

Catholic Parish Social Ministries in England and Wales

Summary Findings from
National Survey by CSAN in November 2020

Methodology and Significance

CSAN believes this was the first national survey of Catholic parish priests in the dioceses of England and Wales on local socio-economic concerns and on parish social ministries. It was a high level survey and not designed to substitute for each bishop's pastoral planning. It was undertaken during the pandemic in November 2020, with no baseline for comparison.

246 Catholic parishes (12.5%) responded.

The sample allows us to draw some high level conclusions for England and Wales. While there were too few responses from parishes in Wales for separate analysis, these are included where possible in overall findings.

We are grateful to Daniel Mason, independent researcher, for delivering the project.

Use of the English *Index of Multiple Deprivation* (IMD)

We mapped the postal address of parish respondents (normally the presbytery) against the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation for England. The Index ranks around 35,000 small statistical areas (LSOAs) in England by their relative deprivation, based on:

- Income Deprivation (22.5%)
- Employment Deprivation (22.5%)
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation (13.5%)
- Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%)
- Crime (9.3%)
- Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%)
- Living Environment Deprivation (9.3%)

LSOAs are then ranked in 'deciles': 1-10% most deprived in decile 1, 11-20% most deprived decile 2, and so on.

For some of our analyses, we compared responses from deciles 1-2 (20% most deprived, 55 responses) to deciles 9-10 (20% least deprived 36).

Executive Summary

Priests reported **steep increases in isolation and material destitution** during the pandemic in 2020.

These increases were **more pronounced in areas already in relatively high poverty pre-pandemic.**

The level of parish **social ministries generally fell.**

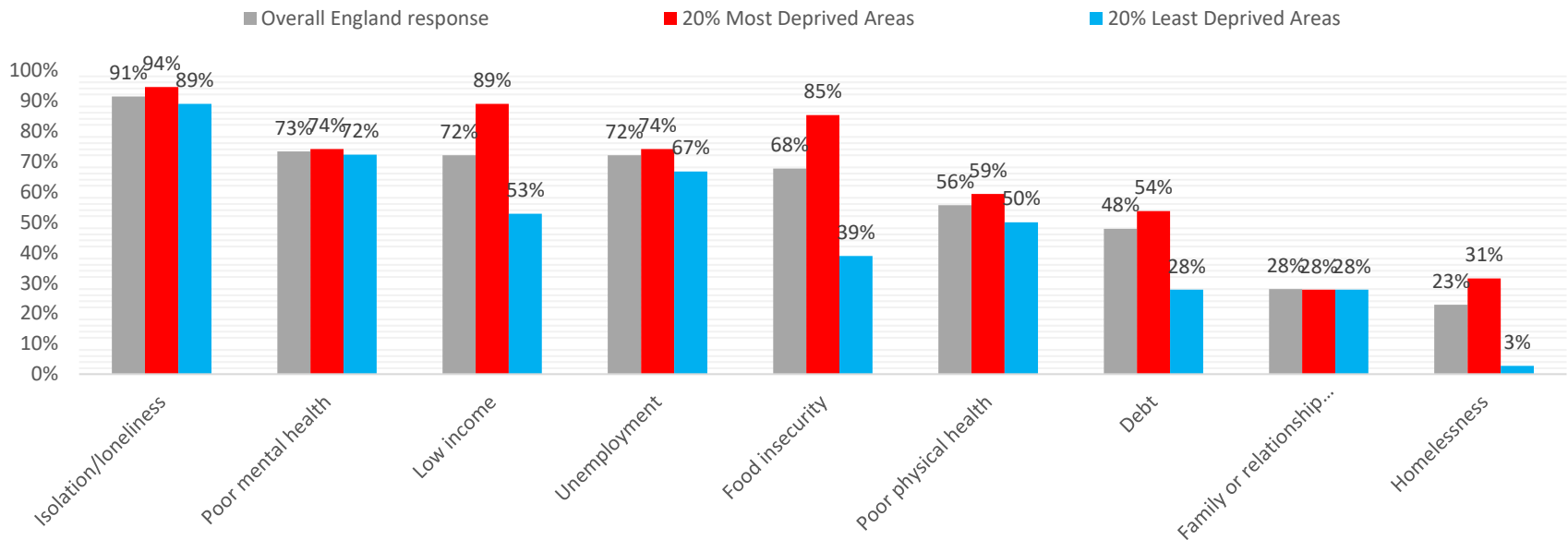
On top of restrictions of public worship in 2020, **the core/backbone of (mainly older) parish volunteers had often not been able to continue** in parish social ministries, as a result of age, shielding and fear of infection.

When the opportunity to return to Mass had been available, **previously regular attenders and families were often not returning.**

Looking forward, while some pastors **regarded online outreach as useful**, others were **struggling to see how to re-connect** with people in practical terms, with few regarding digital options as satisfactory.

Increase in need

Priests reported **steep increases in isolation and material destitution** in 2020.

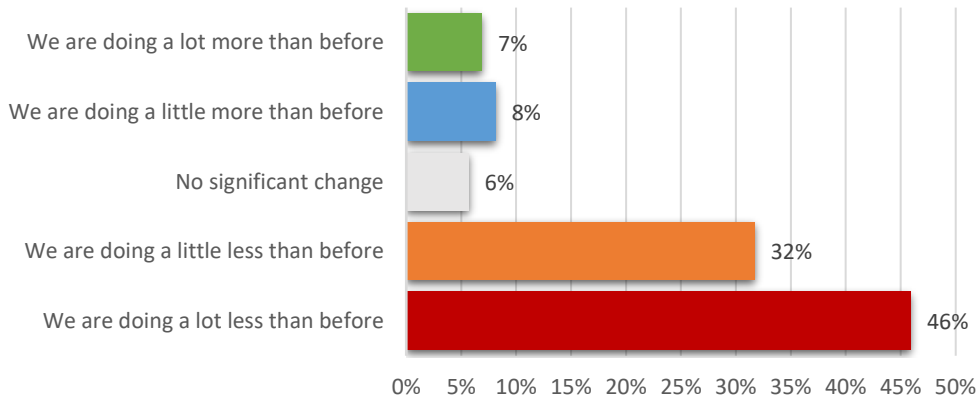


These increases **were more pronounced in areas already in relatively high poverty** pre-pandemic.

“Most” and “Least” deprived relates to the Lower Super Output Area in which the presbytery is located, not the whole parish area. The graph shows, for example, that 89% of parishes responding from the most deprived areas reported signs of increases in low income, compared to 53% of parishes in the least deprived areas.

Decrease in action

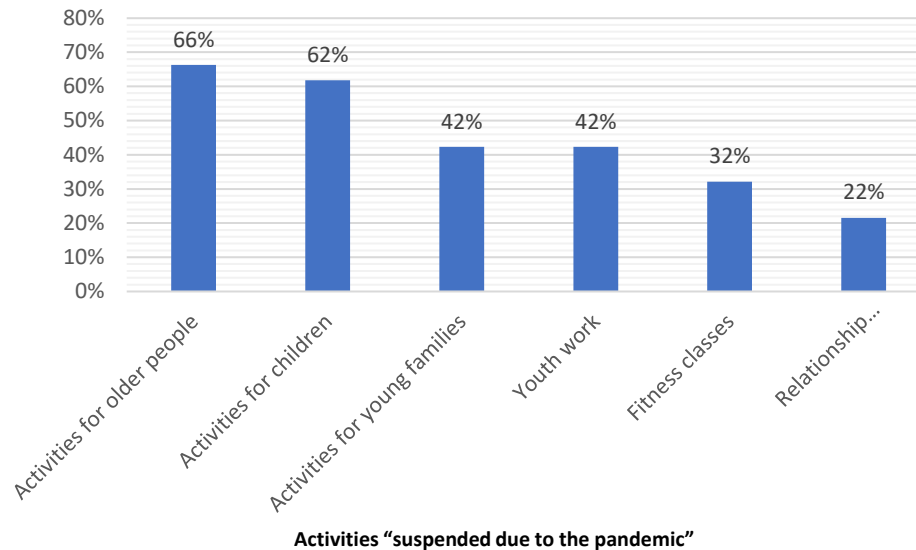
Parish social ministries **greatly reduced** in 2020.



78% of all respondents said they were doing 'a little' or 'a lot' less than before the pandemic

Activities suspended

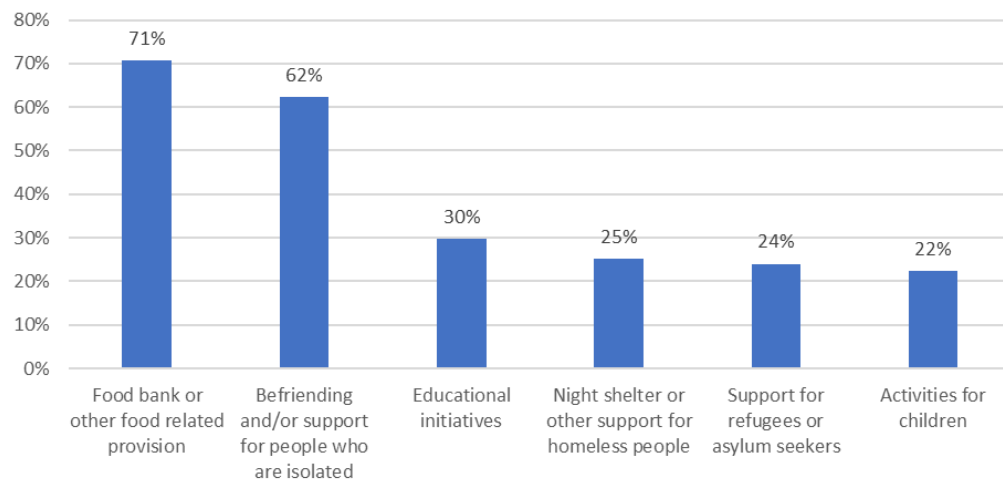
Suspended activities were most likely to have been previously in person and age-segregated.



Given the steep increase in social isolation also reported by parishes, is there a need to put more focus on activities that cross generations?

Activities continuing

Continuing activities were most likely to be immediate support – food banks, night shelters and refugee support – and activities that some groups were moving online – befriending and educational initiatives.



Activities that are currently being run or supported by all parishes

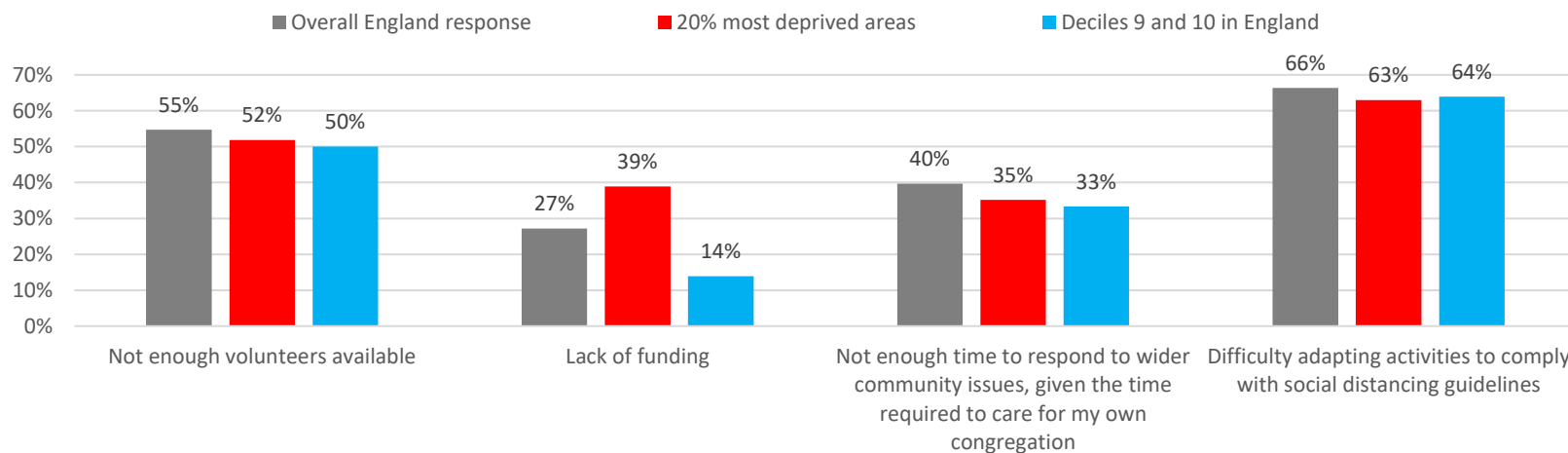
“Our outreach through media platforms has been a fruit of the Pandemic lockdown”

Response to Q6, What opportunities have opened up?

Given the steep increase in poverty reported by parishes, the current emphasis on immediate responses raises the question of how groups can best help people out of poverty for good.

Challenges during the pandemic

Parishes commonly reported difficulties in adapting activities to comply with social distancing, and lacking sufficient volunteers.



There are few differences in the responses between more and less deprived areas, apart from in **lack of funding**, where **more deprived areas were almost three times as likely to say it was a challenge**.

“Most” and “Least” deprived relates to the Lower Super Output Area in which the presbytery is located, not the whole parish area.

What support do parish social ministries need?

1: Connecting with (younger) parishioners

- The reported increases in isolation and finding volunteers suggest that, if older people cannot return on the same basis as before, for the foreseeable future, and they have formed the majority of parish volunteers during the week (cf. research by Bullivant), then pastoral leadership and activity organisation that enable more working age/younger volunteers to participate will become even more urgent and important.
- Based on the qualitative feedback from parishes, a key consideration for developing parish social ministries may be how to nurture encounter and mutual appreciation between people in different age groups.
- For poorer parishes seeing a steep rise in poverty, enhanced solidarity across church boundaries, i.e. redistribution or other support for poorer parishes, may become more critical for the common good.
- It was noticeable that parishes had focused on meeting immediate needs, and talked less about how, with the smaller number of volunteers, they can be effective in realising long lasting change. This may also be important for increasing external support for social action.

What support do parish social ministries need?

2: Tools and resources

Those parishes responding to the survey told us they most want:

- Support to improve links with others addressing local poverty, e.g. faith groups, other communities and external organisations.
- Information on what other churches are doing to address social issues.

However, 47% of Catholic parishes did not open the email inviting them to participate in this survey. We do not know how far this is attributable to furlough of administrative staff. We see a need to consider:

- Enabling easy communication with Catholic communities as places of welcome, including under lockdown, and
- How far use of electronic tools can improve connections between Catholic and other organisations, particularly in times of crisis.

Guidance for social action in parish groups and schools is available on CSAN's website – www.csan.org.uk/guidance

We are bringing together more guidance where there are gaps.

Future research

CSAN is keen to develop the national story on parish-led social engagement, to help church leaders make the best use of resources, and to inform the Catholic Church's public voice, as a contributor to the vitality of communities in this country.

CSAN does not receive direct Government funding. This survey was funded by one-off grants from two trusts that are independent from the Caritas network.

For more information, or if you would like to support this work, please

- See our website – www.csan.org.uk
- Email us – policy@csan.org.uk