



## **Embedding equalities and human rights in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry**

This document explains how the UK Covid-19 Inquiry will consider any disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people, and how it will adopt the 'PANEL' human rights principles in its work.

### **Equalities**

The terms of reference for the UK Covid-19 Inquiry state that the Inquiry will consider any disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people, including, but not limited to, those relating to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and equality categories under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

When investigating unequal impact among different groups or populations the following characteristics will be considered:

- a. Groups with protected characteristics
- b. Geographical differences,
- c. Social economic background,
- d. Occupation,
- e. Immigration status.

To meet the commitment in the Terms of Reference, we will aim to answer the following core questions in each [module](#):

- Did decision makers consider the impact of policy decisions on each of these groups?
- Were the decisions taken as a result adequate in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on these groups?

Not every characteristic will be relevant for all modules and some modules will have a particular focus on specific groups.



Some people or groups are affected by multiple characteristics (for example: social economic status, ethnicity and immigration status) and proper consideration will be given throughout the Inquiry into how they interact.

Each module will aim to answer the core questions using evidence from a wide range of witnesses including expert witnesses.

### **Human Rights principles**

Human rights approaches vary depending on the issues with which an organisation has to deal. Common principles have been identified across organisations as the "PANEL" principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination, Empowerment and Legality.

#### ***Participation: people should be involved in decisions that affect their rights***

We will provide opportunities for people whose human rights were affected by the pandemic to be meaningfully involved in the Inquiry. This will include:

- Anyone who wishes can share their experience of the Covid-19 pandemic with the Inquiry via Every Story Matters. These experiences will help us to understand the effect of Covid-19, the response of the authorities and any lessons that can be learned. They will directly feed into the legal investigative process.
- We will obtain evidence from organisations representing groups with protected characteristics and other disadvantaged groups where it is relevant to each module.

#### ***Accountability: there should be monitoring of how people's rights are being affected, as well as remedies when things go wrong***

Public inquiries are by their nature designed to hold people to account, through the questioning of witnesses in public, the publication of evidence and through findings and recommendations. Specifically for human rights we will also:

- Question decision makers on how they considered the human rights implications of their decisions and consider the impact decisions had on disadvantaged groups.



- Ensure the Inquiry’s own work and decision-making is open. We will live-stream the Inquiry’s public hearings and publish all evidence adduced in the hearings on the Inquiry’s website. We will also be open in decision-making , for example, publishing written reasons behind the Chair’s determination of applications for Core Participant status. We are publishing quarterly financial reports showing how the Inquiry is spending its budget.

***Non-discrimination: all forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated, and people who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights should be prioritised***

The Inquiry will be designed to be accessible to, and inclusive of, those with protected characteristics. This will include:

- Translating important Inquiry documents into other languages and formats.
- Working to ensure the Inquiry’s hearing centre is accessible.
- Ensuring Every Story Matters reaches a reflective cross-section of society, and actively seeking alternative ways to engage with groups that are underrepresented or are typically less likely to have their experiences heard.

***Empowerment: everyone should understand their rights and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices which affect their lives***

The Inquiry will support Core Participants and the public to play an active role in the Inquiry, including:

- Providing Core Participants in the Inquiry with regular opportunities to review and make submissions on the investigative approach, such as reviewing lists of issues, commenting on expert reports and suggesting lines of questioning.
- Seeking input from bereaved families and other groups in the design of Every Story Matters and commemoration activities.



***Legality: approaches should be grounded in the legal rights that are set out in domestic and international laws***

As well as scrutinising the extent to which decision-makers had regard to human rights considerations, we will ensure that the Inquiry itself complies with human rights and equality legislation.