the funders to build continuity and work towards shared goals.

IPC reported an extremely positive experience working with funders during the pandemic. Negative financial impact was mitigated by "understanding funders, who have been brilliant in their flexibility with targets and extending deadlines for the charity to adapt delivery models". As a result, IPC reported they have six to twelve months of reserves. IPC also noted that it was helpful that funders did not require them to collect data during the initial crisis; not collecting data allowed staff to get on with the work on the ground without worrying about the paperwork.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** IPC has six paid staff and around 20 volunteers. During the pandemic IPC made the decision to take less volunteers, because of responsibility for their safety. To replace the volunteers, senior staff have intervened with the on-the-ground work including food delivery.

IPC credits its financial stability through the pandemic to their Strategic Development Manager, who ensured they received enough funding and paid close attention to budget.

**Impact on infrastructure and logistics:** IPC was based in a church space, before moving into a local authority space. However this space has not been adequate, especially during the pandemic - there is no kitchen and no room to have a drop-in service. IPC are hoping to move into a large building called the International Centre on a 25-year lease from the Council. Although it has a commercial kitchen, IPC estimates it will need investment of around £146,000.

## **Summary:**

*IPC is an established organisation that has absorbed the shocks of the pandemic through making strategic decisions. The main challenge for the organisation is to secure the infrastructure and resources to continue expanding and meeting the needs of those who have so far not been reached.*

## **Justice First**

*Justice First helps people seeking asylum primarily housed in the Teesside area. With trained caseworkers (OSCI Level 2), the organisation steps in when asylum seekers' applications have been rejected, and they no longer have access to legal assistance. Although Justice First cannot legally represent asylum seekers, caseworkers pick up their cases and acquire new evidence to present to the Home Office.*

**Impact on services:** In normal times, Justice First had an 'open door' policy four days a week. Additionally, caseworkers would spend Thursdays in Stockton alongside *Migrant Help*, meeting with around 30-40 clients. Lockdown restrictions meant these valuable 'opendoor' sessions could not continue. Instead the caseworkers had to provide advice over the phone.

As with IPC, lack of face-to-face contact shook the foundations the organisation was built on: *"The emotional support we were so honoured to provide has gone. We were a special organisation - not only were we qualified, but we could afford to take the extra little bit of time to listen to someone's story, give support and give honest advice about a claim."* Justice First Case Worker Lucy Fleming said it had sometimes been hard to be motivated to have those difficult conversations on the phone. She recognised that, practically, the outcomes of asylum applications were always going to be the same, but she lamented the inability to provide the same quality of emotional support.

Interestingly, Justice First reported a massive drop in demand for destitution support in the initial part of the lockdown because 'failed asylum seekers' were being rehoused by the Government and other homelessness charities. Additionally, the Home Office did not issue any negative decisions on asylum applications during this period. As a result, like *MAP*, Justice First reported that their casework had improved during the pandemic. The organisation was able to process claims quicker, as the Home Office had simplified the claims process: all documents could be sent by email and phones were directed to mobiles. Because of this efficiency, and in particular the time-saving element, the quality of claims was better.

**Impact on income:** Justice First reported that funders including the *Lloyds Bank Foundation* and the *National Lottery Fund* gave them emergency grants, securing the organisation's immediate future. The *Lloyds Bank Foundation* was particularly supportive; Lloyds sent a troubleshooter to discuss strategy with the *Justice First* Chairperson to help the organisation to access emergency funds.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** Justice First have had to reconfigure their organisational structure to keep pace with the demands of the pandemic. As well as furloughing some staff, Justice First recruited a new Project Manager, amalgamated with a more financial role. Like IPC's strategic development manager, the Project Manager will execute fundraising and be a strategic leader going forward.

Like many other organisations, Justice First did not use volunteers during the pandemic, since face-to-face drop-in sessions had been stopped. The majority of volunteers working with the organisation are former asylum seekers or in the process of seeking asylum and provide interpretation services and emotional support during these sessions.

**Impact on infrastructure and logistics:** Since the second lockdown, Justice First has been working from their office: *"The second lockdown didn't feel like a lockdown, we worked in the office. The Home Office and the courts didn't stop working."* Additionally, whilst the restrictions loosened in the summer, Justice First were able to host face-to-face meetings again.

## **Summary:**

*As lockdown measures lift in the coming months, Justice First will face the challenge of meeting increased demand for asylum application support, whilst at the same time reverting back to their usual model that delivers a more comprehensive package of support to each individual.*

## **Ubuntu Multicultural Centre CIC**

*Ubuntu Multicultural Centre CIC was founded in February 2020, just before the UK went into lockdown. The vision is to offer education, advice, support and advocacy for migrants - whilst remaining impartial, non-judgmental and non-directive. In addition, the organisation also aims to provide a place for individuals to explore their options in a safe, comfortable and trusted environment through training, workshops, cultural dance, meetings, and food.*

*Having identified ethnic minority communities often lack the confidence and trust to seek and access help, its model is to outreach to the communities. In 2021, Ubuntu established a centre in premises on Clifton Street.*

**Impact on services:** Before the pandemic hit, Ubuntu had plans to establish a physical multicultural hub. However as the nation entered lockdown, the organisation put these plans on hold and instead mobilised to deliver weekly culturally-appropriate food parcels to the community. To support the delivery of this service, Ubuntu have received food packages from *Greggs* and *Barefoot Kitchen* and have worked collaboratively with *TM&C*.

Like many organisations, digital exclusion has been a huge problem for the organisation as many community members lack digital infrastructure. Additionally, Ubuntu admitted to requiring more digital infrastructure themselves.

Ubuntu has been running a telephone service for isolated members of the community, which has been in high demand. Ubuntu recognised that people using the service often wanted to talk for longer, which shows that loneliness has increased among their user-base.

Ubuntu successfully launched their physical centre in 2021. To ensure its success, the organisation engaged with the community through a survey to establish support and demonstrate the need and viability of the physical space of a community 'drop-in' centre. The findings also equipped Ubuntu with important information about the community they serve to ensure the centre was fit for purpose.

**Impact on income:** During the first lockdown, Ubuntu's first ever funding application was to County Durham Community Foundation for funds (£3,500) to buy a laptop, calltime, phone and travel expenses. The funder was impressed with what the organisation was doing with emergency food parcels, and made a further grant of £1,250 to contribute towards the rest of the project. Ubuntu commented that this particular funder has been extremely supportive, even helping them to raise their profile by including them in their newsletter.

Since then, Ubuntu successfully gained funding from national grantmakers, receiving £9,500 from the National Lottery. The organisation had initially proposed to use the funding for food parcels, however the funder was flexible and allowed them to use part of the funding to set up the physical centre. This was helpful as days became cold rendering working from outside very difficult.

Despite the organisation's success in gaining emergency funding, it is experiencing a budget deficit. The organisation needs additional funding to cover two part-time employees and for necessary structural work on their centre.

**Impact on staff ng and volunteers:** At the moment, husband and wife duo John and Irene Kabuye work full time on Ubuntu Multicultural Centre projects. They are helped by four regular volunteers.

John and Irene expressed a desire to work with more volunteers, and a number of people have inquired to volunteer with the organisation. However, it has been difficult to take on any new volunteers because of further lockdown restrictions.

**Summary:**

*Having established a name for themselves so quickly, and finally establishing a physical centre, Ubuntu needs more funding to grow the organisation. Now that they have a one-year lease of a physical centre, with the possibility of extension, their 'case for support' is stronger.*



## **Amal Project Teesside**

*Amal Project Teesside provides tailored hampers to ethnic minority families that have been identified by local schools. The organisation also distributes surplus food items to reduce food waste and shares activities and resources with families and local schools. Amal Project Teesside serves around 70 families (approximately 205 children and 126 adults).*

**Impact on services:** Amal Project Teesside was launched in response to the pandemic specifically, after recognising the needs of the ethnic minority community is often overlooked when it comes to food parcels and emergency food. For example, the organisation's next food delivery will involve extra treats for children and families observing Ramadan, Easter and Eid.

During the pandemic, demand for their food parcels has been extremely high. Founder Sahida Ditta told us that they initially started the project to help a limited number of families, but increased capacity by 17% to attempt to meet demand. This was made possible by the hard work of volunteers, but is not sustainable in the long term. At the same time, the needs in the community will not go away when the pandemic wanes, so they need a sustainable solution so they can provide holiday support and redistribute surplus items to families.

Despite its overall success, Amal Project Teesside reported there are barriers to supporting those in the community who are most in need because of language barriers and issues around confidence and trust. Amal Project Teesside works with teachers who identify families who need support; these teachers have mentioned frequently it is difficult to engage with some parents and pass on important information. The organisation also mentioned it can be difficult to build relationships of trust with refugees and asylum seekers who are new to the area and are relocated frequently.

**Impact on income:** Amal Project Teesside received an initial £500 worth of shopping vouchers plus further funding from *Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation* (who also published an article about the organisation in their newsletter), and a £1,200 grant from local infrastructure organisation *Catalyst*.

The organisation also has a strong working relationship with *Middlesbrough Environment City*. After joining a webinar on how to make hampers more aligned with the NHS' *The Eat Well Guide*, Amal Project Teesside received a grant from UNICEF via Middlesbrough Environment City.

Although Amal Project Teesside has successfully secured funding from local grantmakers and organisations, they have struggled to secure funding from larger public funders. Not pursuing National Lottery funding is a main reason for this: as an Islamic organisation, Amal Project Teesside does not want to be associated with the National Lottery, which facilitates gambling.

Amal Project Teesside has attempted to work closely with funding bodies that fit their beliefs, but they felt that larger charity organisations or projects were given more consideration than the smaller grassroots groups by some funding bodies.

The organisation felt dismissed at the first hurdle despite the importance of their work: *"[Our] project in many peoples' eyes is quite niche, locally we are introducing a unique concept of tailored food support; we understand there may be doubts around the success or duration of the work we are doing. We feel new grassroots projects need to be given increased support which will help grantmakers see the potential and therefore gain positive publicity and recognition for everyone involved, which is an important factor... we are addressing an issue that is clearly overlooked by so many people."*

With no large-scale, long-term grant from a national funder, Amal Project Teesside has less than three months of reserves and there is uncertainty around the longevity of the Project, due to the unpredictable nature of lockdowns and the availability of resources to maintain stock levels.

In recognition of the challenge of obtaining public funding, the Project has been working with Civil Society Consulting CIC on a community engagement survey to measure and collect demographic information that can boost future funding applications. The survey will be completed by families currently receiving support, via teachers at target schools.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** The organisation is volunteer-run and -led. Like many of the other organisations we profiled, the Project has reduced volunteer numbers due to lockdown restrictions.

**Impact on infrastructure and logistics:** Amal Project Teesside coordinating the delivery of the food parcels from a building that has been provided for free.

### **Summary:**

*Amal Project Teesside have successfully secured funding from local and private grantmakers, but they need to now establish relationships with national grantmakers to gain access to longer-term funding. The organisation also needs to build capacity, for example, invest in digital infrastructure and interpreting services, to reach families who are most in need.*



## **All Nations Church**

*All Nations Church is an ethnic minority-majority church based in Hemlington, Middlesbrough. 90% of the congregation are of African ethnicity.*

**Impact on services:** Due to the pandemic, All Nations Church has had to cancel planned activities, as well as reduce the core service that it continued to deliver. Over time, all services have been moved online, including pastoral support, training and social events. The church has also been involved in emergency food delivery.

Being unable to open to people and the lack of face-to-face services has caused the most significant issues for the church.

Working with the new roadmap for lifting lockdown, the church is aiming to hold their first service in the building on Easter Sunday. This will be the first time the congregation will have met in person for 13 months. Although this is a positive step forward, the church is aware the service will be severely curtailed in what it can and can't do.

Moving forward the challenges are about restoring confidence in the personal safety of the members but also dealing with the financial impact and mental health impact upon them. Due to the pandemic the church saw a number of people leave the area on a permanent basis to get work or to move to be with other family members.

**Impact on income:** Covid-19 has had a largely negative impact on the church's ability to raise income through room bookings and other in-person events. The church has also been unable to take physical donations as previously. Due to the reduction of income, All Nations Church has between three to six months of reserves.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** The church benefits from around 10 volunteers, although they have had to reduce these numbers for much of the pandemic.

## **Summary:**

*All Nations Church have established an effective online presence, however they will need to secure funding to ensure in-person activities are able to resume. The impact on members has been minimal in terms of physical health, however financial hardship and mental health problems have significantly affected many individuals in the congregation.*

## **North of England Refugee Service (NERS)**

*The North of England Refugee Service is an independent and charitable organisation which exists to meet the needs and promote the interests of asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived or have settled in the North of England (established 1989) with offices in Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. Serving around 4,000 individuals, NERS provides an advice service to support people throughout all stages of seeking asylum; an integration service to support those granted refugee status and help them to rebuild their lives in the UK; a supported housing project; and translation and interpreting services.*

**Impact on services:** NERS have been delivering services via telephone and video conference through the lockdowns. They report that the organisation has been able to sustain its normal level of support. Overall, NERS has experienced more or less the same amount of demand as they did before the pandemic, but there has been a decrease in some parts of the service and increase in others. NERS highlighted that asylum seekers are a section of the community that need particular help as we gradually come out of lockdown.

**Impact on income:** Throughout the pandemic, NERS supported their clients thanks to newly-acquired financial support from emergency grant sources including the Big Lottery Community Fund and Barrow Cadbury Trust Covid-19 Support Fund. The organisation had also been granted flexibility on existing funding streams. Despite their success in securing emergency grants, NERS expressed a concern about the long term economic impact of Covid-19 on the organisation.

Despite securing emergency grant incomes, other income generation has been made impossible. The organisation has lost around 20% of its trading income. As a result, the organisation estimates they have less than three months reserves.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** The organisation is run by 11 paid staff and 40 volunteers. Over the course of the pandemic, some staff have been furloughed to keep costs down.

### **Summary:**

*NERS have sustained their 'normal' level of support throughout the pandemic, but pointed out the long term economic impact of Covid-19 is still a threat to their organisation.*

## Saabat Gallery CIC

Saabat Gallery CIC has five areas of activities that can engage the local community in art: exhibition and events; art studios for long term hire at affordable rates; art education; art shop and a garden. Having moved to Middlesbrough as a political refugee from Iraq, Kurdish artist Azad Karim Mohammed, set up the contemporary art gallery and studio space based in South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland six years ago. Before the pandemic, the organisation had plans to expand and develop studio and educational space.

**Impact on services:** The gallery has been closed during the pandemic. However, following the path of art galleries around the country, the Saabat Gallery's current exhibition of oil paintings by David McArthur has moved online.

The organisation commented, "Lockdown is teaching us how to review our function as an art gallery and how to avoid being useless during the crisis". In light of this, Sabaat Gallery offered space at the gallery for community organisations to store emergency aid items including food and clothing. *Tees Community Clothing* and *Tees Valley Together* were some of the organisations that made use of this offer. The ingenuity was profiled on the Guardian series 'Anywhere but Westminster'.

When local down ends, the organisation is planning to run live music nights in the Saabat Gallery gardens under the name 'Kavanna Klub'.

**Impact on income:** Sabaat is in a difficult financial position, with no reserves. They have also lost all trading income: in 'normal' times the gallery has spaces which they would rent for workshops, events and meetings and a resident qualified teacher of Art who runs art workshops and tutoring; all these activities have been unable to go ahead. The organisation has struggled to secure funding during the pandemic despite submitting several applications to the Arts Council.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** Sabaat Gallery is run by two paid members of staff and four to six volunteers. Staff have been on furlough during the pandemic.

## **Summary:**

*It is a hard time for arts and heritage organisations, as there is very little Covid-19-related funding for non-emergency organisations and projects. Despite this, Saabat has been at the ready to assist other community organisations during this time and is full of ideas to aid recovery.*



## **Iranian Community North East**

*Iranian Community North East provides support and information to the Persian community, as well as asylum seekers and refugees from all nations living in Stockton-on-Tees. This community empowers around 60 men and women, whose futures have been irrevocably changed by past events in their home country, to regain some control over their lives. Services include driving test theory lessons, English classes, and ICT classes. All classes and activities are available in both Farsi and English.*

**Impact on services:** Iranian Community North East has stopped all face to face appointments and drop-ins, despite increased demand. This has been replaced by Zoom and telephone meetings, as well as increased use of social media.

Despite the transition online, the organisation maintains that they have not been able to provide the same level of support. Many clients are digitally excluded due to digital poverty: the Community's main service-users are refugees and asylum seekers, whose allowance (£37.77 a week) is too little to buy mobiles or tablets. To emphasise this point, the organisation mentioned that these service-users even struggle to manage the cost of food and hand sanitiser.

**Impact on income:** Iran Community North East has been impacted financially: they have no reserves and did not have the capacity to apply for funding as usual.

**Impact on staff and volunteers:** The organisation is run by five volunteers.

## **Summary:**

*Digital exclusion has been a huge barrier for Iran Community North East to reach their service-users. Since the organisation is entirely volunteer-run, the organisation will need more fundraising capacity to alleviate digital exclusion and to continue the provision of emergency food and PPE.*

# 6. Concluding observations & considerations

We've developed a series of concluding observations and considerations addressing the main challenges a) for organisations, b) for the sub-sector and finally, c) for the community. These conclusions are informed by the interviews and surveys from organisations profiled in this report, as well the contributors to the 'sector-wide' study, featuring 45 organisations.

## a) What are the main challenges for organisations?

The pandemic has highlighted the need of ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities in Middlesbrough, and also the fact that the most in need are often also those most underrepresented in services.. *Ubuntu Multicultural Centre CIC commented that they are "touching the tip of the iceberg" of people's needs: "people are struggling and don't want to ask for help. With their confidence and trust, you see how much the need is".*

The key challenges for organisations working to support ethnic minorities in Middlesbrough is to raise enough money to continue and enhance core services and to expand services responding to growing or shifting needs.

The majority of organisations we spoke to reported as having as little as three months' reserves. This stores up significant issues for the sector locally around potential higher unemployment, higher levels of unmet need, and/or other organisations whose capacity will be put under even more pressure.

With reduced incomes, many organisations have had to furlough staff, which has slashed capacity to work on fundraising and operations. This has meant many organisations have had to reduce core delivery.

Organisations have struggled to make successful funding applications during the pandemic, especially smaller, newer organisations with less capacity. These CSOs are in urgent need of more capacity dedicated to fundraising, and it is also advisable to explore other ways of generating income, diversifying so as to ensure future financial sustainability.

There was also a perception, particularly from smaller, grassroots community projects, that more established organisations are given preferential treatment by funding bodies. Mainstream grantmakers such as Lloyds Bank Foundation have recognised a need to make their application process more inclusive, and there is clearly a shift towards this across the sector. However, it is too soon to say whether this has made a material change yet.

Organisations have also had to reduce the use of volunteers due to lockdown restrictions. Activities which would normally be carried out by volunteers including food deliveries and door-stopping have been taken on senior members of staff. This is not sustainable during recovery. Luckily, with lockdown restrictions loosening over the next few months, volunteers should be able to return and relieve staff of some of the workload.

New arrivals often face the most barriers accessing support because they lack English speaking skills and they are often less confident and empowered to access support. *Justice First* said one of the most important aspects of their work with refugees and asylum seekers is to *"make them feel like human beings"* and show them that this isn't the way life has to be. The importance of this emotional support should not be underestimated, but it is difficult to give priority to it when resources are stretched and when services are delivered solely online.

*Amal Project Teesside* also highlighted the difficulties of language barriers when supporting newly arrived communities - extra resources need to be dedicated to increasing accessibility of services for them. The teachers the organisation work with mention frequently they lack capacity to address the challenge of engaging with ESOL parents to pass on important information. Another barrier is trust: newly arrived asylum seekers are often moved around to many places, so they find it increasingly difficult to settle and build trust with organisations.

Every contributor to this report touched on the issue of digital exclusion, which emerged as one of the preeminent challenges facing organisations during the pandemic. Digital exclusion due to digital poverty is particularly stark for refugees and asylum seekers. Fortunately some organisations secured funding to provide digital infrastructure (tablets, mobiles, and data) for those with no digital access; this made a positive difference, however not all individuals could be provided for.

It was encouraging to see widespread recognition and acknowledgement of the need for culturally appropriate food parcels. However there was a feeling that support should extend further than emergency food aid. Mental health, wellbeing and social isolation are huge social issues that have been compounded by the pandemic. Organisations already providing support are well placed to address many of these issues.

## **b) What are the main challenges for the sub-sector?**

Some of the organisations were concerned about a disconnect with local councils. One organisation leader told us there are high expectations placed on the voluntary sector. For example, one council meeting suggested that the voluntary sector should look to increase capacity by 20%; this is not feasible for many groups, who lack resources. There needs to be increased dialogue between local councils and small community groups to increase the council's understanding of the barriers faced by CSOs and pave the way for working together to reach shared targets.

In particular, organisations felt more collaboration across the wider public sector was needed to address language barriers, cultural awareness of services and accessibility of public services. One organisation stated its desire for increased collaboration with the local authorities, specifying the mental health authority, local police community engagement team and the council. Local authorities recognise this too: when we spoke to Cleveland Police as part of the 'sector-wide' study, they acknowledged that they need to create trust with the ethnic minority communities to do effective police and community support work. "Due to a disengagement from the community, trust within our service has fallen. This needs to be created again", they said. The pandemic has posed significant challenges to social connection, so there needs to be increased, concerted and well-considered effort from the Police to enter ethnic minority community spaces to rekindle these relationships.

Organisations were developing their own ideas on how to move forward towards recovery as lockdown restrictions are gradually loosened. These include community forum events, as well as better signposting to community information and how to get involved.



## c) What are the main challenges for the community?

There are some recurring themes to the stories shared by the nine civil society organisations supporting ethnic minorities that contributed to this report. According to our analysis, the most pertinent challenges to the ethnic minority and newly arrived communities are:

### 1. Digital Exclusion

The pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on marginalised and disadvantaged communities: “*Whatever inequalities there might have been - those inequalities have been magnified*”, explained *Investing in People and Culture (IPC)*. Digital exclusion has deepened this divide; given how widely it was reported, tackling digital poverty will be the first building block for achieving meaningful and widespread social impact in the ethnic minority communities.

### 2. Stigmatisation of asylum seekers and refugees

However, asylum seekers and refugees were vulnerable and often lived precariously before the pandemic; there are structural barriers and policies in place that make it difficult for migrants to remain in the UK. *Justice First* commented asylum seekers and refugees are stigmatised in this country, and “*people buy into this*”, which compounds the problem. The organisations we’ve spoken to in this report deal with the emotional impact of this xenophobia, which is often extremely negative. A step change through education and awareness-raising is needed to improve this.

### 3. Reaching ethnic minority women

As well as asylum seekers and refugees, organisations across the sector identified women from ethnic minority backgrounds as some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Women from these backgrounds are more likely to have become isolated; they are more likely to work than men, and are less likely to have access to transport. Though rates of domestic abuse are not necessarily higher, the form of abuse can be distinct, for example honour-based violence, so overlooked or unaddressed.

### 4. Perceptions of the rest of the community

One of our contributors expressed a view that local media tends to highlight differences in the community, and between community projects, in a negative way to attract more publicity for their media outlet. This organisation had been approached by a local media outlet to speak on a panel last year about why the country was able to celebrate Christmas, when Eid had been called off for Muslims. The contributor thought it was an unconstructive discussion topic and felt vulnerable to their words being misconstrued. The media has the influence and power to portray diversity in a positive way, and should use the opportunity to do this.

### 5. Recognising the specific needs of ethnic minorities

Despite the need to focus on what communities have in common, there is a need for open forums and dialogue about different cultures and their specific needs. This will help community groups to create and deliver truly inclusive services.

## 7. Recommendations and practical solutions from the community

Below is a series of recommendations and practical solutions addressing some of the challenges that emerged in this report. Many of these were put forward by contributors to this 'spotlight' report, but we also drew on findings from our sector-wide study, which can be accessed on request.

The recommendations are for the consideration of the organisations supporting ethnic minorities and newly arrived communities, local infrastructure organisations such as TM&C, and local statutory bodies:

Providers of ESOL and other training and educational services have had to close during the pandemic. In the event of further lockdowns or restrictions, registering as an educational provider can help organisations stay open to deliver these vital services.

A hybrid model of service delivery: partially in-person and partially digitally remote support can help organisations transition back to in-person service delivery, as lockdown restrictions lift over the coming months.

Being joined-up, and/or coordinated in formal partnerships is an effective way of tackling a shared goal. An example where this has worked well is the Ariadne Partnership (between MAP, British Red Cross, Open Door North East and Justice First). The partner organisations, although working for the same client base, have different skills to bring to the table, creating a holistic approach to assisting asylum seekers and refugees.

Organisations expressed a lack of dialogue and joined-up thinking with local councils, and a desire for stronger working relationships and partnerships. Flat-hierarchy working groups, and informal workshops could be a way to achieve this, since they provide an opportunity to identify shared goals and see for themselves the opportunities to collaborate

Integrating interpretation services into programmes/services means that all services can reach individuals who are most in need. Organisations can recruit those who speak community languages for voluntary and/or paid-roles; these individuals could very well be former or current service-users.

As we have seen, there are many organisations tackling food insecurity in Middlesbrough. Each engagement is also an opportunity to make contact with someone vulnerable. Therefore, organisations who are providing this sort of support should also think how they can use their capacity and resources to at the same time mitigate other urgent social issues. Loneliness and social isolation should be high on the priority list.

Perceptions of ethnic minorities in the Middlesbrough area have been shaped by the specific local history, so initiatives to shift perceptions should start at a local level - for example, through positive messaging via community groups and championed by the local media.

Women from ethnic minority backgrounds are vulnerable to distinct forms of domestic abuse. Organisations should be trained professionally on how to spot and what to do in cases of honour-based violence, as well as how to identify signs and safeguard appropriately and ensure safety both short and long term.

## 8. About this report

This report was produced by **Civil Society Consulting CIC**, commissioned by **Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland**.



**Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland** is a not-for-profit, faith-based organisation that works with churches and community groups to tackle poverty and the challenges that local people face. Established in 2012, it is a joint venture with the Diocese of York and the Church Urban Fund (CUF). TM&C works across Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland as part of the Together Network, which is a nationwide community and faith-driven alliance working in partnership with the Church of England and CUF.



**Civil Society Consulting CIC** is an independent not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC). Founded at the height of the then Government 'austerity' agenda 10 years ago, the CIC is committed to supporting smaller 'grassroots' community-based organisations. We enable them to flourish and to tackle the problems that exist in the local communities they know and love. We believe not only that this is right, but that it is a highly effective way to leverage social impact.

Recently, the team have worked extensively with faith and civil society organisations in: throughout London including Barking & Dagenham, Bromley, Southwark, Tower Hamlets & Waltham Forest; Blackpool, Coventry, Derby, Ipswich, Leicester, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Peterborough, Redcar, Rochdale and across the West Midlands and East Anglia.