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Animal experimentation

UK could allow animal tests for cosmetic ingredients for first time since 1998

Exclusive: campaigners say aligning with EU ruling on chemical testing will ‘blow a hole’ in UK leadership on cruelty-free cosmetics



The UK banned animal testing of cosmetic ingredients in 1998. Photograph: Steven Senne/AP

The UK banned animal testing of cosmetic ingredients in 1998. Photograph: Steven Senne/AP

Natalie Grover Science correspondent

@NatalieGrover

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Ministers have opened the door to expanding the use of animal testing to ingredients used in cosmetic products for the first time in 23 years, an animal welfare charity has said.

Cruelty Free International (CFI) said animal testing on ingredients exclusively used in cosmetics – which was banned in the UK in 1998 – could be required, after being told by the Home Office that the government had “reconsidered its policy.”

In a letter, the government said it was aligning itself with a decision made last year by the appeals board of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), which said that some ingredients used only in cosmetics needed to be tested on animals to ensure they were safe.

The Home Office insisted that UK law on animal testing had not changed, but campaigners warned that accepting the ECHA’s ruling could lead to a much wider use of animal testing.

The ECHA ruled that German chemicals firm Symrise had to carry out animal tests on two ingredients used solely in cosmetics to satisfy chemicals regulations, overruling EU restrictions on animal testing of cosmetic ingredients. The ingredients are widely used across a range of cosmetics.

In a letter sent to CFI and seen by the Guardian, the Home Office said it aimed to “publicly clarify its position now with the formal publication of an updated policy and regulatory guidance”.

CFI has warned that by aligning itself with the ECHA decision, the UK would be “blowing a hole” in its leadership on animal testing.

In response, a government spokesperson said there had been no change in legislation and that the ban on using animals for the testing of finished cosmetic products remained in force.

“Under UK regulations to protect the environment and the safety of workers, animal testing can be permitted, where required by UK regulators, on single or multiuse ingredients. However, such testing can only be conducted where there are no non-animal alternatives,” they said.

CFI’s director of science and regulatory affairs, Dr Katy Taylor, said: “the government is saying that even ingredients used solely in cosmetics, and with a history of safe use, can be subjected to animal tests in the UK”.

“This decision blows a hole in the UK’s longstanding leadership of no animal testing for cosmetics and makes a mockery of the country’s quest to be at the cutting edge of research and innovation, relying once again on cruel and unjustifiable tests that date back over half a century.”

In 1998, the then Labour government used its own legislation as an example as it sought to get the practice of animal testing on cosmetics banned across the EU. The EU testing ban on finished cosmetic products was introduced in 2004, and the ban on such testing of cosmetic ingredients in 2009.

Kerry Postlewhite, CFI’s director of public affairs, said the letter signalled the UK will not hold firm on animal testing bans after Brexit.

Dr Julia Fentem, head of the safety and environmental assurance centre of Unilever, one of the world’s largest manufacturers of cosmetics, said there has always been uncertainty about how to comply with the EU’s chemicals and cosmetics legislation. She said the UK’s plan to align with the Symrise decision was a “retrograde step”.

According to Fentem, there are roughly 100 cosmetics-only ingredients that may be subject to animal testing under chemicals regulations.

Before animal testing bans were enforced, most of these ingredients underwent some form of animal testing to assess things like skin and eye irritation. But Taylor said the chemicals legislation, at least in the Symrise case, requires additional animal tests, including investigating the effects of the ingredient on a developing foetus.

She said many cosmetics-only chemicals have been around for decades and have not led to problems, but the new chemicals legislation could require companies to conduct these extensive animal tests “just to tick boxes”.

A [2020 survey](#) from UK charity Frame found that 84% of respondents would not buy a cosmetics product if they knew it, or one of its ingredients, had been tested on animals.

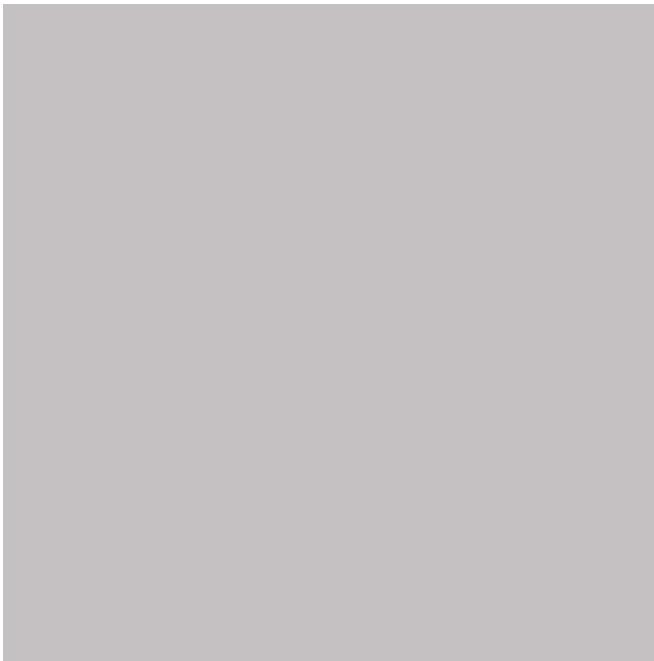
Symrise has challenged the ruling at the European court of justice on scientific grounds.

Sophisticated approaches that can ensure the safety of cosmetics without using animals already exist, said Fentem. “And then you’ve got these regulations which just don’t align with the science that we’ve got.”

She said the move by the UK signalled a complete reversal of the leadership on no animal testing for cosmetics. “That’s the signal to the consumer who’s looking at having logos on the pack around sustainability, no animal testing, vegan etc … essentially then it’s the house of cards, and everything around cruelty-free products just collapses.”

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A poster in the window of a pharmacy offering commercial Covid-19 PCR test for travel. Photograph: Yau Ming Low/Alamy

[Guardian morning briefing](#)

Wednesday briefing: Traveller Covid testing system under stress

A poster in the window of a pharmacy offering commercial Covid-19 PCR test for travel. Photograph: Yau Ming Low/Alamy

Drop-off boxes overflowing with unprocessed swabs ... Andrew Cuomo's fall from grace ... and what Welsh lamb has in common with champagne

by [Warren Murray](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.29 EDT

Top story: Blanket testing ‘complete scam’ says MP

Hello, I'm Warren Murray, glad you could join us in the briefing room.

The government is under pressure to intervene amid concerns that its Covid testing regime for travellers is close to collapse. Photos online have shown drop-off boxes overflowing with unprocessed swabs, while growing numbers of returning holidaymakers are reporting test kits failing to arrive or taking up to six days to process. The testing regime [looks set to be overwhelmed](#) as more travellers start returning from August getaways.

The Labour MP Ben Bradshaw said PCR tests on fully vaccinated people returning from countries with lower Covid rates lower than the UK were “a complete scam and completely unacceptable”. The Liberal Democrats have called for the government to cap “rip-off” costs and scrap the VAT on tests after its research found that, of the more than 400 providers who met minimum standards to provide PCR tests for travel, only 47 charged under £50, while one test costs £575. Keep up on coronavirus developments around the world [at our live blog](#).

‘Deeply, deeply apologise’ – The women who accuse Andrew Cuomo of sexual harassment have said they feel [“vindicated and relieved”](#) after the

New York governor resigned. The lieutenant governor, Kathy Hochul, will become the first woman to hold the state governorship when she succeeds Cuomo in two weeks. Announcing his resignation, Cuomo said he had thought his behaviour was acceptable but acknowledged the 11 women involved were probably “truly offended” and said “for that I deeply, deeply apologise”. He also said there was “no factual basis” for the most serious allegation against him. It has been a fast, furious and vertical fall from grace for Cuomo, who in March 2020 held 87% approval for his response to the coronavirus pandemic, and proved to be the most prominent and trusted Democratic voice amid a public health crisis under then-president Donald Trump.

Midweek catch-up

- > A-level inequality between private and state schools grew to its widest in the modern era as teacher assessment again replaced exams across the UK. Independent schools' top grades rose nine percentage points to 70%, compared with six percentage points elsewhere.
- > A Canadian entrepreneur who was arrested in China on spying claims, just days after the Canadian arrest of a Huawei executive, has been sentenced to 11 years in prison after a secret trial. Critics say the case is China using “hostage politics”.
- > Emergency powers to handle post-Brexit queues of up to 13,000 lorries across Kent are being made permanent, signalling the government expects further disruption. Operation Brock was meant to end by October 2021.
- > A nurse in Germany is suspected of injecting people with saline solution rather than Covid shots. Authorities have appealed for up to 8,600 people to get vaccinated again. The nurse had expressed vaccine scepticism on social media, police said.
- > Britain may be opening the door to animal testing of cosmetic ingredients, according to the animal welfare charity CFI. It comes after the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) ruled some ingredients need to be tested on animals for safety.

> Coca-Cola bottles and cans were the most prevalent branded litter on beaches in the UK, a report has found. The company and others say the [UK needs a good deposit return scheme \(DRS\)](#) so their packaging is returned for recycling.

‘Democracy can still work’ – The US Senate has [passed a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill](#), with 19 Republicans joining Democrats to get it through. It affirmed Joe Biden’s strategy to push bipartisanship: “Today, we proved that democracy can still work,” said the president, noting that the 69-30 vote included the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell. The bill still has to go again through the House of Representatives before Biden can sign it into law. The White House says it will create “millions of jobs” – investing new federal funds in upgrading roads and bridges, as well as supporting greener policies such as expanding networks of charging stations for electric cars and boosting train travel and electric buses.

Lamb legacy – Lamb [grazed on samphire, sorrel and sea lavender](#) on the Gower peninsular in Wales is the first UK food to receive protection under a post-Brexit regime. The geographical indication scheme marks out regional products and was set up to replace a previous EU-wide scheme. Produced using knowledge and skills dating back to medieval times, Gower salt marsh lamb comes from lamb born, reared and slaughtered in south Wales. The UK protection regime – which includes speciality products such as traditional Bramley apple pie filling – already includes more than 5,000 products from across Europe originally protected under the EU scheme, such as Melton Mowbray pies, Jersey Royal potatoes, and champagne.

Today in Focus podcast: ‘Code red’ climate emergency

A major UN scientific report has concluded global heating is now irreversible and it is [unequivocal that human influence has warmed the planet](#).

Today in Focus

'Code red' climate emergency

00:00:00

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Lunchtime read: 'I don't intend to let my son down twice'

When 18-year-old Edward Mallen killed himself, his father blamed the NHS, society – and himself. He [founded the Zero Suicide Alliance](#) to try to make such deaths a thing of the past.



Steve Mallen. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#).

Sport

[Lionel Messi has pledged](#) to “help build something special” at [Paris Saint-Germain](#) after completing his move and signing a two-year contract on Tuesday. [The story of Barcelona and Lionel Messi](#) has not been about the extraordinary numbers but something more – the memories. [A decision is to be taken](#) before the end of the year about the possible launch of a female British & Irish Lions touring team. [Luka Dončić welcomed all his bosses](#) with the [Dallas Mavericks](#) to his home country of Slovenia to watch the young superstar sign the richest contract in club history. [Steven Gerrard has quickly lurched](#) towards territory marked ‘crisis’. For the first time in his Rangers tenure, Gerrard has presided over three defeats in a row – this one ended their dreams of competing in the [Champions League](#) once again. Wayne Rooney described [Derby's penalty shootout win over Salford](#) in the [Carabao Cup](#) as his “proudest moment” as a manager.

Business

If you can manage to get away to Europe, your money will be going a lot further than it has for a while after the pound hit an [18-month high against the euro](#) yesterday. The rise followed data showing a dip in investor confidence in Europe’s largest economy, Germany, amid a surge in new coronavirus cases. Sterling topped out at €1.183 on Tuesday and although it dipped very slightly overnight it is likely to continue benefiting from the UK economy’s fast recovery from the pandemic. The pound was steady at \$1.383, while the FTSE100 looks like lifting a touch this morning.

The papers

“[Gap widens between private and state schools](#)” – our **Guardian** lead story in print today. A-level students have told the Guardian about the [challenges of studying in a year disrupted by the pandemic](#) and their experience of teacher-assessed grades. Here are the [top five takeaways](#) from this year’s unprecedented result outcomes among students in England – among findings, girls beating boys in maths and getting more A*s and As as well, and a doubling of A grades in 12 subjects since 2019.



Guardian front page, Wednesday 11 August 2021.

Little sense in some quarters, though, of it being due recompense for what these pupils have gone through during the pandemic. “Call for urgent A-levels overhaul as grades soar”, says the **Times**. The **Telegraph** reports that “A-level grades could be scrapped to end top marks ‘free-for-all’” while the **i** looks ahead to 2022 with “Revealed: plan to fix A-level inflation”. The Guardian’s Richard Adams writes that next year the government cannot simply revert to the 2019-style system. “This year’s sixth formers had pre-pandemic GCSEs to show employers and admissions officers. The 2022 A-level candidates won’t even have that. Their GCSE grades were awarded during Williamson’s 2020 debacle and over the past 18 months they have endured all the chaos of pandemic lockdowns and burst bubbles. [Next year’s sixth formers deserve a break just as much as this year’s did.](#)”

The **Daily Mail** leads with the “grade gap” too but most of its front page points to coverage inside of the allegations in a US court case against Prince Andrew. Of the latter, the **Metro** says “Enough to make a duke sweat”. The **Express** has “‘Super scans’ give hope in dementia battle” which is about [artificial intelligence being used to spot warning signs](#). “Strictly hit by jitter bug” – that’s the **Sun** on one of the show’s professional dancers testing positive for Covid, sending cast and crew into isolation. And in the

Financial Times: “Biden buoyed by Senate backing for £1tn infrastructure package”.

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Michael Spavor trial: China court sentences Canadian to 11 years for spying

Justin Trudeau says ruling is ‘absolutely unacceptable’ as tensions grow between countries over fate of arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou in Canada



Michael Spavor was arrested in 2018 after Canada’s detention of a senior executive at tech giant Huawei. He was put on trial accused of espionage and has been sentenced to 11 years in prison. Photograph: AP

Michael Spavor was arrested in 2018 after Canada’s detention of a senior executive at tech giant Huawei. He was put on trial accused of espionage and has been sentenced to 11 years in prison. Photograph: AP

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei, [Leyland Cecco](#) in Ottawa and agencies

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.18 EDT

Justin Trudeau has condemned as “absolutely unacceptable and unjust” China’s jailing of Canadian entrepreneur Michael Spavor for 11 years on charges of spying.

Canada’s prime minister said: “The verdict for Mr Spavor comes after more than two-and-a-half years of arbitrary detention, a lack of transparency in the legal process, and a trial that did not satisfy even the minimum standards required by international law.”

The verdict, delivered by a court in Dandong on Wednesday morning, comes as Beijing steps up pressure ahead of a Canadian court ruling on whether to hand over Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou to face US criminal charges.

Spavor’s arrest in 2018 came just days after Meng’s arrest in Canada in connection with possible violations of trade sanctions on Iran, drawing accusations by critics of “hostage diplomacy”.

[Path to freedom narrows for detained Canadian duo caught in US-China feud](#)

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Spavor, and fellow Canadian Michael Kovrig, have spent 975 days in detention, and were tried separately in secret earlier this year. In March China’s state media tabloid, the Global Times, said Spavor – who lived near the North Korean border and arranged cultural exchanges – was accused of supplying intelligence to Kovrig, a former diplomat turned analyst for the International Crisis Group. Canadian authorities have said the charges are baseless.

On Wednesday, the court in Dandong announced Spavor had been found guilty of spying and illegally providing state secrets to other countries. He was sentenced to 11 years in jail, confiscation of personal property, and fined 50,000 yuan (\$7,715), according to a statement by the Liaoning Dandong intermediate people’s court.

Canadian ambassador Dominic Barton said he was disappointed with the long sentence. “We condemn in the strongest possible terms this [decision] which was rendered without due process or transparency.”

Barton said he was able to have a consular visit with Spavor, who thanked his supporters and said he was in good spirits but wanted to get home.

The court had also ordered Spavor be deported but it was not clear when this would occur. Barton told the media they had interpreted the judgment to mean deportation after the sentence, but “hopefully there is a way for him to get home a little earlier”.

Beijing-based lawyer Mo Shaoping told Reuters that deportation generally takes place after the person has finished serving the sentence but may happen earlier for special cases.

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston, a senior fellow at the University of Ottawa’s graduate school of public and international affairs, said there was precedent in [a similar 2014 case](#), in which Canadian couple Kevin and Julia Garratt were detained, charged and sentenced in China after Canada extradited Su Bin, a suspected spy, to the US. They were released and deported in 2017 soon [after Su cut a deal in the US](#).

“[Spavor’s case] may be a signal that the Chinese are willing to deport him at whatever time the Canadian government creates the right conditions for him to leave – in other words Meng being released to return to China,” she said.

Spavor has two weeks to appeal against the ruling, but China’s notoriously opaque justice system rarely grants appeals and routinely posts conviction rates of more than 99.9%.

Spavor’s family have maintained he was innocent of the accusations against him, saying he had done much as a businessman to “build constructive ties” between Canada, China and North Korea.

Separately on Tuesday, a court rejected the appeal of a third Canadian, Robert Schellenberg, whose prison term in a drug case was [abruptly](#)

increased to death after the executive's arrest. Canada's foreign ministry condemned that verdict, which it labelled a "cruel and inhumane punishment". The statement prompted a rebuke from China's embassy in Canada that it had violated China's judicial sovereignty.

All three cases are suspected to be linked to the ongoing extradition hearing in Canada, where Meng and her lawyers have made their case to a judge that her extradition should be tossed out. In the coming days, the Canadian government will argue that the extradition should proceed.

Western governments have accused China of engaging in "hostage diplomacy" by arresting citizens and linking their fates to bilateral disagreements or, in Canada's case, legal action against Chinese nationals. Diplomats from dozens of countries gathered at Canada's embassy in Beijing on Wednesday to hear the Spavor verdict, in a show of solidarity with Canada.

Diplomats from twenty-five countries at the Canadian embassy in Beijing this morning for the Spavor verdict.
pic.twitter.com/qym0pOxaPm

— Jonathan Cheng (@JChengWSJ) [August 11, 2021](#)

Beijing denies its prosecution of Schellenberg, Spavor and Kovrig are retaliation for Meng's arrest. Trudeau, has previously said the charges against Spavor and Kovrig were "trumped-up" and that Chinese officials were "very clear" the cases were connected.

Canada and other governments including Australia and the Philippines face growing pressure from China in disputes over human rights, coronavirus and territorial claims. Washington has warned Americans they face "a heightened risk of arbitrary detention" in China for reasons other than to enforce the law.

[China court upholds death sentence against Canadian Robert Schellenberg](#)
[Read more](#)

“It’s hard to know whether or not China actually believes that we have a legal system that is separate from government interference. I genuinely don’t know if they appreciate that reality,” said Stephanie Carvin, a professor of international relations at Carleton university. “But the fact is, there’s no coincidence that these verdicts are happening this week.”

While Spavor’s sentencing has been condemned by Canadian officials and allies, it nonetheless represents movement in the case. “There is the thinnest of silver linings; as the legal processes march towards some kind of conclusion, we do move towards more of an endgame,” said Carvin.

She also pointed to the Garratt case, noting it wasn’t until the whole process was complete that China released the Garratt family.

“While there are elements of similarity in the cases, I do worry that China of 2015 isn’t the China of today. We’ve seen a far more aggressive foreign policy and security policy coming out of the country,” Carvin said.

That aggression – and a series of frosty meetings between US and Chinese officials – has dampened hopes that a deal between the two nations could be imminent.

At the same time, legal experts have previously said Meng’s case could take nearly a decade if she pursues appeals all the way to Canada’s supreme court.

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Regenerative farming shift could reduce UK climate emissions, say experts

Organic farming methods, which use fewer pesticides and store more carbon in soil, are becoming more popular



John Cherry of Weston Park Farms, which is innovating in sustainable methods of production and follows principles of no cultivation, using cover crops where possible and diversity in rotation. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

John Cherry of Weston Park Farms, which is innovating in sustainable methods of production and follows principles of no cultivation, using cover crops where possible and diversity in rotation. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Tom Levitt](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

There is growing momentum behind a shift to ‘regenerative’ agriculture in the UK, which can help to mitigate the climate crisis, say leading experts in the sector.

“More and more people are seeing other farmers doing it [regenerative farming] and are happier for it,” said John Cherry, who founded [Groundswell](#), the UK’s flagship event for regenerative agriculture, on his farm in Hertfordshire. “People may be getting a higher yield with conventional approaches, but it is costing them more too with all the inputs, so they are not making more money.”

Minette Batters, head of the National Farmers’ Union, has set out an ambition for UK farming to be [climate neutral by 2040](#). Henry Dimbleby’s [National Food Strategy](#) has now recommended that the government put aside up to £700m to pay farmers to create nature-rich, carbon sequestering landscapes.

Food and farming – a key UK sector – has a large carbon footprint, accounting for one-fifth of our emissions. That figure rises to about 30% if you factor in the emissions produced by all the food we import. Agriculture accounts for about 10% of emissions, but in recent years there have been a number of commitments to reducing that.

There are already more than 1,700 organic farmers across the UK registered with Soil Association Certification, covering almost half a million hectares of farmland. As well as using fewer pesticides, organic farms [have more](#) wildlife and store more carbon in their soils, reducing climate emissions.

But in recent years, ‘regenerative’ farming techniques have seen a significant growth in interest.



Piglets on an organic farm ecological in Wales. Photograph: Herb Bendicks/Alamy Stock Photo

When Groundswell started six years ago, there were just a couple of hundred attenders. This year, more than 3,500 people turned up, [including environment secretary George Eustice](#), who told the crowd that Brexit was a chance for the UK to lead the world on supporting regenerative agriculture. Under new subsidy plans announced by his department, farmers will be offered up to £70 per hectare to take up regenerative techniques, including mixed farming systems where crops are cultivated alongside livestock to help boost soil health.

Even the most traditional farming media outlets have been [awash with praise](#) for the new approach managing land and producing food in recent weeks, admitting that [many farmers are now experimenting](#) with some of the ideas.

Earlier this year, McDonald's [announced](#) it was launching a regenerative farming project to transition its beef suppliers in the UK to more sustainable approaches. And writing in the Guardian in May, Prince Charles [called for](#) a "rapid transition to regenerative farming".

As well as shows like Groundswell, membership of regenerative farming groups has soared. The [Landworkers Alliance](#), set up in 2014, represents

more than 1,500 farmers and landworkers across the UK promoting more regenerative approaches to farming. While the [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) and [Pasture-fed Livestock Association](#) have more than 1,500 farmer members between them.

The lockdown had also given farmers a chance to pick up on a proliferation of online events and content on regenerative farming, said Nikki Yoxall, 34, a first generation regenerative farmer in Aberdeenshire. “While those practising it are still a minority, there’s a lot more awareness and interest in it from all quarters.”



Workers pick strawberries at Riverford organic farm in Devon. Photograph: Phil Clarke Hill/Corbis via Getty Images

The end of subsidies and rising cost of inputs like fertilisers is pushing farmers to reconsider what they do. “If you accept that things can’t carry on as they are, then you can leave the industry or try something different,” said Herefordshire regenerative beef, sheep and fruits farmer Rich Thomas, 42. “If you take away chemicals slowly then you can wean yourself off a little bit every year and look to start farming in a different way. It’s about trying to regenerate and better use our soils.”

[‘Sustainable isn’t a thing’: why regenerative agriculture is food’s latest buzzword](#)

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Yoxall, who runs a grazing service for farmers and landowners to help manage and maintain their land and soils, said regenerative agriculture was a more accessible type of farming for new entrants too, given its lack of reliance on high inputs and machinery. “If we have more regenerative agriculture in the UK then we’ll need a lot more farmers in the UK for sure.”

But the ideas are also attracting existing, older generations of farmers who want to leave a positive legacy on their farm. “I’m getting regular calls now from the 55-year-old plus age group who realise they’ve degraded their land and just want to make amends and leave it in a better state,” said Herefordshire farmer and regenerative agriculture consultant [Ben Taylor-Davies](#).

And it’s picking up public support. “There’s an interest in it as a label beyond just farming, with people looking for wool and leather from a regenerative farming origin too,” said Cotswold-based regenerative farmer James Allen.

Allen said consumer interest would ultimately be a bigger driver than government policy. “Organic started as a niche, but now every supermarket has its own range. It [regenerative farming] is on a wave gaining momentum all the time,” he added.

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Sexual violence

‘Like I wasn’t a person’: Ethiopian forces accused of systematic rape in Tigray

Mutilation, slavery and torture of women and girls detailed in accounts published by Amnesty, in what organisation says could amount to war crimes

- Warning: this article contains graphic details of sexual violence that readers may find upsetting



Ethiopian soldiers taken captive by the Tigray Defence Forces in Mekele, Tigray's capital, last month. A fragile ceasefire has broken down.
Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

Ethiopian soldiers taken captive by the Tigray Defence Forces in Mekele, Tigray's capital, last month. A fragile ceasefire has broken down. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

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[Emmanuel Akinwotu](#), *West Africa correspondent*

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

Ethiopian government forces have been systematically raping and abusing hundreds of women and girls in the current conflict in Tigray, according to a new report from Amnesty International.

Adding to a growing body of evidence that rape is being used as a weapon of war in the northern region of Ethiopia, Amnesty's research offers a snapshot of the extent of the crimes in an area where communications with the outside world have been deliberately restricted by federal authorities.

The report comes as Ethiopia's government this week called on "all capable Ethiopians" to join the military to stop resurgent forces from the [Tigray region](#) "once and for all", in an apparent abandonment of its unilateral ceasefire in June.

The war in Africa's second-most populous country has risked destabilising the Horn of [Africa](#) region since it broke out in November, when the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, a Nobel peace laureate, declared war on the regional government, controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which had ruled Ethiopia for almost 30 years.

The report, based on the accounts of 63 Tigrayan women and medical professionals, details how women have been routinely subjected to mutilation, gang rape, sexual slavery and other forms of torture by members of Ethiopia's army, the Ethiopian National Defence Force; the Eritrean Defence Forces, which are allied to Ahmed's government; and Amharan militia fighters as the Tigray conflict continues, said Amnesty.

The presence of Eritrean troops, and an Amharan militia group called Fano, fighting against the TPLF forces, has caused outrage and brought international sanctions. According to researchers at Belgium's University of Ghent, there have been at least 10,000 reported deaths and 230 massacres. Thousands have suffered horrific abuses, according to the [UN](#).

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary general, said: "The severity and scale of the sexual crimes committed are particularly shocking, amounting to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. It makes a mockery of the central tenets of humanity."

"It's clear that rape and sexual violence have been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray. Hundreds have been subjected to brutal treatment aimed at degrading and dehumanising them."



Women who fled the conflict in Tigray pray at a church near Umm Rakouba refugee camp in Qadarif, eastern Sudan, last November. Photograph: Nariman El-Mofty/AP

She said the Ethiopian government must take immediate action and called on the African Union and UN to bring an end to the conflict.

Rights groups and aid organisations, whose activities have been restricted, must be granted access, she added.

Twelve of the women interviewed by Amnesty said they had been raped by soldiers in front of their family members, including children. Five of the women were pregnant at the time.

In one account, a 20-year-old woman, referred to as Lena*, told Amnesty she was attacked in her home in November last year. Three armed men who spoke Amharic and wore a mixture of military uniforms and civilian clothing raped and threatened to kill her, she said.

“I did not scream; they gestured to me not to make any noise or they would kill me. They raped me one after the other ... I was four months pregnant. I don’t know if they realised I was pregnant – I don’t know if they realised I was a person,” she told Amnesty.

A 35-year-old mother with two children, referred to as Ngist*, said she and four other women were raped by Eritrean soldiers in Sheraro on 21 November.

“Three of them raped me in front of my child. There was an eight-months pregnant lady with us, they raped her too,” she said. “They raped the women and slaughtered the men.”

Amnesty said Tigrayan health facilities recorded 1,288 cases of gender-based violence between February and April. Many of the women interviewed for the report said they had not visited clinics.

In May, a nun in Tigray [told the Guardian](#) that rape by security forces was occurring daily.

[‘Don’t betray women of Tigray’: calls grow for international action against rape in war](#)

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“Rape is starting at the age of 8 and to the age of 72,” she said. “It is so widespread, I go on seeing it everywhere, thousands. This rape is in public, in front of family, husbands, in front of everyone. Their legs and their hands are cut, all in the same way.”

TPLF forces have also been accused of potential war crimes during a conflict where historic and ethnic divisions have intensified. Ahmed has repeatedly said that any crimes would be investigated.

Despite Ethiopia announcing [early victories](#), it was forced to declare a ceasefire in June as resurgent Tigrayan forces retook much of the region. TPLF forces have since marched on the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. Ethiopia’s government has vowed to summon its “entire defensive capability” against Tigray.

05:42

Why is Ethiopia facing civil war? – video explainer

The conflict has led to a hunger crisis, with more than 400,000 people [facing famine conditions](#). Nearly 70,000 people have fled to neighbouring Sudan.

In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support for rape and sexual abuse on 0808 802 9999 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in [Scotland](#), or 0800 0246 991 in [Northern Ireland](#). In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at [ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html](#)

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Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola most common littered brand on UK beaches, says study

Calls for deposit return scheme now, with report tracing 65% of branded packaging pollution back to 12 firms



Litter on a beach in Bournemouth last year. Companies say a lack of a good deposit return scheme in the UK means their packaging gets needlessly littered. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

Litter on a beach in Bournemouth last year. Companies say a lack of a good deposit return scheme in the UK means their packaging gets needlessly littered. Photograph: Finnbarr Webster/Getty Images

Helena Horton

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

Coca-Cola bottles and cans were the most prevalent branded litter on beaches in the UK, a report has found, as campaigners call on the government to get on with introducing a deposit return scheme.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of all branded packaging pollution across the UK coastline can be traced back to just 12 companies, according to the findings by the marine conservation charity Surfers Against Sewage (SAS).

These are Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, AB InBev, McDonald's, Mondelēz International, Heineken, Tesco, Carlsberg Group, Suntory, Haribo, Mars and Aldi.

In total 3,913 volunteers collected branded items over 11,139 miles, making it the UK's biggest coordinated cleanup event. SAS recorded a total of 9,998 branded items that were linked to 328 companies.

Hugo Tagholm, the charity's chief executive, said: "Our annual Brand Audit [report] has once again revealed the shocking volume of plastic and packaging pollution coming directly from big companies and some of their best-known brands ... Legislation such as an 'all-in' deposit scheme needs to be introduced urgently and governments need to hold these companies to account and turn off the tap of plastic and packaging pollution flooding the ocean."

Companies say that a lack of a good deposit return scheme (DRS) in the UK means the packaging of their products gets needlessly littered.

There are plans for such a scheme in Britain, but this has been delayed until 2024 – with the government blaming the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a DRS consumers are charged an additional deposit fee when they buy a drink in a single-use container. This deposit acts as an incentive to support recycling because it is redeemed when the consumer returns the empty container to a return point.

A spokesperson for Coca-Cola said: "Like everyone, we care about reducing packaging waste and we don't want to see any of our packaging end up where it shouldn't. All of our packaging is 100% recyclable and our aim is to get more of it back so that it can be recycled and turned into new packaging again.

“It’s disappointing to see any packaging being littered and that’s why we support the introduction of a well-designed deposit return scheme, which would encourage people to recycle rather than litter or throw away. In Great Britain, we’re continuing to work with numerous organisations to encourage more recycling on-the-go and we’re actively supporting a number of initiatives with the aim of making litter something of the past.”

Andrew Opie, the director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said: “Supermarkets are working quickly to remove unnecessary plastics from their stores, having already removed all polystyrene packaging and plastic cutlery, as well as trialling packaging free and refillable options. This helps explain how supermarkets achieved a drop in the amount of plastic across their own brand products.

“More needs to be done and retailers have set themselves challenging reduction targets and are committed to ensuring all packaging will be 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable in the future. However, government and local councils must play their part by improving our current recycling infrastructure, and better enforcing laws against irresponsible littering.”

SAS is calling for companies to reduce their packaging and switch to refill models as well as the all-in return scheme. The Brand Audit report estimates that more than half (52%) of the pollution from the “dirty dozen” companies would be captured through such a scheme, including 80% of Coca-Cola’s products.

Despite the ubiquity of single-use personal protective equipment such as face masks during the Covid crisis, this made up a tiny fraction of the litter found.

Tagholm said: “Despite the surge in single-use plastic as a result of the pandemic, PPE made up just 2.5% of unbranded plastic pollution recorded during our latest Brand Audit. We cannot allow polluting industries to use the current health crisis to deflect from their own damaging behaviours and put the blame on the individual – we must demand action now.”

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Ministers face calls to intervene in ‘scam’ Covid travel test system

Travellers have complained of unfair prices, missed deliveries and slow processing of PCR tests

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The Liberal Democrats have called for a cap on the price of PCR tests.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

The Liberal Democrats have called for a cap on the price of PCR tests.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Miles Brignall](#), [Sarah Butler](#) and [Rupert Jones](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 14.06 EDT

The government is coming under pressure to intervene amid concerns that its Covid testing regime for travellers is close to collapse, with thousands failing to be properly tested on their return.

As photos posted online showed drop-off boxes run by Randox, the UK's largest PCR testing provider, overflowing with unprocessed swabs, growing numbers of returning holidaymakers are reporting that their test kits are failing to arrive, or are taking up to six days to process.

Even before France came off the amber-plus list on Sunday, private testing companies approved by the government were struggling to cope with the demand. MPs and users have led a chorus of disapproval against the testing regime, which looks set to be overwhelmed as more travellers start returning from August getaways.

The Labour MP Ben Bradshaw said he had been inundated with messages from people all over the UK whose test kits hadn't arrived on time.

He questioned the need for PCR tests on those who were fully vaccinated and returning from countries where Covid rates are lower than the UK.

"They are completely unnecessary," he said. "It is a complete scam and completely unacceptable."

There has also been growing anger about the government receiving millions of pounds from the regime – the tests are subject to VAT at 20%.

Martyn Sumners, executive director of AITO, the specialist travel association, said the government should be monitoring whether companies were fulfilling their purpose for the general public.

"People are abiding by the rules with no follow-up. They are paying a lot of money for these tests and not getting results," he said.

All travellers returning from green- and amber-list countries must take a test before they depart for the UK, and a further PCR test on their second day

after arriving home. With PCR tests costing upwards of £50 each, households are paying as much as £200 for day-two kits.

Those who have not been fully vaccinated must also self-isolate and take a test on day eight if they visited an amber-list country. The tests have to be booked with private firms [listed on the gov.uk website](#).

However, it is increasingly clear that passengers are not being tested as directed. Rory Boland, travel editor at consumer body Which?, said he had seen problems with several testing firms and an increase in every type of complaint. Complaints included tests not arriving on time, people being unable to book tests and misleading prices.

“The system isn’t set up for large numbers, and now many people are travelling the system is not working properly,” he said. “The government might now say it is looking into the prices of tests, but it’s very late in the day and these problems were foreseeable.”

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, [has asked the Competition and Markets Authority](#) (CMA) to look into the fees being charged, it emerged over the weekend.

Industry insiders said that some providers were clearly taking on more business than they could comfortably handle via their transport and delivery networks.

Ariane Crampton from Salisbury, arrived back from France with her husband last month.

“We purchased day-five ‘test to release’ PCR tests from Boots at £85 each and were told we would receive the results within 24-48 hours,” she said. “My result arrived 55 hours later but my husband’s results took six full working days. Taken together with problems with our other, day-eight tests, the whole exercise was completely pointless.”

The Liberal Democrats have called for a government cap on “rip-off” PCR test costs, and are also demanding that it scraps the VAT on them. The party said this week its research found that, of the more than 400 providers who

met the minimum standards to provide PCR tests for travel, 102 were charging £200 or more, while only 47 were under £50. The most expensive test they found was priced at £575. “This compares with Greece and Italy – who have capped their test prices to £34 and £52 respectively – and France, who provide them for free,” said a party spokesperson.

Which? has published research this month that found that the current cost of testing “is likely to be too expensive for most people, especially families”. It said that an unvaccinated traveller on a return trip to Spain currently required four tests totalling an estimated £219 a person. For a family of four, that could add up to £876.

The Tory MP Henry Smith, chairman of the all-party Future of Aviation Group, said travellers should be allowed to take much cheaper rapid lateral flow tests on return followed by a “gold standard” PCR only if the first test is positive.

Ministers insist arrivals must take the pricier PCR tests as they are considered more accurate and can be sequenced for mutant Covid strains. But NHS test and trace figures showed that just 5% of swabs are being sequenced.

A government spokesperson said: “We are clear that all private providers must meet a set of required standards, and each provider is held to account, with companies that fail to meet high standards being removed from the list of approved suppliers. The health and social care secretary has requested advice from the CMA to stamp out any exploitative behaviour or poor provision in this market. We are also working with the travel industry and private testing providers to further reduce testing costs.”

Some people have reported that no one had checked whether they had done a day-two test. The Guardian asked the Department of Health and Social Care whether the NHS test-and-trace system checked that people had done the test. It indicated it was not true to say that the NHS test-and-trace system relied on passengers self-reporting the results of their test, and that private test providers were legally required to report test results to NHS test and trace.

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Taliban fighters capture Afghan city at strategic junction north of Kabul

Officials in Pul-e-Khumri say government forces abandoned compounds during heady fighting, as Biden says Afghans must fight for themselves



People who have fled fighting in Afghanistan's northern provinces vie for supplies being distributed in a Kabul park. The EU estimates 400,000 Afghans have been displaced in recent months. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

People who have fled fighting in Afghanistan's northern provinces vie for supplies being distributed in a Kabul park. The EU estimates 400,000 Afghans have been displaced in recent months. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Akhtar Mohammad Makoii](#) in Herat and [Peter Beaumont](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.09 EDT

The [Taliban](#) have captured the key Afghan city of Pul-e-Khumri, 140 miles north of the capital Kabul, giving the insurgents control of a strategic road junction linking Kabul to the north and west, according to insurgents and local officials.

Two officials in the city told the Guardian it fell to [Taliban](#) after heavy fighting on Tuesday, with officials and security forces abandoning their compounds.

“Pul-e-Khumri fell to the Taliban, they are everywhere,” one official said in a phone interview during which the sound of heavy gunfire could be heard.

“Taliban fighters broke through the frontlines in several directions during the afternoon. After heavy clashes, officials and security forces abandoned the governorate, intelligence and police headquarters. Heavy clashes are ongoing. We are deciding where to retreat now.”

A Taliban spokesperson on Twitter also claimed the capture of the city, the capital of Baghlan province. Images on social media showed the Taliban’s flag at city gates and insurgent fighters inside the city.

If confirmed, Pul-e-Khumri would be the eighth out of 34 provincial capitals captured by the hardline Islamist movement in less than a week.

The city’s fall to the Taliban would be a massive blow to the Afghan government, threatening the remaining cities in the north of [Afghanistan](#) not already under insurgent control including Mazar-i-Sharif and Faizabad.

Earlier on Tuesday, a senior EU official warned that the Taliban’s strategy in northern [Afghanistan](#) appeared to be to cut off the capital, Kabul, from forces to the north that could support it.

On Tuesday Joe Biden said he does not regret his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, noting that Washington has spent more than \$1 trillion over 20 years and lost thousands of troops.

“Afghan leaders have to come together,” Biden told reporters at the White House, saying the Afghan troops outnumber the Taliban and must want to fight. “They’ve got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation.”

He said the United States continues to provide significant air support, food, equipment and salaries to Afghan forces.

[Taliban told that Afghan government installed by force will go unrecognised](#)
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The latest gains in the Taliban’s lightning advance came as a US peace envoy to Afghanistan warned the Taliban that any government that comes to power through force in Afghanistan [would not be recognised internationally](#).

The US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad went to Doha, Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office, to tell the group that there was no point in pursuing victory on the battlefield because a military takeover of Kabul would guarantee they would be global pariahs.

Khalilzad’s comments came as the UN human rights chief, [Michelle Bachelet](#), warned of a mounting campaign by the Taliban targeting current and former government officials and family members for “summary execution” and destruction of their homes and other property.

According to the EU about 400,000 Afghans have been displaced by the fighting in recent months.

Khalilzad and others hope to persuade Taliban leaders to return to peace talks with the Afghan government as US and [Nato](#) forces finish pulling out from the country.

During the past two months the Taliban has rapidly expanded the territory it controls to about 65% of the country, including a large proportion of rural areas. A third of the country’s provincial capitals are under threat.

[Map of Afghanistan](#)

The Taliban military chief released an audio message to his fighters on Tuesday ordering them not to harm Afghan forces and government officials

in territories they conquered.

In the nearly five-minute audio Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of the late Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, also told the insurgents to stay out of abandoned homes of government and security officials who had fled, to leave marketplaces open and to protect places of business, including banks.

It was not immediately clear if Taliban fighters on the ground would heed Yaqoob's instructions. There have been reports by civilians who have fled Taliban advances of heavy-handed treatment by the insurgents – of schools being burned down and of repressive restrictions on women.

In a separate intervention on Tuesday, the UN human rights chief urged an end to the Taliban offensive on Afghan cities and said her office was receiving reports of possible war crimes.

“The Taliban must cease their military operations in cities. Unless all parties return to the negotiating table and reach a peaceful settlement, the already atrocious situation for so many Afghans will become much worse,” Bachelet said in a statement.

Bachelet’s remarks came as heavily armed fighters flooded into Farah city on Tuesday morning, with the Taliban announcing that its “special forces” had arrived in the city.

['Please pray for me': female reporter being hunted by the Taliban tells her story](#)

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The Taliban also posted pictures of its triumphant fighters standing in front of city’s main administrative building.

Following a now familiar pattern, an official in Farah who spoke to the Guardian described a fruitless request for government reinforcements and desertions.

“No help has so far arrived from Kabul, and we no longer expect them, if they wanted to send help they should have sent it,” the official said. “One of

the intelligence officers switched sides last night and joined the Taliban with several of his men.”

Another local official said earlier on Tuesday: “The Taliban have been active in outskirts of Farah city for weeks but they started their big assault last night and were pushed back. But now they are advancing again.” The official was surrounded by the Taliban in a government compound and the Guardian was unable to reach him after fall of the city.

The fall of Farah followed the Taliban [capture of Zaranj](#) on Friday, which was followed two days later by [the huge symbolic capture of Kunduz](#), a strategic city close to the border with Tajikistan and an important political and military hub. The group has also claimed [Sheberghan](#), the capital of the northern Jawzjan province, Taloqan in Takhar province, Sar-e Pul in the northern province of the same name and Aybak in the province of Samangan.

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Food & drink industry

Gower lamb is first British food to get protection under post-Brexit scheme

Geographical indicator regime to protect against copycats only covers England, Wales and Scotland



About 3,000 lambs a year are reared on the Gower peninsula marshes.
Photograph: Gower Lamb

About 3,000 lambs a year are reared on the Gower peninsula marshes.
Photograph: Gower Lamb

[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Lamb grazed on samphire, sorrel and sea lavender on the Gower peninsular in Wales is the first UK food to receive protection under the post-Brexit regime.

The UK's independent geographical indication scheme, which marks out products from a particular region to prevent them being undermined by copycats from elsewhere, was set up to replace a previous EU-wide scheme.

Produced using knowledge and skills dating back to medieval times, Gower salt marsh lamb comes from lamb born, reared and slaughtered in south [Wales](#). About 3,500 lambs a year are reared on the marshes.

Dan and Will Pritchard from Weobley Castle Farm, who produce Gower salt marsh lamb, said: "We are the third generation of Pritchards to farm in this amazing location, meaning that we've perfected our way of rearing lamb over the years. We currently produce around 1,000 lambs per year – taking care of the whole process to create meat with a unique local flavour of samphire and sea lavender.



Will Pritchard and family produce Gower Salt Marsh Lamb. Photograph: Gower Lamb

"This recognition means that the reputation of our regional product is protected, and it helps us promote traditional agricultural practices and

eliminate non-genuine products.”

The UK protection regime – which includes speciality products such as traditional Bramley apple pie filling, as well as products linked to a particular region – already includes more than 5,000 products from across Europe originally given protection under the EU scheme, such as Melton Mowbray pies, Jersey Royal potatoes, and champagne.

However, Gower salt marsh lamb, and any future products listed under the new UK scheme, will only be protected from copycats in England, Wales and Scotland. Producers of the lamb, and any other products wanting to join the list in England, Wales and Scotland, will have to apply for separate protection in the EU, involving further costs and paperwork.

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The all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on geographically protected foods launched a consultation in May seeking views from British food and drink producers on the new scheme.

Applications currently in process include Sussex wine, Dundee cake and New Forest pannage ham.

The food minister, Victoria Prentis, said: “I would encourage producers from all around the UK to apply to the scheme, so that we can celebrate and protect more of our excellent local produce, and ensure it is given the recognition that it deserves.”

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[China](#)

China to ban karaoke songs with ‘illegal content’ that endangers national unity

China’s nearly 50,000 venues will be encouraged to provide ‘healthy’ songs rather than those threatening territorial integrity or religious policies



China will establish a list of songs that will be banned in the country’s 50,000 venues. Photograph: ipopba/Getty Images/iStockphoto

China will establish a list of songs that will be banned in the country’s 50,000 venues. Photograph: ipopba/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Reuters

Tue 10 Aug 2021 22.19 EDT

China will establish a blacklist of karaoke songs to ban those containing “illegal content” from karaoke venues across the country starting from 1 October, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The ministry said banned content would include that which endangers national unity, sovereignty or territorial integrity, violates state religious policies by propagating cults or superstitions, or which encourages illegal activities such as gambling and drugs.

[Five arrested in Hong Kong for sedition over children's book about sheep](#)
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Content providers to karaoke venues will be responsible for auditing the songs, the ministry said on its website on Tuesday, adding that China has nearly 50,000 entertainment outlets with a basic music library of more than 100,000 songs, making it difficult for venue operators to identify illegal tracks.

The ministry said it encouraged content providers to supply “healthy and uplifting” music to these venues.

China heavily regulates and scrubs content that includes violence, pornography, or politically sensitive commentary from social media and websites and has in recent months punished livestreaming to video platforms for hosting content it deems “low taste”.

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[Museums](#)

Tea, sweat and whale poop: museum sniffs out history of London's docks

Dockland smells and documents from transatlantic slave trade feature in show that draws on largely unseen archive



Imported bananas being handled at the Royal Docks, in an undated photograph from the PLA archive. Photograph: PLA Collection

Imported bananas being handled at the Royal Docks, in an undated photograph from the PLA archive. Photograph: PLA Collection

[Mark Brown](#) Arts correspondent

Wed 11 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

The smells of damp wood, sea air, tobacco and maybe just a soupçon of human sweat will waft through a gallery for an exhibition telling the hidden stories of what was [once the world's busiest port](#).

Details have been announced for a show that draws on the enormous, largely unknown archive of the [Port of London authority](#) (PLA).

Staged at the Museum of [London](#) Docklands, it will tell 200 years of stories that will range from seafaring phrases that have filtered into everyday English language use to the historical dependence of London's docks on the sugar trade and slavery.

The curator, Claire Dobbin, also wants visitors to experience the smells workers would have inhaled day in, day out – as she herself has been doing.



Damp wood and sweat ... deal porters being trained at Surrey Docks.
Photograph: PLA Collection

“My office smells very much like the docks because I’ve got all the samples here,” she said. “I’ve learned that you become accustomed to the smell of a room in about seven seconds. You adjust quite quickly. I don’t notice it until I go out and come back in and think, ‘oh, it smells like a warehouse in here.’”

The scents section at the show will evoke the docks themselves – wood, sea air, sweat – as well as a tea warehouse and the home of a dock worker: “The smell of a coat drying by the fire, the smell of tobacco,” said Dobbin.

“Younger people don’t remember when so much of London smelled of tobacco.”

The show is a partnership with the PLA, which has a remarkable archive on shelves about 1km long. It includes photos, objects, reels of film and oral testimonies. There are also about 50,000 plans and engineering drawings and 5,000 paintings and prints.

“Sizewise it is quite vast,” said Dobbin. “The problem has been where to start and then ... at some point you need to stop. I think we have done more than scratch the surface and we have found lots of exciting stories to tell.”



A group of Lascar seamen – sailors from southern or south-east Asia – at East India Dock, 1908. Photograph: PLA Collection

Objects going on display include sandals seized in the 1870s, which have hollowed out soles to smuggle opium, and a 1950s diver’s helmet and air pump used by someone clearing riverbeds.

One section will describe how seafaring and dockland words and phrases have filtered in to common usage. Examples include sling your hook, tie up loose ends, fathom something out, like the cut of someone’s jib and crack on – the crack being the cracking sound from when a sail is released for a boat to go faster.



One of the objects on display, a diver's helmet. Photograph: PLA Collection

The museum has for a number of years addressed the history of the transatlantic slave trade. Last year [it removed the statue of Robert Milligan](#), a prominent British slave trader, which had “stood uncomfortably” outside the museum for a long time.

In the port of London show it will exhibit a document commemorating the unveiling of the statue to serve “as a reminder of the full truth behind the economic prosperity that made the building of West India Docks possible”.

London remains the UK’s busiest port and the exhibition will tell its story from the end of the 18th century to the creation of the London Gateway “mega port” at Thurrock in the Thames Estuary.



The jar's label reads "Dehydrated meat. Landed at New Fresh Wharf approx March 1944." Photograph: Museum of London

Dobbin said it had been a thrill to go through the archive. "It has been a lot of fun and a real privilege to have access to such a meticulous and eclectic collection."

One aim of the exhibition was to give "a behind-the-scenes view of things which, actually, many people don't know much about."

It will also include examples of the countless samples which were taken of goods coming in to London. One is a pot of dehydrated meat from the 1940s: "We haven't opened it," said Dobbin.

Another is a pot of ambergris, which was highly prized and used in perfumes. Dobbin explained: "It is essentially whale poop."

Port City is at the [Museum of London Docklands](#), 22 October-8 May.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Delta variant renders herd immunity from Covid ‘mythical’

Head of Oxford Vaccine Group rules out overall immunity, but also questions need for booster jabs

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Commuters on London Bridge. Prof Sir Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said: ‘The Delta variant will still infect people who have been vaccinated.’ Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Commuters on London Bridge. Prof Sir Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, said: ‘The Delta variant will still infect people who

have been vaccinated.' Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Natalie Grover Science correspondent

@NatalieGrover

Tue 10 Aug 2021 12.57 EDT

Reaching herd immunity is “not a possibility” with the current Delta variant, the head of the Oxford Vaccine Group has said.

Giving evidence to MPs on Tuesday, Prof Sir Andrew Pollard said the fact that vaccines did not stop the spread of Covid meant reaching the threshold for overall immunity in the population was “mythical”.

“The problem with this virus is [it is] not measles. If 95% of people were vaccinated against measles, the virus cannot transmit in the population,” he told the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on coronavirus.

“The Delta variant will still infect people who have been vaccinated. And that does mean that anyone who’s still unvaccinated at some point will meet the virus … and we don’t have anything that will [completely] stop that transmission.”

Although the existing vaccines are very effective at preventing serious Covid illness and death, they do not stop a fully vaccinated person from being infected by the virus that causes Covid-19.

The concept of herd or population immunity relies on a large majority of a population gaining immunity – either through vaccination or previous infection – which, in turn, provides indirect protection from an infectious disease for the unvaccinated and those who have never been previously infected.

Data from a recent [React study](#) conducted by Imperial College London suggests that fully vaccinated people aged 18 to 64 have about a 49% lower risk of being infected compared with unvaccinated people. The findings also indicated that fully vaccinated people were about three times less likely to test positive after coming into contact with someone who had Covid (3.84%, down from 7.23%).

About 75% of all UK adults have now received both their jabs.

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said on Tuesday that plans were in place to start offering Covid booster jabs to the most vulnerable groups in the UK from next month. He said that the flu jab would be offered at the same time.

But Pollard – who chairs Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) but is not specifically a member of the Covid JCVI committee – questioned whether boosters would be needed.

[Think it's all over? Why the Covid experts are not so sure about that](#)
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“The time we would need to boost is if we see evidence that there was an increase in hospitalisation – or the next stage after that, which would be people dying – amongst those who are vaccinated. And that is not something we are seeing at the moment,” he said.

Even if vaccine-induced antibody levels waned, our immune systems would probably remember the vaccination for decades and offer a degree of protection if exposed to the virus, he said. “So, there isn’t any reason at this moment to panic. We’re not seeing a problem with breakthrough severe disease.”

The question of whether or not [to vaccinate under-16s](#), as countries including the US, Ireland and Israel have done, has also provoked scientific debate in the UK.

The JCVI has recommended only vulnerable children aged 12 to 15 be vaccinated, and those who live with at-risk adults. Some critics have said that rich countries with high adult vaccine coverage, such as the UK, should not be hoarding doses for children but should donate those doses to poor countries, many of which have barely vaccinated any of their most at-risk populations.

But [Prof Devi Sridhar](#), the chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh, pointed out that the only vaccine authorised for use in children aged 12 to 15 in the UK was the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

“I think actually the real issue is not about vaccinating kids versus the world – it’s what do we do about boosters that is being discussed in rich countries, because those are the doses that could be going abroad,” she said.

“Luckily … we have a very effective vaccine in AstraZeneca that can be used for the world, but it’s not going to solve our children issue here.”

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US urged to fast-track vaccine approval for children under 12 as cases rise

Children accounted for 15% of new Covid cases reported last week, American Academy of Pediatrics data analysis shows



A 13-year-old shows his bandage after receiving a dose of the Covid vaccine in Queens, New York, in June. Photograph: Scott Heins/Getty Images

A 13-year-old shows his bandage after receiving a dose of the Covid vaccine in Queens, New York, in June. Photograph: Scott Heins/Getty Images

[Oliver Laughland](#) in New Orleans
[@oliverlaughland](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 11.35 EDT

As Covid cases among children continue to rise in the US due to spread of the Delta variant, experts are urging the federal government to fast-track vaccine approval for those under the age of 12.

New [data analysis from the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) indicated that children accounted for 15% of new cases reported last week, with a total of almost 94,000 cases. There was a 4% increase in child cases over the past two weeks, the AAP found.

[Texas governor appeals for out-of-state help to fight latest Covid wave](#)
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While children still make up a small fraction of hospitalized Covid patients, up to 1.9% in states reporting such data, there is anecdotal evidence in areas that have seen a significant Covid surge in recent weeks that more children are being admitted for care.

In Louisiana, which saw a significant surge of 16,000 new Covid cases and 50 deaths over the weekend as the Delta variant rips through the region, pediatricians in New Orleans expressed concerns about an uptick in child Covid admissions.

Dr Mark Kline, chief of Children's Hospital New Orleans, [told local news](#) that outpatient Covid positivity rates had risen from 1% a month ago to 20%. The hospital was treating 18 child Covid inpatients with six in intensive care. There were three on ventilators, including a three month old baby, Kline told WDSU News.

"It is heartbreaking, honestly, to take care of potentially dying children," Kline told the news channel. "All of this was likely unnecessary if we as adults did what we needed to do and get the vaccine. We could have protected these children."

Louisiana has one of the lowest rates of vaccination in the US with just 37% of the state fully vaccinated.

Last week, president of the American Academy of Paediatrics Lee Savio Beers, wrote to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the

government agency responsible for vaccine approval, urging them to fast-track vaccinations for those under 12.

“Last week saw the largest week-over-week percentage increase in pediatric Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic,” [the letter](#) states. “Simply stated, the Delta variant has created a new and pressing risk to children and adolescents across this country, as it has also done for unvaccinated adults.”

The letter acknowledges that the agency has worked with US manufacturers Moderna and Pfizer to expand the number of children in clinical vaccine trials, but urges the agency to approve the vaccine with clinical trial results it has already obtained: “In our view, the rise of the Delta variant changes the risk-benefit analysis for authorizing vaccines in children.”

In May the [FDA approved](#) the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for emergency use for 12- to 15-year-olds, having given approval for use in those aged 16 and older in December last year. That US-German pharmaceutical partnership has not yet applied for emergency use authorization for its Covid-19 vaccine for five to 11-year-olds.

From 1 March 2020, to 30 April 2021, about 1.5 million Covid-19 cases in 11- to 17-year-olds were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the FDA added.

Meanwhile, a number of Republican governors in states with lower vaccination rates and increasing hospitalizations continue to resist implementing mask mandates in schools.

On Monday, the Republican governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, announced that the state board of education would be [permitted to withhold payment](#) of school district leaders who implement mask mandates as students prepare to return from summer break..

The governor had previously issued an executive order banning school districts from implementing masking orders, against expert guidance from the CDC, which [recommends](#) masking indoors in areas of high community spread.

Florida has seen a surge in cases and hospitalizations. Last Friday, the state recorded almost 24,000 new cases, the state's highest single day total since the start of the pandemic with Covid patients accounting for [almost a quarter of all hospitalizations across the state.](#)

In Texas, the Republican governor, Greg Abbott, has also opposed mask mandates in schools by issuing an executive order in May. As [Covid cases continue to soar in the state](#), a number of school districts have sought to fightback against the order with independent school districts in Dallas and Austin [announcing this week they will require masks.](#)

On Sunday evening Southern Center for Child Advocacy, an education non-profit, filed a lawsuit seeking a temporary restraining order against the governor's executive order.

The lawsuit [argues](#) Abbott's order "creates an arbitrary and capricious impediment to the ability of school districts to respond to this pandemic".

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Germany

Germany to abolish free Covid testing in bid to get more people vaccinated

New regulations part of government efforts to incentivise those without jabs amid a rapidly rising case rate

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People queue to enter a vaccination party with DJ's in Berlin. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock

People queue to enter a vaccination party with DJ's in Berlin. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Kate Connolly in Berlin](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 09.15 EDT

Germany's leaders have set out new coronavirus regulations for the coming months, including abolishing free rapid testing to incentivise people to get vaccinated.

Widespread restrictions are likely to stay in place in an effort to tackle a growing case rate that is only expected to worsen in the coming weeks as holidaymakers return.

The most controversial rules apply to people who are not vaccinated. They will be [expected to undergo tests](#) as a condition for attending all manner of events, from indoor gatherings to restaurant visits to church services.

The system of free rapid coronavirus testing, which has been widely available for months and has been used by Germans to get into venues such as theatres and football stadiums, is expected to be abolished from 11 October. After that, those who are unvaccinated – except for pregnant women, children or those advised against getting a vaccine on medical grounds – will have to pay for the tests. The hope is that people will no longer rely on the test system as a way of avoiding getting a vaccine.

Masks are also expected to remain obligatory in indoors spaces such as offices, schools, shops and on public transport.

The leaders of [Germany's](#) 16 states, who met with the chancellor, [Angela Merkel](#), on Tuesday to hammer out the new regulations, will reserve the right to tighten them further if the infection rate is deemed to be out of control.

Germany's incidence rate for every 100,000 people over a seven-day period has almost doubled in the past three weeks, with one in 10 regions now registering a rate of more than 35.

[Germany coronavirus case rate](#)

It has led to concerns that another lockdown is looming, despite a lack of political will to impose one, not least with a federal election scheduled in six

weeks.

The Bundestag is due to vote next month on whether “epidemic conditions” still apply in Germany, the legal basis on which the government is able to apply the strict measures currently in place, but which will expire on 11 September unless it is extended by MPs.

Critics of the decision to tighten current restrictions and to disadvantage those who have not taken up the offer of a vaccine have called it a “vaccine mandate by the back door”.

Among the most vocal opponents are the pro-business FDP party and the right wing populist AfD. One of the AfD’s leaders, Alice Weidel, on Tuesday accused the government of “threatening to split society”.

The government said the measures were necessary in order to protect vulnerable people and the unvaccinated. It said it would continue to adjust the regulations as the epidemic develops.

“The time for tighter measures for those who are not vaccinated will continue to be decided on by the federal government and the states,” a spokesperson said.

Wolfgang Kubicki, deputy leader of the FDP, accused the government of patronising ordinary citizens by suggesting they needed to be “protected from themselves”.

“The government is quite clearly dismissing the idea of aligning its measures with the interests of the public good, and instead is saying explicitly that citizens need to be protected from themselves,” he said. He added that Merkel’s coalition government “considered responsible citizens a risk factor who must if necessary be forced to do what’s good for them.”

Currently only 55% of Germans have received a full vaccination – including 80% of people older than 60 – with 62.5% having had one jab. For a country where the vaccine campaign got off to a sluggish start, it no longer compares as unfavourably to somewhere such as the UK – where the comparable rate is 59% and 70% – although the German figures still fall well short of the

Merkel government's stated goal for 85% of the population to have received a full vaccination by the end of the summer.

[German minister's plan to place restrictions on unvaccinated criticised](#)

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In addition to the hope that scrapping free testing will motivate people to get vaccinated, the government is also setting its store by teenagers, who have shown an unexpected willingness to take up the [recent offer of jabs](#). So far, almost a quarter of 12- to 17-year-olds – more than one million people – have had one jab, according to Jens Spahn, the health minister.

Successful measures to increase vaccine uptake have included the offer of a free hotdog in the state of Thuringia, and the chance to combine shopping and a jab in three Ikea outlets in Berlin. The first 1,100 people who turn up for a jab this weekend at a conference centre in Freiburg will be offered free tickets for an SC Freiburg home game.

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Coronavirus

Nurse in Germany suspected of replacing Covid vaccines with saline solution

Authorities say about 8,600 people may have been affected

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A nurse in Germany is suspected of injecting thousands of people with saline solution instead of Covid vaccine. Photograph: Robin Utrecht/REX/Shutterstock

A nurse in Germany is suspected of injecting thousands of people with saline solution instead of Covid vaccine. Photograph: Robin Utrecht/REX/Shutterstock

Reuters

Tue 10 Aug 2021 20.12 EDT

Authorities in northern Germany have appealed to thousands of people to get another shot of [Covid](#) vaccine after a police investigation found that a Red Cross nurse may have injected them with a saline solution.

The nurse is suspected of injecting salt solution into people's arms instead of genuine doses at a vaccination centre in Friesland – a rural district near the North Sea coast – in the early spring.

"I am totally shocked by this episode," Sven Ambrosy, a local councillor, said on Facebook as local authorities issued the call on Tuesday to about 8,600 residents who may have been affected.

While saline solution is harmless, most people who got vaccinated in [Germany](#) in March and April when the suspected switch took place are elderly and at high risk of catching Covid.

Police investigator Peter Beer, speaking earlier at a news conference covered by German media, said that based on witness statements there was "a reasonable suspicion of danger".

The motive of the nurse, who was not named, was not clear but she had aired sceptical views about vaccines in social media posts, police investigators said.

It was not immediately clear whether the suspect had been arrested or charged in the case, which according to broadcaster NDR has been handed to a special unit that investigates politically motivated crimes.

Local police declined to comment outside normal working hours.

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Business live

Business

Heathrow reports busiest month since March 2020 as travel recovery begins – business live

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Global economy

Economic recovery from Covid ‘running out of steam’ – OECD

Data collected from 38 member countries says UK among the major economies now in the slow lane

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Usually busy tourist spots such as the Shambles in York are suffering as consumers remain reluctant to eat out and shop, the OECD found.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Usually busy tourist spots such as the Shambles in York are suffering as consumers remain reluctant to eat out and shop, the OECD found.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

[Phillip Inman](#)
[@phillipinman](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 13.29 EDT

The world's major economies have seen their rapid recovery after easing Covid restrictions begin to run out of steam in the past month as a resurgence in the virus depressed consumer spending, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

There are signs that the recovery in the US and Japan is losing momentum, the OECD said, while parts of Europe and China have slowed as consumers remain reluctant to eat out, visit attractions and shop as they did before the pandemic.

The Paris-based organisation said data supplied by its 38 member countries showed that most major economies had passed their 2021 peak levels of growth and while they were still expanding, it was at a slower pace.

Picking out the UK, France and Germany as among those countries in Europe that have begun to see domestic industries stutter and trade with the rest of the world slip down a gear, the OECD said they had been joined by Brazil and Russia in the slow lane.

Economists at the OECD said there were likely to be ebbs and flows in the pattern of recovery because “despite the gradual lifting of Covid-19 containment measures in some countries and the progress of vaccination campaigns, persisting uncertainties might result in higher than usual fluctuations in the composite leading indicators and its components”.

The indicators cover a range of business and consumer surveys, retail sales data, wages growth and international trade alongside figures on the employment and output of the manufacturing, services and construction sectors.

A bounceback last week in the number of jobs created in the US gave a temporary lift to stock markets increasingly concerned that governments will need to reimpose restrictions to prevent the virus spreading.

After reaching \$77 a barrel, Brent crude prices have slipped back to below \$70 in response to growing concerns that global economic growth has taken a backward step.

Shilan Shah, a senior economist in Capital Economics' India office, said the outlook for the economies of many emerging markets was also grim as the spread of the Delta variant gathered pace.

[New Zealand rated best place to survive global societal collapse](#)

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In a note headlined the “outlook darkens”, he said: “Experience from elsewhere shows that the economic hit from new virus waves has tended to be less severe than last year.

“But weaker fiscal positions and the limited capacity of health systems to deal with new outbreaks mean that many frontiers are likely to be hit harder than their richer emerging market or developing market peers.”

Ethiopia, Ecuador, Kenya, Ghana and Sri Lanka were highlighted by Shah as having large debts and increasingly heavy demands on their health systems at a time when tourism and other key industries are operating below their capacity.

He said there was likely to be a delay before tourism returned to its pre-pandemic levels, which would hit many countries in Asia and Africa that depend on visitors from abroad to generate foreign exchange.

A fall in demand for basic raw materials from China and other Asian countries would hit metal producers from Peru to Zambia, he added.

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Guy Foster, chief strategist at wealth manager Brewin Dolphin, said the slowing growth prospects meant concerns about inflation appear to be diminishing.

“The falling oil price is a major disinflationary force in the US and that should make the pace of price gains more sustainable while we wait for supply chains to start flowing once again.”

He said it may take a while for supply lines from China to Europe and the US to flow normally after Beijing raised the prospect of lockdowns

returning to China. “This means supply chain issues could worsen,” he said.

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‘I don’t intend to let my son down twice’: the bereaved father trying to end suicide



‘What happened was a woeful indictment on our society’ ... Steve Mallen.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

‘What happened was a woeful indictment on our society’ ... Steve Mallen.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

When 18-year-old Edward Mallen killed himself, his father blamed the NHS, society – and himself. He founded the Zero Suicide Alliance to try to make such deaths a thing of the past

[Simon Usborne](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Not long before Christmas in 2014, Steve Mallen began to worry about the eldest of his three children. Edward, who had just turned 18, was good at everything. A gifted pianist, a talented sportsman and a nurturing big brother, he had secured a place at the University of Cambridge.

Then Edward stopped playing the piano. He became withdrawn and began to eat less and lose sleep. On 22 January 2015, he went to see the family’s GP, near their home in a village outside Cambridge. He revealed that he had suicidal feelings and had begun to self-harm, something he felt too ashamed to share at home. He had no known history of mental health problems.

The appointment triggered an urgent referral to [NHS](#) mental health services, but no swift action. Letters went missing, communication channels failed and the teenager's parents were kept in the dark about his symptoms and treatment.

While they waited for help, the family booked an appointment with a private psychiatrist. Edward saw the psychiatrist on Friday 6 February and said it had gone well. He watched TV with the family that weekend and enjoyed his favourite dinner, spaghetti bolognese. On Sunday, he worked his usual shift at a bookshop in Cambridge. "I remember him coming home that evening and looking very tired," Mallen says. "But we knew that we had got him some help. We were expecting letters from the NHS. His mum was making his favourite food ..." His voice trails off.

The next day, Edward caught the train to Cambridge to hand in a maths assignment at his sixth-form college, then headed back to the village. Mallen was home alone that afternoon when there was a knock at the door. "Four big policemen in hi-vis jackets came in and informed me that my son had died horrifically, 500 yards from my front door," he says. "And then they left. It was like someone had thrown a hand grenade into my house."

I meet Mallen, 55, at the botanic garden in Cambridge, more than six years after Edward killed himself at his local train station. We sit on memorial benches outside the glasshouses and stroll among July blooms. "We used to spend whole days here with a picnic," Mallen says. "Edward loved the natural world."

Mallen has come dressed for business, in a suit over an open-necked shirt. He has an easy charm, but at times deep pain and anger inflect his voice. His face reveals the strain of grief and a personal mission that has cost him his privacy and his career.

In the weeks and months after that knock at the door, Mallen came to realise how badly Edward had been failed by the NHS, society – and his father. Almost immediately, Mallen, a commercial property consultant, began to direct his anger and guilt, as well as his astute business mind, into a new life.



Edward Mallen, aged 17, on holiday in Florence. Photograph: Courtesy of Steve Mallen

In 2017, he co-founded the [Zero Suicide Alliance](#), which has government funding and the backing of multiple NHS trusts. The alliance, which works with businesses, charities and bereaved families, has delivered online suicide-awareness training to more than 1.7 million people. It is part of a global “zero suicide” movement designed to shake up prevention strategies and attitudes at every level of society. Mallen does not believe we can eradicate suicide. “But if zero isn’t the right number to aim for, then what is?” he asks.

Mallen regularly testifies to select committees in Westminster as part of overdue moves in parliament to improve mental health services. In an act he describes as “putting my head in the dragon’s mouth”, he became a governor at the NHS trust that he blames for his son’s death. Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary who now chairs the health and social care select committee, has described Mallen as “the country’s most formidable campaigner on suicide prevention”.

“Tireless” does not do Mallen justice, nor is it correct. He is exhausted – and constantly aware of the potential impact of his work and profile on his wife and their surviving children, who are 22 and 19 (Edward would be 25). He

prefers not to name the other family members or the village in which they live. Yet, with their support, Mallen is unbowed and driven by a promise.

“When Edward died, people would come up and say it was an accident, or like being struck by lightning,” Mallen says, his voice getting louder. “And they meant well, but what happened was a woeful indictment on our society. Edward should be alive. And I stood in front of his coffin and made him a public promise that I would investigate his death and seek reform. I don’t intend to let him down twice.”

Mallen is worried about the effects of the pandemic on young people, in particular the disruption and isolation they have endured. “This is going to scar a whole generation,” he says, sharing the concerns of mental health charities. There is no evidence yet of a related spike in suicides, but one study last year recorded [a rise in suicidal feelings among young people](#). Suicides among people aged 10-24 (15-24 in Scotland) were already becoming more common in Great Britain, having increased in 2019 for the second year in a row, to [601 deaths in England and Wales](#) (74% of them male) and [110 deaths in Scotland](#) (70% of them male). There were slightly more than [6,500 suicides in Great Britain in 2019](#) – about 18 a day. (The [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#), which collates the figures for that country, has not published complete data for 2019.)

These deaths sometimes seem to defy explanation. A third of teenaged suicide victims have no known history of suicidal ideas or self-harm, plus low rates of risk factors such as substance misuse or adversity, according to a study last year by the Centre for Mental [Health](#) and Safety at the University of Manchester. “Suicidal ideas may develop rapidly in this age group and crisis services should therefore be widely available,” the researchers wrote. “Future prevention cannot rely on explicit expressions of risk.”

[The Outspoken series celebrates the Guardian's 200th anniversary](#)

Edward’s inquest, in 2016, laid bare the failings that contributed to his death. After the urgent referral by the GP, 18 days before Edward’s death, a liaison practitioner decided the teenager did not need urgent help, despite

conversations about suicide and daily train journeys. Instead, the clinician scrawled some support websites on a scrap of paper.

Edward was prescribed antidepressants, but he was not warned that initially they might make him feel worse. A letter, sent to Edward on 29 January 2015, about an appointment with a psychiatrist on 24 February, never arrived; it was incorrectly addressed. Meanwhile, Edward's parents knew nothing; Edward was an adult, but he had given his consent for his parents to be told about his suicidal thoughts and treatment. "He felt ashamed and asked one of the clinicians to 'tell my mum' – and nobody even bothered to pick up the phone," Mallen says.

The coroner was so concerned about the failings of Cambridge and Peterborough NHS foundation trust that she issued [a "regulation 28" report](#) – a requirement when action must be taken to prevent future deaths. The trust apologised. "While there are elements in what occurred that may well not have been foreseeable, there were also things we could have done better," it said after the inquest, adding that it would act on the coroner's direction and its own inquiry.

Under new leadership, the trust invited Mallen to become a governor in 2018. "Steve's contribution is vital in helping us understand the needs of family members and patients," says Tracy Dowling, the trust's chief executive since 2017, in an email. "We have encouraged all our staff and indeed everyone we know to take the training offered by the Zero Suicide Alliance."

Mallen, who was born near Tottenham in north London, started his mission by educating himself. He realised that he knew nothing about mental health or suicide prevention. "It's really easy to throw rocks at stuff, but that's not the same as doing the homework and getting inside the system," he says.

An "Edward" folder on Mallen's computer used to contain family photos and school documents. Mallen then added a subfolder and called it "RIP". "It started off with his death certificate and letters from the coroner – that kind of thing," Mallen says. "It now has over 60,000 files in it, from policy

documents and letters to peer-reviewed academic journals from all over the world.”

Mallen blames decades of underinvestment in the NHS, as well as reforms introduced in 2013 by the Health and Social Care Act, for fragmenting health services, leading to a postcode lottery in funding and quality. He has also been struck by the varying levels of knowledge and commitment of the people he has met and challenged in government and beyond. “You quickly realise that, when you pull a lever in Westminster, there isn’t much on the end of it,” he says.

He felt ashamed and asked one of the clinicians to ‘tell my mum’ – and nobody even bothered to pick up the phone

The Zero Suicide Alliance represents Mallen’s search for a functioning lever. The alliance, founded with Joe Rafferty, the head of Mersey Care NHS foundation trust and a zero-suicide pioneer in the UK, soon won government backing and funding, which has since hit £2m. Part of the zero approach involves providing education and information in all areas of life, from hairdressers’, schools and workplaces to late-night taxis, clifftops and bridges. “Intervening early is infinitely easier, and certainly a lot cheaper, than when somebody is in crisis,” Mallen says.

The alliance offers free interactive, online training, featuring case studies and “what would you do?” quizzes. A virtual coach offers advice, including on what to say to someone who seems withdrawn or has stopped doing the things they enjoyed (“they call that anhedonia,” Mallen says). Sleep or appetite loss is also a warning sign. The course cautions against using stigmatising language such as: “You’re not going to do something silly, are you?”

“It’s OK to have difficult conversations with your children,” Mallen says, wishing he had known six years ago a fraction of what he has learned. “It’s OK to say: ‘Are you OK?’ It’s OK to say: ‘Are you hurting yourself?’ or: ‘Have you thought about taking your own life?’”

Mallen was walking in the woods recently when he saw a woman sitting alone, clearly upset. He sat down with her and asked if she was OK. “I just got her to laugh and smile and made sure she had somewhere safe to go,” he says. “Does that make me a good samaritan? No, because it’s how we should all behave.”

Mallen is also big on “postvention”: what happens to a family bereaved by suicide, for whom rates of divorce, mental health struggles and suicide rise immediately. “Most families don’t survive this kind of trauma,” he says.

In 2018, Mallen was on his way home after a dinner when he was attacked by a drunk person. Mallen fell heavily against a shopfront. A huge cut to his face and head required 50 stitches and a blood transfusion. “Within 24 hours of being discharged, I was contacted by victim support and the police. I was given a case officer by the courts and was put in touch with a criminal compensation authority,” he says, running a finger along his scar. (His attacker received a two-year suspended sentence for grievous bodily harm.) “When my son got taken away from me in horrific circumstances, there was nothing.” Thanks in large part to his work, a commitment to [suicide bereavement support services in all trusts by 2024](#) is part of the government’s NHS long-term plan.

Mallen is also working on prevention in prisons and schools. He is working with the government on guidelines for consent and confidentiality in families when there is an imminent risk to life. He is pleased that the levers of change are beginning to move – and celebrates a “social revolution” in discussions about mental health. After we met, NHS England [announced plans](#) for new waiting time standards for mental health patients, including one-hour responses in extreme cases. Charities welcomed the move while questioning the service’s ability to deliver, given growing demand and staff shortages.

Mallen is aware that he is privileged to be able to campaign full-time (even though most of his savings are gone). “I stand shoulder to shoulder with lots of other mums and dads who can’t do that,” he says. Their emails reach his inbox weekly; he has guided several families through grief and the trauma of inquests.

Yet campaigning has also been cathartic. Mallen can't imagine doing anything else. He says he is often the only person in a room with dry eyes. But he often cracks, usually when he is alone and thinking about Edward's death. "As much as I blame the system and the NHS for the loss of my boy, my son was dying in front of me and I couldn't see it," he says. "The feeling that one should have done better will never go away."

As he heads off to get the same train home that Edward caught just before his death, Mallen says: "Grief is like glitter: no matter how hard you try, you never quite pick it all up. But you do rebalance." He says he won't stop campaigning until he can be confident that a boy like Edward, with the same symptoms today, would get the help he needed. "I will always stand next to my boy," he says. "But we have a long way to go."

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#).

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A moment that changed meWomen

A moment that changed me: I met my soulmate at Istanbul airport security

As a recently divorced British Asian Muslim, I didn't expect anyone to understand my mix of culture, faith and life experiences. But the woman who became my best friend saw past my aloof exterior



The real deal ... Saima Mir on her wedding day, with her best friend Sabena Sultan. Photograph: Courtesy of Saima Mir

The real deal ... Saima Mir on her wedding day, with her best friend Sabena Sultan. Photograph: Courtesy of Saima Mir

[Saima Mir](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

“I was going to take out the wire from my bra and hand it to her!” whispers an annoyed voice from behind me. I turn to see who it is, and in that moment, my life changes.

I am at Istanbul airport. It’s 2004, a few years after 9/11, and there is still heightened security around air travel.

I have been through the metal detector countless times, emptied my on-board luggage, and am standing barefoot on the cold vinyl floor. I don’t know it yet, but I have just met the woman who will save my life.

I’m trying to put my breeze-block of a laptop back into its case, along with my other prized possessions, when the owner of the underwired bra joins me at the security table, chattering away happily.

This never happens to me. People assume I am aloof – partly because I am introverted, partly because my head is full of stories, ideas and a to-do list at every given moment, and also because of what others have described as my [“resting bitch face”](#). The woman clearly hasn’t had the memo, and carries on asking questions. Taken aback, I answer, and the universe sings.

We often ask people about the day they met their romantic partners. We rarely ask them about the day they met their soulmate. Celtic wisdom speaks of “Anam Cara” – soul friends, who share their innermost selves without judgment. Muslim scholars say that souls are soldiers; those who enlist for God’s love recognise each other on the Earth plane.

I wouldn’t have believed either of these things until I met Sabena Sultan. I had [been through a difficult arranged marriage](#), and was recently divorced, culturally alienated and trying to find where I belonged. I had seen little kindness outside of my family in years, and I didn’t know anyone else like me.

I had flown to Istanbul from Manchester, and was en route to Karachi to spend a couple of weeks with my grandmother. Sabena had boarded at Heathrow to catch the same connecting flight. The universe decreed that we walk through security at the same time, fly the same airline, and be booked on the same flight back.

“You told me you were going to seek solace at your nani’s house and write,” Sabena says, when I ask her what she remembers about that day. She is a scientist, and, characteristically, she sends me a detailed list of memories of that day. “You were wearing Converse, jeans and a pink scarf. I’d just changed out of jeans and into a shalwar kameez, but you told me you couldn’t be bothered with that and that is why you wore a kurta with your jeans. I thought you were really cool.”

Crossing cultures is like being at the pick’n’mix sweet bar, it is a little random, and two people rarely get the same bag. As a second-generation British Asian woman of Muslim heritage, I had never met anyone who had picked the same bits of culture and faith as me, let alone had almost identical life experiences.

To be a conservative Muslim and a liberal seemed a contradiction to most people, but not to Sabena. She was warm and open and really liked my answers to her questions. Especially when I told her I was divorced. “Me too!” she said, with more joy than I had expected. The deal was sealed.

I had never had a best friend before. Something about the phrase had always felt childish and constrictive to me, but there was no other way to describe what we became to each other.

We were two independent-minded Muslim women navigating our lives post-divorce in a culture that didn’t understand us, and, out and out, judged us. We gave each other a safe haven to talk about lost love, squandered potential and the youth we had sacrificed to intergenerational trauma and cultural acceptability. But it wasn’t all heavy. We laughed at ourselves. We talked about poetry and classic Indian film tracks, and we understood each other’s cultural references.

When I was the victim of racism at work, I would call her every day after leaving the office, saying: “I’m too old for this bullshit.”

She coached me through my vulnerability issues when my current husband proposed, and nudged me to stay when I was tempted to cut and run before the wedding.

After I became a mother, she told me truths that made me feel seen, at a time when I felt most invisible. And, having navigated parenthood a few years earlier, she keeps me going with words of experience and wisdom, and the kind of advice that comes from unconditional love.

“No, you don’t look big at all,” I had told her, when she was heavily pregnant with her first child. “I was the size of a house!” she reminds me. And I can’t disagree. But what good would it have done to tell her? This is what our friendship is built on – the knowledge that the other person can handle whatever life throws at them, but that they just need someone to believe in them.

Sabena has celebrated my highs, and held on to me through the lows, like the rope that holds a climber to a cliff. On the days I have wanted to jump, she has pulled me back up. She is the keeper of my secrets, and a voice of sanity in my otherwise tumultuous life. She is the best friend a woman could hope for, and more.

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[Shakespeare's Globe](#)

Twelfth Night review – impeccable staging of Shakespeare's merriest romp



Fantastic idiots ... Nadine Higgin as Sir Toby Belch and George Fouracres as Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night at Shakespeare's Globe, London.
Photograph: Marc Brenner

Fantastic idiots ... Nadine Higgin as Sir Toby Belch and George Fouracres as Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night at Shakespeare's Globe, London.
Photograph: Marc Brenner

Globe Theatre, London

Imaginative directorial tweaks and an expert cast bring out the full effects of a text stuffed with double-meanings, gender-swapped disguises and dextrous language



[Arifa Akbar](#)

[@Arifa_Akbar](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 20.07 EDT

Post-pandemic theatre in the UK seems to be bringing us a slew of upbeat musical revivals, classics and feelgood fare. Shakespeare's most merry of romps, abounding with music, love triangles and pleasing silliness, sits squarely among it. Whether these shows mark a collective retreat into comfort viewing and escapism is a moot point. What is clear is that Sean Holmes's production excels at the job of lifting us up and making us laugh.

Every comic character is clearly drawn and expertly played. A swaggering and sometimes staggering Sir Toby Belch (Nadine Higgin) comes on with a crate of beer. Andrew Aguecheek (George Fouracres) is a fantastic idiot in pastel colours and a cravat. Victoria Elliott's wise clown, Feste, is whip-smart and nimble, albeit with a too soft singing voice that doesn't carry above the orchestra. Sophie Russell plays Malvolio as an understated puritan until bursting into his awful comic incarnation in a yellow body-sock. All are genuinely funny with excellent comic timing, and bring out the full effects of a text that is stuffed full of double meanings and dexterous language.

The dramatic characters duly stick to seriousness, on the whole. Bryan Dick's Orsino is an intense unrequited lover. [Michelle Terry](#) excels as Viola, straight-faced, tormented, only occasionally raising a conspiratorial eyebrow at the audience. Ciarán O'Brien's Sebastian is the most comic – a kind of Alec Guinness spoof with his cane, his RP and his emphatic actorliness – and is enormously entertaining to watch. Shona Babayemi is poised and stately as Olivia, and knows how to bring physical comedy into the part the more besotted the character becomes.



Tormented ... Michelle Terry as Viola. Photograph: Marc Brenner

The production is a faithful one, yet full of imaginative tweaks in its comedy of deception and gender-disguise. Feste, who initially comes on in sparkly dress and stilettos, transforms into an androgynous figure before us, while the play's same-sex attraction is channelled well in scenes between Orsino and Viola, dressed as the male Cesario.

Viola and Sebastian's Elizabethan dress clashes with the rest of the cast's contemporary costumes and marks them out as interlopers in Illyria. Several characters look like modern-day cowboys: Orsino in fringed jacket and shirt; Toby Belch in the long coat and Fedora of an outlaw. Jean Chan's set resembles a down-at-heel holiday town (jukebox, carousel tiger, tacky welcome sign) but with surreal touches (a dead stag, alluding to the play's

theme of the romantic hunt). These dissonances all work well and build on a sense of doubleness.

[‘There are lots of feelings!’ Michelle Terry on reopening Shakespeare’s Globe](#)

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It is a production with many tonal variations, from love sickness and romance to drunken revelry and the bitter aftertaste left by Malvolio’s cruel gulling, but all its parts are carefully entwined and contain an impeccable artistry.

At the [Globe theatre, London](#), until 30 October.

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Theatre

Peaceophobia: Muslim men who love their modified motors



Car subculture ... Sohail Hussain, Casper Ahmed and Mohammad Ali Yunis in Peaceophobia. Photograph: Karol Wyszynski

Car subculture ... Sohail Hussain, Casper Ahmed and Mohammad Ali Yunis in Peaceophobia. Photograph: Karol Wyszynski

Mistaken for drug dealers? Monitored by police? A new play staged in a Bradford car park weaves stories of everyday racism, faith and petrolheads



[Lanre Bakare](#)

[@lanre_bakare](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

“I don’t go out, I don’t really go clubbing, I don’t drink, I don’t do none of that,” says Sohail Hussain, who is explaining how all encompassing his hobby is. “All my money goes on cars – for me it’s an investment.”

Hussain is one of three actors starring in Peaceophobia, a piece from collaborative theatre company Common Wealth that interweaves stories about Islam, faith and modified car culture. Set in a car park in [Bradford](#), the three drivers – Casper Ahmed, Mohammad Ali Yunis and Hussain – chat pistons and prayer over the constant hum of engine noise and tension.

Ali is mistaken for a drug dealer because of his car, Casper is harassed when working as a doorman, Sohail is told “he’s not like the other Asians” when he politely interacts with dog walkers.

The play originated from [Speakers’ Corner](#), a political safe space in Bradford where a group of young Muslim women suggested doing something to de-stigmatise their brothers’ love of cars and Islam. The group originally held a car rally in Bradford’s city centre, where motor enthusiasts

of all backgrounds met and talked about their shared pride. After that was a success, Common Wealth decided there was more to explore in the subculture.

It's creative. When they see someone else's car they appreciate it as art

Written by Zia Ahmed, the production is a typical of Common Wealth's collaborative approach. The actors, all of whom have day jobs, contributed real-life stories that made it into the play, while six women from Speakers' Corner also served as co-directors alongside Evie Manning.

Iram Rehman is one of them and says the project is about informing and unpicking some well-worn stereotypes about Bradford's Asian population, who make up 20% of the city's residents. "Because of the Bradford riots, there's a lot of stigma around Muslim men," she says. "The impression is that they are violent because of what happened, and they don't really have a voice themselves. These are normal, Muslim men. They are passionate about certain things in life but they just want to live their lives."

Ahmed, who is from south London, spent time with the three lead actors, listening to their stories and crafting a play that delivers a deeper look into the daily experiences of the three protagonists, from everyday racism and religious bigotry to harassment and street violence. "Casper talks a lot about his faith in the play. Faith is what brings him peace, but it's also the thing that puts him under surveillance."



Real-life stories ... ‘There’s a lot of stigma around Muslim men’

Manning says the dedication and skills they devote to their cars is somehow lost in the mix of moral panic headlines and a general distrust of Asian men that has festered since 2001. “It’s creative, it really is like art to them,” says Manning. “And when they see someone else’s car they appreciate it as art because they know how much work goes into it.”

Ali, who founded Bradford Modified Club which holds meets for car enthusiasts, explains that since the Covid-19 lockdowns, driving while brown in Bradford has become increasingly difficult. He estimates he’s been stopped more than 10 times in the last two months and faced fines that amount to hundreds of pounds. “It’s taking the piss,” he says.

That anger and tension builds through the play as the cars themselves begin to “speak” with the actors and map out the political moments that shaped the men’s experiences: from the formation of the BNP in the early 80s, to the [Manningsham riots](#) in 1995 and the start of the [Prevent strategy](#) after 9/11.

The result is a rare – and often funny – peek into the psyches of British Muslim men and a shocking reminder of what two decades of Islamophobic media coverage and government policy has delivered.

Common Wealth are based in both Bradford and Cardiff and have built a reputation for their challenging, site-specific work. Peaceophobia is similarly rooted in its locality. Bradford's Telegraph and Argus newspaper is peppered with stories about car crime and associated antisocial behaviour, while the lyrics and videos of local bassline acts like Bad Boy Chiller Crew constantly reference car culture..

"This play could only come from Bradford," says Manning, who will be touring it around the country from September.

Yet despite the hyperlocal nature of the piece, Manning says Peaceophobia is about the universal problem of being misunderstood. These men are essentially geeks, she says. Nerds with an addiction to buffing their cars, rather than antisocial petrolheads. "There's none of that easy stereotype thing of, like, boys who drive cars are tough. It's just not that at all."

Changing that perception is one of the reasons Sohail joined the project. "I just want people to understand us," he says. "A lot of people who see a car come past think either he's a drug dealer or up to no good. So if people have the confidence to approach us and talk to us after seeing the play – that would be a win in my eyes."

- [Peaceophobia](#) plays at Oastler Market car park, Bradford, from 10–18 September, then tours to Contact Manchester from 29 September to 2 October.
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/aug/11/peaceophobia-muslim-men-who-love-their-modified-motors>



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[Lionel Messi](#)

Lionel Messi to PSG: the inside story of how a stunning deal was done

A call at 10pm last Thursday set the ball rolling on a move that had seemed impossible hours earlier



Lionel Messi at Le Bourget airport, north of Paris, on Tuesday after flying from Barcelona to complete his move. Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP/Getty Images

Lionel Messi at Le Bourget airport, north of Paris, on Tuesday after flying from Barcelona to complete his move. Photograph: Sameer Al-Doumy/AFP/Getty Images

[Fabrizio Romano](#)

[@FabrizioRomano](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

It was 10pm in Barcelona on Thursday when [Paris Saint-Germain](#) made their move for Lionel Messi. The stunning news had broken two hours

earlier that the forward would not be staying at the Camp Nou and the way PSG went about their business showed how determined they were to get their man.

In transfers approaches are regularly made via intermediaries or agents, and clubs hoping to tempt Messi from [Barcelona](#) had often gone down this route. But PSG calculated this was a moment for the personal touch and, seeing an unexpected opening, they pounced.

[Lionel Messi arrives in Paris to seal PSG move on two-year contract](#)
[Read more](#)

The sporting director, Leonardo, made a direct approach to Messi's father, Jorge, and the player's lawyers – and the president, Nasser al-Khelaifi, joined the talks later that night. It is rare for Khelaifi to get involved but he did so with Neymar's transfer from Barcelona four years ago and his presence here confirmed the move's scale and the seriousness of PSG's push.

On Thursday morning such a turn of events had seemed impossible. Messi and his father had travelled back to Barcelona from Ibiza for the player to sign a five-year contract to stay at the Camp Nou. An announcement was planned for 8pm and the details were clear: two years' salary paid over five years to help the financially troubled club.

Messi was stunned and distraught when Barcelona's president, Joan Laporta, said La Liga's rules on salary limits meant the club had no way to register him. But his father quickly stressed to him the need to find a solution and both were impressed that two of the most important people at PSG came straight to them. Messi also spoke to the manager, Mauricio Pochettino.



PSG's president Nasser al-Khelaifi with the sporting director Leonardo (right) in September 2019. Photograph: Nicolas Tucat/AFP/Getty Images

Talks involving Khelaifi, Leonardo, Jorge Messi and the player's lawyers went late into Thursday night and continued all through Friday. The Messi camp were excited by the project presented to them and accepted the wage proposal of about €35m (£29.6m) net, including bonuses, on a two-year contract with an option for a further season. Negotiations on issues such as taxes and sponsors took much of the time. The need to factor in financial fair play rules was discussed but PSG were always confident on that front. Messi's deal, like Neymar's, has a clause that guarantees him a bonus if PSG win the Champions League.

On Saturday a verbal agreement was reached and PSG prepared a formal contract with their legal team. This was sent to Messi at 10am on Sunday, not long before his tearful farewell press conference at Barcelona. Although Messi denied there that a deal with PSG was done, in reality it was all but sorted.

01:33

'I wanted to stay more than anything': Lionel Messi tearful at Barcelona exit – video

Messi's lawyers wanted two days to check every detail and rumours that the player was flying to Paris were at that stage false. By Monday night, though, everything was in place and final agreement was confirmed at about 10am on Tuesday morning. A short while later Messi and his family set off for Barcelona airport.

In the PSG dressing room celebrations at Messi joining had started as early as Friday. That was because Neymar had confidently told the squad his former Barcelona teammate would be coming. From Thursday night Neymar had acted almost like a member of the PSG board, calling and messaging Messi and pushing him to make the move.



Lionel Messi with Neymar Jr after Argentina beat Brazil in the final of the Copa América last month. Photograph: Gustavo Pagano/Getty Images

Messi was certainly tempted by the opportunity to play again with his good friend but there is no question Barcelona had been his first choice. In the last week of April Messi had, through his father, turned down an approach from PSG, determined to stay at the only club he has really known.

The previous month Manchester City had made an approach via Pep Guardiola and club executives who also have a background at Barcelona. Messi had given the same response: he was continuing at the Camp Nou.

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email.

This time City have not made a move for Messi. Guardiola is happy with Jack Grealish as the new No 10 and is looking at Tottenham's Harry Kane as his priority if one more big attacking signing can be made. With Chelsea focused on getting Romelu Lukaku from Internazionale they too stayed away from talks with Messi.

Less than a week ago PSG had no chance of signing Messi. But it often pays to expect the unexpected when it comes to transfers and so a seemingly impossible deal has been done.

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Your problems, with Anna TimsConsumer affairs

My mortgage is under threat because of how my address is written

Royal Mail and on the electoral roll list it differently, which affects my credit rating



Older tenement buildings in Scotland may have their address registered in a different way to Royal Mail. Photograph: Iain Masterton/Alamy

Older tenement buildings in Scotland may have their address registered in a different way to Royal Mail. Photograph: Iain Masterton/Alamy



[Anna Tims](#)

Wed 11 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

I face being unable to secure a mortgage and losing the property I want to buy because of an anomaly with address formats in Edinburgh. The flat I rent appears in two ways: Royal Mail lists it as 5/7, while on the electoral roll it is 5 3F1 (building no 5, third-floor, flat 1). My bank has it as 5 3F1. This has affected my credit report because Equifax has no record of me under the the Royal Mail format. It told me to ask Royal Mail to change its listing, but it insists its format is correct.

LW, Edinburgh

The same issue affects many Scottish residents who live in older tenement buildings, and the consequences, should they apply for any kind of credit, can be serious. Historically, flats in tenements were registered according to the street number of the building, which storey they were on, and how far they were from the top of each staircase. This has been retained for old blocks. When Royal Mail computerised its database, it counted the number of flats in a block and allocated consecutive numbers.

This matters because it's the Royal Mail database, the postcode address file (PAF), which companies tend to rely on by default. If you apply for a

mortgage online using the lender's dropdown menu to find your address, it is likely to be the Royal Mail version. Therefore, if your bank and other companies have you registered according to the electoral roll, the lender will receive an incomplete report, or draw a blank.

The same problem can occur if a property is interchangeably known by a house name and a street number, or if "apartment" is substituted for "flat". It's therefore vital the same address appears on the electoral roll, the PAF and all payment accounts. Royal Mail says: "We always work closely with local authority street-naming teams to ensure our data is accurate. In this instance, there was a discrepancy between the historic address and the latter-day address.

"Royal Mail has agreed to change this on our postcode address finder database."

Everyone thinking of applying for credit should check the details registered with the three main credit reference agencies well beforehand, and flag up any discrepancies, since a failed credit check leaves a footprint that can deter other lenders.

Lisa Hardstaff, head of customer experience at Equifax, says if there are different formats for the same address a reference agency will need to manually make a link between the PAF address, and an individual's electoral register address. "This situation shows the importance of checking your credit report, before you make an application, to ensure that all the information is correct and up to date," she adds.

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Bovine tuberculosis

TB or not TB? Why Geronimo the alpaca has divided experts

Analysis: fate of condemned camelid shines light on one of the UK's greatest animal health threats



Geronimo the alpaca has tested positive twice for bovine tuberculosis.
Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Geronimo the alpaca has tested positive twice for bovine tuberculosis.
Photograph: Jacob King/PA

[Nicola Davis](#)

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 14.30 EDT

Long-necked, mop-headed and allegedly “a bit grumpy”, Geronimo the alpaca may seem an unlikely cause célèbre.

Yet the future of the eight-year-old camelid has divided experts, stirred some tabloids into [indignant fury](#), and provoked campaigners – known as “alpaca angels” – to march through London.

Their anger is aimed at the ruling that he must be put down – because he has twice tested positive for bovine tuberculosis. They want him saved. Others insist there’s [no choice](#) – his time is up.

It’s a story that would be easy to dismiss as a [silly season](#) staple, but there are important issues behind the headlines.

According to government figures, 28,356 animals [were slaughtered](#) due to a TB incident in England in the 12 months to March 2021, with 205 camelids culled in 2020.

None have gained the same attention as Geronimo – TB controversies have previously focused on the culling of badgers to prevent the spread of the disease, a practice some [scientists have criticised](#) but [farming unions have said is necessary](#).

But the fate of Geronimo has shone a light on a pathogen that experts say is one of the greatest animal health threats to the UK, costing taxpayers about £100m every year.

Bovine TB is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*, and can occur in a range of species, including badgers and camelids – such as alpacas. A zoonotic disease, it can also be passed to humans, although in the UK this is now rare thanks to measures including milk pasteurisation and compulsory tuberculin testing of cattle herds, together with culling of infected animals.

“Although the risk to humans is currently very low, that is because all these controls are in place,” said Prof Rosie Woodroffe at the Zoological Society of London, [who is an expert on badgers and TB](#). “As recently as the 1930s, tens of thousands of people were dying each year from bovine TB, and at that time about 40% of cattle had the disease, and milk wasn’t pasteurised.”

While the prevalence of bovine TB declined until the end of the 1970s, it subsequently stalled before rising. “We now have TB spreading again, particularly up the west side of England and south Wales,” said Malcolm Bennett, a professor of zoonotic and emerging disease at the University of Nottingham.

Testing for the disease varies between species. For cattle the situation is rather like the skin test for TB in humans: purified proteins from bovine TB are injected into the neck of the cow.

If a lump develops, this is indicative of infection.

But because some other mycobacteria, which are not of such concern, can also result in a reaction, the cow may also be injected with proteins from these.

“The two reactions are compared – literally by measuring a skin swelling at the injection sites – and if the difference is above a threshold, the animal is declared positive [for bovine TB],” said Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh who is a member of Defra’s Science Advisory Council and bovine TB partnership.

“These tests are generally poor sensitivity – [they] miss lots of positives – but high specificity,” Kao added. In other words, they rarely say a negative is positive.

If the test comes up positive, those cattle are culled.

However, as Kao points out, most of the data for the tests is on cows – although there is some on camelids.

Prof Ian Jones of the University of Reading said the test was not perfect. “There is a question mark over how big a lump you need in order to score it as a definite positive which has led to the development of several alternatives” he said.

According to Bennett, the skin test does not work well on camelids, deer or badgers. Instead antibody tests are used.

But as antibodies do not reach high levels until the disease is advanced, the animal may be first given a dose of bovine TB proteins 10-30 days before the test, which will amplify antibody levels – provided an immune response already exists as a result of an infection.

Jones said there were questions around accuracy and how applicable such tests were between species.

In Geronimo's case, the Enferplex antibody test was used. According to Defra, this has been specifically developed and validated for alpacas with the chance of a false positive result just 0.34%.

Defra notes Geronimo was [twice found to be positive](#) using this approach. "Geronimo tested positive and had antibodies to four different types of the TB antigens in response to the TB bacterium," Defra said.

One issue with Geronimo, Bennett said, was that it seemed the alpaca had been given skin tests in 2017 prior to arriving in the UK and having antibody tests.

"[Some would argue] there is a big difference between ... giving one dose of tuberculin [TB proteins] and then looking for antibodies to improve the sensitivity, and giving three or four doses and then getting an antibody response," he said.

However Defra [has denied this](#). "The injection of tuberculin does not induce a false positive antibody response in animals that have not been exposed to the bTB bacterium in the first place," they say, noting tuberculin does not build up in animals and that uninfected animals will not have antibodies to bovine TB.

Fundamentally the fact is that bovine TB is controlled on a population level and, as Jones notes, the premise is to err on the side of caution and destroy an animal even if a positive test is borderline.

"This is made all the more difficult and emotive when you are dealing with individual animals and your policy involves culling," said Bennett. "Of course vaccination would be far better – [and that is coming](#)."

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‘Most of the women and girls I know have fled the city and are trying to find somewhere safe.’ Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

[Women report Afghanistan](#)

‘Please pray for me’: female reporter being hunted by the Taliban tells her story

‘Most of the women and girls I know have fled the city and are trying to find somewhere safe.’ Photograph: Mohammad Ismail/Reuters

A young female journalist describes the panic and fear of being forced into hiding as cities across Afghanistan fall

by Anonymous, as told to Hikmat Noori

Women report Afghanistan is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 09.22 EDT

Two days ago I had to flee my home and life in the north of [Afghanistan](#) after the Taliban took my city. I am still on the run and there is no safe place for me to go.

Last week I was a news journalist. Today I can't write under my own name or say where I am from or where I am. My whole life has been obliterated in just a few days.

I am so scared and I don't know what will happen to me. Will I ever go home? Will I see my parents again? Where will I go? The highway is blocked in both directions. How will I survive?

My decision to leave my home and life was not planned. It happened very suddenly. In the past days my whole province has fallen to the [Taliban](#). The only places that the government still controls are the airport and a few police district offices. I'm not safe because I'm a 22-year-old woman and I know that the Taliban are forcing families to give their daughters as wives for their fighters. I'm also not safe because I'm a news journalist and I know the Taliban will come looking for me and all of my colleagues.

I'm a 22-year-old woman and I know that the Taliban are forcing families to give their daughters as wives for their fighters

The Taliban are already seeking out people they want to target. At the weekend my manager called me and asked me not to answer any unknown number. He said that we, especially the women, should hide, and escape the city if we could.

As I was packing I could hear bullets and rockets. Planes and helicopters were flying low over our heads. There was fighting on the streets right outside the house. My uncle offered to help get me to a safe place, so I grabbed my phone and a *chadari* (the full Afghan burqa) and left. My parents would not leave even though our house was now on the frontline of the battle for the city. As the rocket fire intensified they pleaded for me to leave because they knew the routes out of the city would soon be shut. So I left them behind and fled with my uncle. I haven't spoken to them since as the phones are not working in the city any more.

Outside the house it was chaos. I was one of the last young women left in my neighbourhood to try to flee. I could see Taliban fighters right outside our house, on the street. They were everywhere. Thank God, I had my

chadari, but even then I was afraid they would stop me or would recognise me. I was trembling as I was walking, but trying not to look scared.

Just after we'd left a rocket landed right next to us. I remember screaming and crying, women and children around me were running in every direction. It felt like we were all stuck in a boat and there was a big storm around us.

Q&A

What is the Women report Afghanistan series?

Show

As provinces and cities fall under Taliban control across Afghanistan, women's voices are already being silenced. For this special series, the Guardian's [Rights and freedom project](#) has partnered with [Rukhshana Media](#), a collective of female journalists across Afghanistan, to bring their stories of how the escalating crisis is affecting the lives of women and girls to a global audience.

Afghan journalists, especially women, face a dire situation. Dozens have been attacked and killed in militant attacks. As the Taliban have advanced, many have lost their jobs or been forced into hiding. Female journalists face a double peril: attacked for their journalism and persecuted for their gender.

All the reporting, photography and journalism published in this series will be carried out by Afghan women, with support from the editors on the Rights and freedom project.

These are the stories that Afghan women want to tell about what is happening to their country at this critical moment.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

We managed to get to my uncle's car and started driving towards his house, which is 30 minutes outside the city. On the way we were stopped at a Taliban checkpoint. It was the most terrifying moment of my life. I was

inside my chadari and they ignored me but interrogated my uncle, asking him where we were going. He said we had been visiting a health centre in the city and were on our way home. Even as they were questioning him, rockets were being fired and landing close to the checkpoint. Finally, they let us go.

On the way we were stopped at a Taliban checkpoint. It was the most terrifying moment of my life

Even when we got to my uncle's village, it wasn't safe. His village is under Taliban control and many families are Taliban sympathisers. A few hours after we arrived, we were told some of the neighbours had discovered he was hiding me there and that we had to leave – they said the Taliban knew I'd been taken out the city and if they came to the village and found me there, they'd kill everyone.



People flee areas taken over by Taliban militants in eastern Afghanistan.
Photograph: Ghulamullah Habibi/EPA

We found somewhere else for me to hide, a home of a distant relative. We had to walk for hours, with me still in my chadari, staying away from all the main roads where the Taliban might be. This is where I am now. A rural area

where there is nothing. There is no running water or electricity. There is barely any phone signal and I am cut off from the world.

[‘We walked 18 hours, no food’: Taliban advance triggers exodus of Afghans](#)
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Most of the women and girls I know have also fled the city and are trying to find somewhere safe. I cannot stop thinking and worrying about my friends, my neighbours, my classmates, all the women in Afghanistan.

All my female colleagues in the media are terrified. Most have managed to flee the city and are trying to find a way out of the province, but we are completely surrounded. All of us have spoken out against the Taliban and angered them through our journalism.

Right now, everything is tense. All I can do is keep running and hope that a route out of the province opens up soon. Please pray for me.

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OpinionClimate change

Once you understand the terrible cost of doing nothing, climate action is a bargain

Damian Carrington



Critics baulk at the cost of getting Britain to net zero, but the alternative is so much worse



‘Electric cars cost more to buy for now, but are already cheaper to own overall.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

‘Electric cars cost more to buy for now, but are already cheaper to own overall.’ Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Wed 11 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Ruinous, eye-watering, crippling, stratospheric, massive. That’s the cost to the UK of beating the climate crisis, according to those who portray getting to net zero emissions as economic suicide that is being thrust on an unwilling population by posh eco-fundamentalists and zealots.

This is not just wrong, it is the exact opposite of reality. The delusions come from those with histories of climate change scepticism and could be dismissed as the latest mutant variant thrown up by the death throes of denial. But they are having a real-world impact, slowing action at the precise moment acceleration is needed.

So how did we get here? In 2019, the then chancellor, Phillip Hammond, wrote a letter to the prime minister claiming the cost of the UK getting to net zero would exceed £1tn. Then, in July of this year, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimated the investment needed for net zero by 2050 was £1.4tn. These figures are the source of the hot air.

But this is only one side of the balance sheet. The other, conveniently ignored by the critics, carries [huge cost savings](#) due to more efficient vehicles and buildings, and the economic boost of many thousands of good jobs in the green industries that will be the growth story of the 21st century. And that's just the start.

Getting to net zero avoids the terrible costs and suffering that unrestrained global heating is beginning to wreak on the world, as [starkly laid out in the week's IPCC report](#). Cutting fossil fuel burning also brings benefits such as slashed air pollution, which still kills about 40,000 people a year in the UK.

Let's put some of that into numbers. Once the fuel efficiency savings are included, the OBR's cost estimate falls by about 75%, to 0.4% of GDP a year. The OBR also said delaying decisive climate action by a decade could double the cost to the government.

Chris Stark, head of the government's advisers, the Climate Change Committee, estimates that the cost of getting to net zero by 2050 would mean a mere four-month delay in economic growth over 30 years, even without considering the wider benefits to society. Given the alternative – climate chaos – [Stark says](#): “I would argue we can't afford *not* to do net zero.”

Swiss Re, the insurance giant whose business is risk, agrees. It calculates a [10% loss](#) of global GDP by 2050 without further climate action now, [similar to other recent analyses](#). Another study suggests that breaking the 1.5C temperature limit outlined in the Paris agreement will cost far more than acting to hold temperatures down, even if [rich nations have to pay](#) for action in poorer nations. Basically, climate action is a bargain.

In the face of this, why do some still make hysterical claims of ruinous costs? The first reason is blinkered nationalism – [the UK's emissions are just 1% of the globe's](#), they say. The problem here is that the UK is holding the vital Cop26 climate summit in November – why should anyone act to save the world if the host is not? Failing to act would also cede competitive advantage in green industries to other nations: kiss goodbye to “Global Britain”.

The second reason for the hysterical claims is rooted in inane free-market ideology. It is true that there are upfront costs for green technology. Electric cars cost more to buy for now, but are already cheaper to own overall.

[Johnson's muddle over Covid is a foretaste of his thinking on climate change. Be afraid | Gaby Hinsliff](#)

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The solution here, proposed as much by centre-right voices as the left, is ensuring the less well-off [get the help they need](#), such as subsidised electric vehicles or payments funded by carbon taxes levied on the high consumption of the wealthy. To those further to the right, such state redistribution is anathema, which may be why none of those complaining of the costs of net zero [seem able to come up with any alternative plans](#).

They claim to be concerned about struggling families, but as Sam Hall, director of the Conservative Environment Network, says: “If we were to pursue the alternative approach of not mitigating climate change, [unfairnesses in society](#) would be exacerbated. Low-income households, for example, are disproportionately exposed to flood risk.”

The cries of “crippling net zero costs” may be laughable, but they are causing damage, and not just because they are helping delay cuts to carbon emissions. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, is dragging his feet over urgently needed green policies, such as the plan to phase out gas boilers, at just the moment when the UK needs to be leading the way ahead of Cop26.

A reckoning is coming. The Treasury must publish its [review of the costs](#) of the net zero transition in the coming months, which is said to be being redrafted after a first attempt that was considered overly pessimistic in its high projected costs. If the final report accepts the compelling logic that climate action is both vital and affordable, the UK may yet lead Cop26 to the successful outcome the world desperately needs. If not, the cynics – those who know “[the price of everything and the value of nothing](#)” – will have won, and the world will continue to burn.

- Damian Carrington is the Guardian’s environment editor

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OpinionPrince Andrew

Of course Prince Andrew isn't sweating over this lawsuit – he can't

Marina Hyde



The Duke of York is the subject of a US civil suit brought by Virginia Giuffre, who alleges she was abused while a minor



‘Prince Andrew has been made the subject of a US lawsuit, a civil case brought by Virginia Roberts Giuffre.’ Photograph: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP/Getty Images

‘Prince Andrew has been made the subject of a US lawsuit, a civil case brought by Virginia Roberts Giuffre.’ Photograph: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 10 Aug 2021 10.40 EDT

“I could have worse tags than ‘Air Miles Andy’”, Prince Andrew once remarked, “although I don’t know what they are.” Yeah, well ... SPOILERS. I’m not sure if the Duke of York would have better luck if he considered the question again today, in light of Various Events of the past few years. His infamous [Newsnight interview](#) revealed him to be a man of such baroque stupidity that in some ways its most sensational revelation was that Prince Edward must have been the clever one.

And so to events overnight in New York. For the first time, the Queen’s second son has been made the [subject of a US lawsuit](#), a civil case brought by Virginia Giuffre, formerly Roberts, teenage victim of Andrew’s former close friend, the late underage sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Giuffre alleges that the Queen’s second son sexually abused her when she was a minor on three occasions – in London, in New York, and in the US Virgin Islands.

Quite a lot of air miles, there, though I fear we can rule out HRH cashing them in for a free flight to the US any time soon. The prince has not commented on the case but he has always denied the claims saying they're false and without foundation.

He won't be sweating even now, of course – as Andrew famously explained, he is biologically incapable of perspiration because he OD'd on adrenaline in the Falklands. And you know, no matter how many times I type that, I always need to take a moment to get my eyebrows down off the roof.

Anyway, this latest development may well represent Giuffre's last available option for personal agency in pursuit of justice for her claims. Otherwise, she can only await the glacial creep of the various investigations into the now-dead Epstein and his associates, including the financier's alleged procurer Ghislaine Maxwell, who is herself awaiting trial in the US.

Alas, accounts differ as to the level of the prince's assistance with any of these various inquiries. Last January, the then-New York attorney general, Geoffrey Berman, declared HRH had offered "zero cooperation" up to that point. According to Berman, not a lot had changed six months later. "If Prince Andrew is, in fact, serious about cooperating with the ongoing federal investigation, our doors remain open," he reiterated last summer, "and we await word of when we should expect him." Reading that, you might have felt minded to pencil him in for the 12th of never, but the prince's legal team countered that he had "on at least three occasions this year offered his assistance as a witness to the DOJ". In the suit filed on Monday, the documents state: "Again Prince Andrew stonewalled - ignoring (the) plaintiff's letter and emails without any reply or response, thereby making this action necessary now."

Let's move on, then, to a recap on the three locations referenced in Giuffre's case. The Virgin Islands relates to Epstein's private property in the territory, apparently known locally – though perhaps not altogether opaquely – as "Paedophile Island". On the New York allegation, Prince Andrew has already asserted that he couldn't have had "activity" with Giuffre at Epstein's Manhattan address that night as he was staying with the then British consul general in New York, Sir Thomas Harris. Or as Harris put it: "It doesn't sound like he stayed with me," adding that he had "no

recollection” of the claimed royal visit, and it had not appeared in the Court Circular as would be convention. The London allegation arguably comes with the most helpful aide memoire for the prince, what with the existence of a photo of Andrew with his hand resting on the bare hip of Giuffre in an upstairs room of Ghislaine Maxwell’s home. Maxwell herself is smirking in the background of the picture, allegedly taken after a visit by her, the prince, and Epstein to Tramp nightclub.

All sorts of claims have been made about this photograph and what it shows. Placing those allegations and denials to one side for a moment, let’s just focus on what we can see, and ask ourselves a basic question. Namely: what are three big-hitters in their 40s doing hanging round late at night with a 17-year-old runaway? Is this the behaviour of non-weirdos? Not really, let’s face it. Virginia Roberts wasn’t a whole lot older than Andrew’s eldest daughter at the time, which perhaps ought to have crystallised his thinking. Far better to take her to Pizza Express than to run the gauntlet of the aged slimeballs at Tramp.

Nor was it the behaviour of a non-weirdo to continue to hang out with a Tier 1 sex offender AFTER he had been to prison for procuring an underage girl for prostitution, as the Duke of York undeniably did in the case of Epstein. And let’s not forget it wasn’t just one girl, in some kind of he-said, she-said situation. As the Palm Beach police chief who ran the case summarised: “This was 50-something ‘shes’ and one ‘he’ – and the shes all basically told the same story.”

As for what’s next for Andy, I wouldn’t pin hopes on him being a blockbuster Tower of London exhibit for autumn. It was almost exactly two years ago that the fallout of his Epstein friendship hotted up for him again, and back then the prince headed straight to join the Queen’s summer retreat to Balmoral, where he was accompanied by his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson. Andrew was even prominently displayed in the prime seat next to his mother in the car on the way to the local church. He and Fergie then private-jetted off for a second time to Sotogrande – though oddly some random private plane Meghan and Harry had recently taken was deemed of far more febrile and condemnatory interest to most of Fleet Street at the time.

You certainly wouldn't bet against the same pattern being followed this year. Prince Andrew and Fergie are already reported to be imminently expected at Balmoral, suggesting he is not exactly the Banned Old Duke of York. Perhaps we shall see him with mama again, pursing his lips with the grave satisfaction of one who knows that Balmoral's humble kirk does not actually have an extradition treaty with hades.

In the immediate wake of the Newsnight interview, a YouGov poll found that a mere [6% of the UK public](#) believed Prince Andrew to be telling the truth. It does seem particularly notable that he asserts he was "acting honourably" in flying all the way to New York in 2010, supposedly to end his friendship with Epstein. Strangely, he has yet to regard it as a matter of honour to fly to New York to clear his own name. If he fails to take up this new opportunity to do so in a court of law, he and his surrogates can hardly complain about being tried in the court of public opinion.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
- This article was amended on 10 August 2021 to refer to the US Virgin Islands, not British Virgin Islands.

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Yes, the climate crisis is terrifying. But I refuse to abandon hope

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



The world seems to be on the verge of collapse – yet I have just brought a baby into it



Smoke rising from the Dixie fire in California this week. Photograph: David Swanson/Reuters

Smoke rising from the Dixie fire in California this week. Photograph: David Swanson/Reuters

Tue 10 Aug 2021 10.18 EDT

“Babe, look!” my wife said excitedly, as we sprawled on the grass reading on one baking hot afternoon. She passed me her book: “Read this – this person is just like you!” I read the paragraph she was pointing to. A clearly distraught character was fulminating about poorly designed roundabouts; she kept going on and on and on about them. To be clear, I don’t have any opinions about roundabouts. Not a single one. I curtly informed my wife of this. “Yeah,” she said. “But you do have, you know, certain rants you keep coming back to. Like, incessantly.”

I couldn’t argue. While I have always been a committed pessimist, recently I’ve gone into full-blown Chicken Little mode with existential obsessions. I’ll wake up, look at the latest terrifying news on my phone and immediately launch a diatribe about how we are almost certainly going to experience climate emergency-induced societal collapse in our lifetimes. “Have you seen what’s happening in [Greece/northern California/Turkey?](#)” I’ll screech. “Have you seen how many billionaires are [fleeing to New Zealand](#) to avoid

the imminent apocalypse? The weather is out of control! Joe Biden and his woefully inadequate infrastructure bill aren't going to fix anything! We are all doomed! DOOMED!"

Granted, this may be a lot for my wife – or anyone – to deal with before a morning cup of coffee. But a state of constant anxiety about the environment is hardly unreasonable, is it? I mean, when Greta Thunberg gets irate she gets [nominated for a Nobel peace prize](#). But when I do, it's problematic? The world is in dire straits – as Monday's [IPCC report](#) made extremely clear – so if you're not feeling anxious then you're not paying attention. And, if the rising rates of eco-anxiety are anything to go by, a lot of us *are* paying attention: a survey released by the American Psychological Association [last year](#) found that 68% of the adults contacted had "at least a little eco-anxiety" about climate crisis and its effects.

And now my eco-anxiety has been exacerbated by parental guilt. I have a three-month-old baby who I love to bits. Sometimes, however, I'll wake up in the middle of the night and intensely regret having her. That's not because she has woken me up with banshee-like squeals for the 17th time that night (although she definitely has) or because sleep deprivation has caused me to age 30 years in three months (although it definitely has) – it's because I feel horribly guilty for bringing my daughter into a world that seems to be on the verge of collapse. Why did we do this? I'll think. And then I'll remind myself that while choosing to have a child may have been selfish in many ways, it was also an act of optimism. I thought a lot about the climate crisis when deciding whether or not to have a kid. And my conclusion was that if I was going to spend so much time and money on becoming a parent – if I was going to shoulder the responsibility of bringing new life into the world – I was going to have to find reasons to be optimistic. Otherwise how could I live with myself? How could I look my daughter in the eye?

Antonio Gramsci [said](#) that we need the pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will. Those, I think, are words to live by. We must not delude ourselves about the immense challenges the world faces, but we can't let anxiety overwhelm and paralyse us. The world isn't doomed quite yet – there is still a window of opportunity to change things. Particularly as, some [well-respected climate scientists](#) point out, we have the technology to save the world. We don't need to wait for a miracle; we just need the will.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist
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The Covid vaccines mean we can start living again – in Britain, at least

[Devi Sridhar](#)

We made sacrifices to buy time for a scientific solution that has now arrived. Yet where jabs aren't available, the crisis still rages



‘Life is better and brighter when we can do the things that make our lives meaningful.’ Festivalgoers at Latitude, Henham Park, Suffolk, 23 July. Photograph: Ash Knotek/Rex/Shutterstock

‘Life is better and brighter when we can do the things that make our lives meaningful.’ Festivalgoers at Latitude, Henham Park, Suffolk, 23 July. Photograph: Ash Knotek/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 10 Aug 2021 07.20 EDT

We have all made sacrifices over the past 18 months. People have stayed home to protect others. Businesses have shuttered and many people have lost their incomes and jobs. Trips to see family members overseas have been

cancelled; weddings have been postponed. As an initial strategy, these pandemic rules made sense. Our collective sacrifices saved lives and bought scientists time to deliver solutions. In the race to produce a vaccine, time was the currency that counted most.

But now we have several safe and effective vaccines. Hospitals are more experienced at dealing with Covid-19. We know that ventilating buildings, wearing face coverings indoors and avoiding crowded spaces and workplaces when feeling unwell all help to stop the spread of the virus.

It is hard to overstate how transformative vaccines in particular are. Though less effective at stopping the spread of the Delta variant, they are still remarkably effective at preventing severe disease and death. In most instances, people who avoided infection until being vaccinated acquired another layer of protection; they can still get infected, but it is highly unlikely they will end up in hospital or die.

It can be confusing to know how to live in this new situation, where vaccines have transformed but not solved the Covid crisis in richer countries. Legal restrictions have lifted across the UK, but people have not resumed their pre-Covid behaviours. Most are still acting cautiously. This is wise: we know how serious the virus is, and we know that underestimating it is foolish.

At the same time, the collective experiences denied to us during the pandemic are part of being human. Whether it's going to live music concerts, sitting in the cinema or lifting weights in the gym, the rituals and experiences that were dangerous because of the virus are those which give us meaning and joy. I have started doing some of the things I love again, taking part in hot yoga and spin classes. Life is better and brighter when we can do the things that make our lives meaningful.

In many ways, now is the moment we were holding out for. The UK has achieved high vaccination coverage; a recent ONS study estimates over 93% of adults have antibodies across the four nations. The vaccination programme has raced to get a lid on new variants such as Alpha and Delta that are dramatically more transmissible. In terms of uptake, it has been extraordinarily effective.

While life hasn't returned to pre-Covid normality, it is nonetheless time to start getting back to living. The challenge now is to return to the activities we enjoy while maintaining a sense of caution and consideration for others, particularly those who are immunocompromised, who can't get vaccinated and children under 16 who haven't had access to the vaccine. Because not everyone is equally protected against the virus, it makes sense to keep wearing masks in public spaces and acting with others in mind to avoid spreading the virus.

We made sacrifices to buy time for a scientific solution that has now arrived. Thanks to vaccines, we are now in a position where we can make informed decisions about how to take part in previously risky activities. You might think of this like a "risk budget"; if you are doubly vaccinated and get tested regularly, you can go back to doing the things that make you happy and feel alive, deciding where and how you choose to take risks. Covid-19 has not gone away, but the vaccines allow us to think of it like the other risks we take, such as driving on motorways or travelling to foreign countries.

In the early months of the pandemic, when there was still considerable uncertainty about the potential for scientific breakthroughs, suppressing the virus entirely through the so-called zero-Covid approach was, in my view, the best early strategy for countries able to achieve it. [I made the case for this approach](#) across the UK in summer 2020 in order to avoid the second wave and a winter lockdown. Antibody prevalence was [less than 10%](#) at the time. Now even the countries that pursued this model, such as Australia and New Zealand, need a more sustainable strategy. This will involve vaccinating 80-90% of their populations and opening up cautiously to international travel. All countries are running towards the same goal: mass vaccination coverage.

There are still questions over what will happen this winter in the UK and Europe. But the problems we may face in the future will pale in comparison to the devastation that Delta is causing in countries such as Peru, Namibia, Indonesia and Nepal. Vaccines are largely unavailable in these places, health systems are collapsing and people face the choice of going to work and catching Covid-19 or staying home and going hungry.

Now that we're able to go back to living, there's no excuse for not caring about the rest of the world. Rich governments urgently need to start putting real investment into vaccinating poorer countries, whether by building regional manufacturing hubs, waiving intellectual property rights or investing in other countries' medical capacity. The UK government should be doing more to help on these issues and ensure Covid becomes a manageable issue, because the pandemic is not over until it is over everywhere.

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh
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Ben Jennings on A-level results for young people facing a future on fire – cartoon

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The reform of prisons has been my life's work, but they are still utterly broken

Frances Crook

Prisons are fundamentally unjust, but a small, ethical and compassionate system would transform lives

- Frances Crook is the chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform



‘The sheer monotony of life inside does nothing for the mental health challenges many prisoners face.’ Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

‘The sheer monotony of life inside does nothing for the mental health challenges many prisoners face.’ Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Nobody really cares about prisons. They are so far removed from the experience of most people and they are, apparently, full of horrid people. Occasionally, the media will run stories about [rat-infested cells](#) or [suicide rates](#), but because so few people have anything to do with prisons, the stories soon fade and life for those on the outside continues as normal.

But prisons matter. It matters who goes into them. It matters what happens inside them. And it matters how much they cost. Although prisons too often function like black holes into which society banishes those it deems problematic, the state of our prisons tells a story about all of us. Prisons reflect society back to itself: they embody the ways we have failed, the people we have failed, and the policies that have failed, all at immense human – and economic – cost.

As chief executive of the prison reform charity the [Howard League](#) for the past 35 years, reforming prisons has become my life's mission. In October, I will leave my work with one sad but inescapable conclusion: prisons are the last unreformed public service, stuck in the same cycle of misery and futility as when I arrived.

If a time traveller from 100 years ago walked into a prison today – whether one of the inner-city Victorian prisons or the new-builds where the majority of men are held – the similarities would trump the differences. They would recognise the smells and the sounds, the lack of activity and probably some of the staff. It is not only the buildings that have stayed the same – it is the whole ethos of the institution.

Prison is an unhealthy place. Most prisoners have come from poverty, addiction and social deprivation cemented by decades of failed social policy. Many arrive with long-term health problems, and in prison their health deteriorates further. While life expectancy and the quality of life for much of the country has advanced significantly in the past three decades, prisoners are considered “old” at 50. In the 12 months to June 2021, 396 people [died in prison custody](#) – some from Covid, some from suicide, many from “natural causes” that few of us on the outside would consider natural in middle age.

[Two deaths in English prisons make me wonder how civilised we are in 2021 | Eric Allison](#)

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Even before prisons were locked down during the pandemic, it was normal for men – who [make up 95%](#) of the prison population – to spend almost all day in their cells. Wing-cleaning or an education class might occupy a few hours on a weekday. A shower every few days might offer brief respite. Men spend the day, and sleep, in ill-fitting, saggy prison uniforms, unwashed for days on end, waiting to be released.

Mealtimes provide structure, but not sustenance. Breakfast is a pack of white bread, a small bag of cereal and a small carton of milk, provided at tea-time the day before. (Inevitably, it is consumed that night.) They wake hungry, without food until lunch at about 11am – usually a small, soggy baguette, a packet of crisps and an apple, if they’re lucky. One hot meal comes with stodge and vegetables cooked beyond the point of identification at about 5pm.

The sheer monotony of life inside does nothing for the mental health challenges many prisoners face. Addictions worsen, with drugs [readily available](#) across the nation’s prison estate. Lockdown may have ended what little human contact prisoners had with the outside world. It did nothing to stem the flow of narcotics.

On release, many face homelessness and joblessness and may well have lost any family contact they had before incarceration. The people we step over in the street, for whom we sometimes buy a sandwich or a cup of coffee, are often people recently [released from prisons](#). It is hardly surprising that about [half of those released](#) are reconvicted of a further offence and end up back inside. It is a merry-go-round but without cheer.

Minister after minister has done nothing to address the central question haunting our prison system: what is it all for? Each new secretary of state arrives with a new idea – improving a handful of prisons, building a few new ones, or getting people on to sex offender courses – and millions are duly splurged on the latest fad. But it does not face up to the problem that is the prison system as a whole.

At the heart of prisons is the fact that they are fundamentally unjust. They embed and compound social, economic and health inequalities. They disproportionately suck in men from poor, Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. They do nothing to help people out of crime. We only have to look at the internal punishment system to see that unfairness is the name of the game, with Black people significantly more likely to be physically restrained and punished than their white counterparts.

The whole system needs radical overhaul, starting with a swinging reduction in the number of people we imprison. Custody is the most drastic and severe response the state has at its disposal and should only be used in exceptional and rare instances – either for the most egregious crimes, or when someone poses a serious and continuing threat to public safety.

Abiding by that principle would virtually empty our prisons of women and children, and drastically reduce the number of men behind bars. Most women are either on remand or serving a short sentence. Many are survivors of domestic abuse. Vanishingly few have committed violent crimes that warrant incarceration; fewer still could be reasonably considered to pose an ongoing threat to society. They, along with the 500 children who are currently incarcerated, should be managed in the community by specialist local authority-run services that provide the support, rehabilitation and education that will save them from further imprisonment. Thousands of men would benefit from similar support, whether that's community addiction services, decent housing or mental health facilities.

The number of people in prison in England and Wales today sits at 78,600. That number could and should plummet – and swiftly. Margaret Thatcher – no softie on criminal justice – managed with less than half that number of prisoners. The Netherlands has drastically cut its prison population and is closing its prisons. A shrunken estate could be transformed so that prisons become places of purpose where people receive holistic support, quality care, meaningful skills and education, in an environment that is as similar to the society they will eventually re-enter as possible.

Over the past 35 years, I hope that I have contributed to making things just a bit better. I am most proud of the work we have done with police forces to reduce the arrests of young people, saving hundreds of thousands of children

from experiencing the trauma and lifelong damage of being arrested. But the state of our prison system, the leviathan that continues to devour lives and resources and contaminates political discourse, remains my most bitter regret. A small, ethical and compassionate prison system would save the taxpayer a fortune, change lives and transform incarceration for good. It does not have to be like this.

- Frances Crook is the chief executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform
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Flutter's punt on US gambling business FanDuel has played out in spades

[Nils Pratley](#)



The FTSE 100 company's share of the US online sportsbook market in the last quarter was an astonishing 45%



When Flutter topped up its interest in FanDuel to 95% at the end of last year, the additional 37% cost the rather chunky sum of \$4.2bn but that large transaction is starting to look good business. Photograph: Pavlo Gonchar/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

When Flutter topped up its interest in FanDuel to 95% at the end of last year, the additional 37% cost the rather chunky sum of \$4.2bn but that large transaction is starting to look good business. Photograph: Pavlo Gonchar/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 10 Aug 2021 14.49 EDT

The smartest deal, in hindsight, done in recent years by a FTSE 100 company must be Flutter Entertainment's purchase in 2018 of a majority stake in FanDuel, a US business running online sports-based fantasy games for prizes. It was a punt that leadership in the fantasy market could be converted into something very big if US rules were liberalised to allow locals to bet on sport for serious dollars in European style.

At the time, [Flutter, then called Paddy Power Betfair](#) (which still describes the bulk of the company), viewed the deal as akin to "an option" on US liberalisation, says chief executive Peter Jackson. But the bullish projection has played out in spades. The US supreme court indeed changed the rules and individual US states are opening up. Back in 2018, Flutter paid \$158m

for its 58% stake in FanDuel and threw in a few US assets it already owned. When it topped up and took its interest to 95% at the end of last year, the additional 37% cost the rather chunkier sum of \$4.2bn (£3bn).

Even the later transaction, though, is starting to look good business given the US statistics that Flutter sprinkled across its first-half results on Tuesday. Its share of the online sportsbook market in the US in the last quarter was an astonishing 45%, which equates to 2.2 million people, 75% of whom have been recruited in the last 12 months. In a US betting market that currently resembles a land-grab, Flutter has twice the share of its nearest competitor.

The business of acquiring customers is not cheap – \$291 per head, the company said, leading to likely top-line losses this year in the US of up to \$275m. The point, though, is that payback on new customers is calculated to come within a year and Flutter expects “a tipping point” to be reached at the end of 2022 when profits from existing customers more than offsets the cost of acquiring new ones.

Profits in the US would therefore appear in 2023, the first time Flutter has set a date. There would be a delay if big states, such as California, liberalise in the interim, necessitating another promotional splurge, but Flutter obviously hopes they do.

[Fox takes legal action to lower price of stake it may buy in betting firm FanDuel](#)

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While it is hard to believe the company will be able to defend for ever a 45% share of a market that is still in its infancy, the mini-mystery is how the Las Vegas casinos allowed a London-listed, Dublin-based company to waltz into its backyard and gain leadership. The answer may be no more than the inability of land-based operators to understand that the online world is nothing like the one they know. Call it a rare case of European tech beating US efforts, albeit in a socially useless field.

An intriguing twist will come if Flutter lists a minority stake in FanDuel on the US stock markets, an idea it has already raised. The lack of a US chief executive, plus a row with Rupert Murdoch's Fox Corporation over the

rights to a stake in FanDuel, probably preclude a listing for the time being. But the US markets have awarded a rip-roaring rating to share-dealing platform Robinhood, which is essentially just another venue for gambling. FanDuel looks the better long-term prospect.

abrdn has lost its vowels but gained a positive vibe

Progress is slower at Standard Life Aberdeen, or [abrdn as we may one day get used to calling the asset management firm](#), but then it always is. Assets have been flowing in the wrong direction ever since the big merger in 2017, and Tuesday was no exception: on the most flattering basis, net withdrawals were £1.9bn in the first six months of 2021.

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That didn't stop new-ish chief executive Stephen Bird chirping cheerfully about "clarity of focus under our new brand" and he may have a point. In the worst post-merger days, outflows were sometimes ten times as bad. What's more, from the point of view of the folk charging a management fee, not all assets are equal. More of the low-margin stuff, such as money market funds, departed this time; and the arrivals included more of the assets that are worth having, such as private investments.

Throw in the benefit from positive markets and assets under management were flat at £532bn. Fee-based revenue improved 7% and "adjusted" operating profits were 52% higher at £160m. Six months is not enough time to judge the success or failure of Bird's three-year plan, but there is a more positive vibe about abrdn after its integration struggles. If a silly name was needed to generate a buzz, shareholders will take it.

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OpinionSocial care

Predatory financial tactics are putting the very survival of the UK care system at risk

Christine Corlett Walker

The competitive, for-profit model means investor returns have become more important than quality care and worker pay



A resident is helped by care workers. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

A resident is helped by care workers. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Tue 10 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

The [crisis in social care](#) in the UK does not have just one cause, nor one simple solution. Chronic underfunding, an ageing population, the Brexit-induced labour shortage and the devastation wreaked by Covid-19 have all

played a part. But the problems forcing the care system to the brink of collapse don't just come from a series of exogenous shocks – they are internal too. The very structure of the sector is unstable.

The [growing involvement](#) of private equity, hedge funds and real estate investment trusts in the care sector in recent decades has brought about a rise in the use of predatory financial techniques, justified in the name of enticing capital into a sector that the government has persistently failed to adequately fund. According to data from the Care Quality Commission, these firms now own one in eight care home beds in England.

A screen of financial jargon helps investors avoid public scrutiny, but a slew of [recent reports](#) has begun to detail the many tactics used to ensure “healthy” returns on investment – and the profound and troubling consequences that these strategies have for the care sector.

In 2012, the UK-based private equity firm Terra Firma Capital bought Four Seasons Health Care in an £825m [debt-leveraged buyout](#), backed by US-based hedge fund H/2 Capital Partners.

Leveraged buyouts are a common technique used to increase return on investment. They allow investors to pay only a fraction of the purchase price using their own capital; the rest is covered with a loan. In theory, the target social care company then pays off the debt using their cashflow, increasing the equity portion owned by the investment firm, meaning a larger windfall for investors if the care company is sold on.

However, recent research has found that these kinds of buyouts are associated with an 18% increase in [risk of bankruptcy](#) for the target company. In the case of Four Seasons Health Care, onerous debt payments contributed to the company's [collapse into administration](#) in 2019. Two of the other largest care home providers in the UK – HC-One and Care UK – have also undergone leveraged buyouts and, as a result, their corporate group structures remain saddled with significant debts.

The implications of this debt-heavy model are significant. Among the five largest care home chains backed by private equity in the UK, interest

payments on leveraged buyouts and other debt obligations absorb about 16% of the average weekly bed fee.

But interest payments on debt aren't the only additional cost some care providers face. Other strategies for increasing return on investment see investors selling off care home properties for a one-off lump sum, then leasing them back – sometimes from a new landlord, sometimes from other entities within the corporate structure.

Care UK's accounts, for example, state that it paid £4.1m in rent in 2019 to Silver Sea Holdings – a company registered in Luxembourg, a low-tax jurisdiction, which is also owned by Care UK's parent company, Bridgepoint.

These financialised structures demand an ever-growing revenue stream, not to fund more and better quality care or higher wages, but to keep up with growing interest repayments on the debts they carry and rising rents, and to line the pockets of investors, some of whom are astutely located in low-tax jurisdictions.

Current reform proposals do not even begin to touch these problems. The touted 1p increase on national insurance contributions to fund social care, while welcome, would be like pouring money into a bucket that someone has wilfully punched holes into. We have to stem the outflow too.

Tighter financial regulation of the sector could rein in extractivist financial practices, and in the short term should be used to do so. However, this misses an even more fundamental challenge: that the core characteristics of adult social care make it almost impossible to privatise successfully. The supposed benefits of the free market – quality innovations and cost efficiencies – simply don't apply. The bucket itself is not, and never has been, structurally sound.

For starters, well-functioning markets rely on consumer choice: if a product or service is inadequate, you simply choose another. But unlike a phone contract, where poor service may inspire you to switch provider, the physical and emotional costs associated with moving between care homes – known as

“transfer trauma” – can leave vulnerable residents with limited power to voice their concerns.

In addition, the time-insensitive nature of care work means that there are few opportunities for cost-efficiency savings without compromising working conditions and quality of care. After all, asking a care worker to spend less time with each client can only be detrimental for a service in which, as the economist Tim Jackson puts it, the “quality rests entirely on the attention paid by one person to another”.

[Social care desperately needs funding, and the fairest way is inheritance tax | Zoe Williams](#)

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These two features of the care sector mean that service quality and worker pay come into conflict with returns to investors. Independent studies appear to corroborate this, finding that both quality of care and wages are generally lower in for-profit care homes.

Signing-on bonuses to recruit new carers, piecemeal funding reforms and even improved financial regulation cannot scratch the surface of these structural challenges.

The competitive, for-profit model of social care provision has had 30 years to deliver on its promises of efficient, high-quality services. In that time, the crisis in adult social care has only deepened. Instead of driving innovation, increased competition between providers has undermined care quality. It is time to stop pursuing the same strategy and expecting a different outcome.

The care sector needs an overhaul. Not only do we need adequate long-term funding from central government, we also need to address some searching questions about the role of profit in the sector, and ask: who is benefiting from this dysfunctional model? And who, ultimately, is paying the price?

- Christine Corlet Walker is a researcher at the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity
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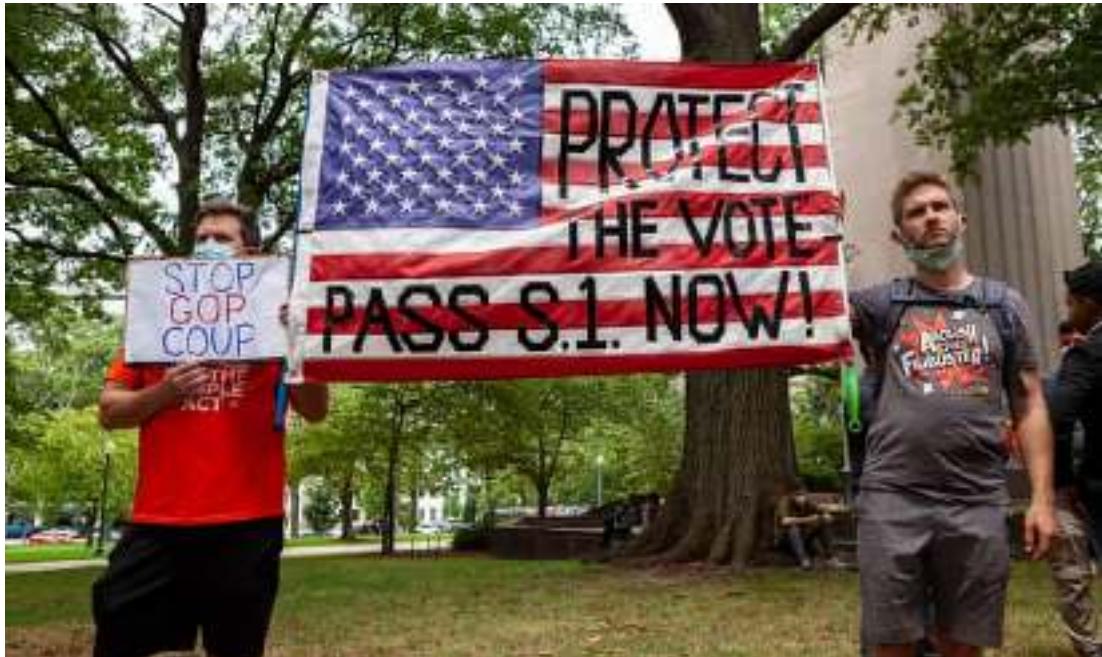
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US voting rights

Senate Democrats poised for voting rights push to counter Republican restrictions

Senate expected to reintroduce Democrats' marquee election reform bill known as the For the People Act before summer recess



Protesters hold an American flag urging Congress to protect voting and pass the For the People Act at the Recess Can Wait protest at the Capitol on 3 August. Photograph: Allison Bailey/REX/Shutterstock

Protesters hold an American flag urging Congress to protect voting and pass the For the People Act at the Recess Can Wait protest at the Capitol on 3 August. Photograph: Allison Bailey/REX/Shutterstock

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Tue 10 Aug 2021 21.08 EDT

Top [Democrats](#) in the Senate are poised to make another attempt to push through voting rights legislation before the chamber leaves Washington for a summer recess, in a sign of their determination to counter a wave of Republican-led ballot restrictions across the nation.

[Biden hails Senate passage of giant \\$1tn bipartisan infrastructure bill](#)

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The Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer is expected to reintroduce Democrats' marquee election reform bill known as the For the People Act, with additional votes on one measure to end partisan gerrymandering and another measure to tighten campaign spending, sources said.

None of the measures, for which Schumer hopes to schedule votes immediately after the Senate takes up the \$3.5tn budget blueprint for infrastructure, is expected to garner any Republican support and will thus likely [follow the demise of the For the People Act](#) in June.

The move by Senate Democrats will encourage voting rights activists, who have watched with alarm that the issue appeared to have taken a back seat as protracted negotiations over the \$1tn bipartisan infrastructure package consumed the Senate.

Yet in the face of united Republican opposition, the endgame for Democrats – even as they scramble to enact voting rights legislation to roll back a wave of GOP ballot restrictions in time for the 2022 midterm elections – remains unclear.

The only conceivable path for Democrats to ensure passage of the voting rights bills would require reforming the Senate's filibuster rule, an option not currently available to party leaders after holdouts last week reiterated their opposition.

Senator Kyrsten Sinema on Friday told ABC that she continued to support the 60-vote requirement for the filibuster, days after senator Joe Manchin

said anew that he would not acquiesce to [carving out a voting rights exemption](#) from the rule.

Democrats face a time crunch as they prepare for the 2022 midterms, when they hope to mitigate Republican gains after House district lines are redrawn on the results of last year's census.

Democrats are particularly determined to curb partisan redistricting, which could allow Republicans to gain enough seats to reclaim the House majority and thwart their ambitions of enacting Joe Biden's legislative agenda in the second half of his first term.

And with some Republican-led states racing to redraw lines once the Census Bureau releases detailed population data on 12 August, advocates for stronger federal voting rights laws have warned that Congress needs to act before mid-September in order to affect 2022 balloting.

To that end, a group of Democrats led by Senate rules chair Amy Klobuchar and Senator Jeff Merkley have continued to work on voting rights legislation in an attempt to keep up momentum against GOP ballot restrictions based on Trump's lies about a stolen election.

Some Democrats involved in the effort were optimistic that they could introduce this week a For the People Act version 2.0 that incorporated elements from a three-page, scaled-down version of the bill proposed by Manchin two months ago, the sources said.

But the legislation was not complete as of Tuesday, and Democrats crafting the voting rights legislation now expect Schumer to try to again advance the For the People Act after the Senate completes a set of marathon rapid fire votes on the \$3.5tn budget blueprint.

The group, which also includes senators Alex Padilla, Tim Kaine, Angus King and Raphael Warnock, anticipate Schumer will then schedule votes on two measures from Manchin's proposal: one that aims to counter partisan gerrymandering, and another to combat so-called dark money in politics.

The stakes are significant both for Warnock, who is on the ballot next year, as well as for the Democratic caucus more widely, since the loss of his seat in the battleground state of Georgia could shunt the party back into the minority in the 50-50 Senate.

And Warnock faces an uphill struggle in seeking re-election as he prepares to run in a state where Republicans have moved decisively to limit mail-in ballots, curb early voting and shift electoral power towards the Republican-led state house.

After [Republicans blocked the For the People Act](#), the most far-reaching election reform legislation to come before Congress in a generation, the Senate majority leader vowed to redouble his efforts.

“In the fight for voting rights, this vote was the starting gun, not the finish line,” Schumer said. “We will not let it go. We will not let it die. This voter suppression cannot stand.”

But some Democrats have signalled skepticism about forcing an almost certainly futile votes measure now, in a rushed move they say could erode potential Republican support should they try to enact bipartisan voting rights bills in the future.

Before the vote on the For the People Act in June, Democrats reached out across the aisle to encourage centrists such as Lisa Murkowski to back the legislation. In a sign of the pessimism about the success of the forthcoming votes, there has been no such effort this time, the sources said.

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[Andrew Cuomo](#)

Cuomo accusers ‘vindicated and relieved’ as New York governor resigns

White House and top New York Democrats hail courage of women who came forward with their stories



Lindsey Boylan condemned Andrew Cuomo for ‘blaming victims until the end’. Photograph: Erik Pendzich/Rex/Shutterstock

Lindsey Boylan condemned Andrew Cuomo for ‘blaming victims until the end’. Photograph: Erik Pendzich/Rex/Shutterstock

[Joanna Walters](#) in New York and agencies

[@Joannawalters13](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 16.06 EDT

Two more women who identified themselves as victims of New York governor Andrew Cuomo's pattern of sexual harassment in the workplace came forward on Tuesday to add their voices to the reaction [to his resignation](#) announcement.

An attorney for the two women said her clients were "vindicated and relieved that Cuomo will no longer be in a position of power over anyone".

[Andrew Cuomo resigns in wake of damning report on sexual harassment](#)

[Read more](#)

Mariann Wang represents Alyssa McGrath and Virginia Limmiatis.

McGrath, an executive assistant, said Cuomo had made inappropriate comments, including commenting on her neckline after staring down her loose shirt, regularly asking about her marital status and asking whether she would tell on another aide if she were to cheat on her husband.

Limmiatis is an energy company worker who said Cuomo had run his fingers on the lettering across the chest of her shirt when they met in a rope-line greeting at a 2017 event.

He then told her he was going to say there was a spider on her shoulder and proceeded to brush her chest with his hand.

Wang castigated what she described as Cuomo's efforts to "gaslight and attack the brave women who came forward", which ultimately "apparently served no purpose".

Lindsey Boylan, another former Cuomo aide who spoke out publicly early on and who investigators described as having been [subjected to retaliation](#) by Cuomo and his office when she did so, said: "From the beginning, I simply asked that the governor stop his abusive behavior.

"It became abundantly clear he was unable to do that, instead attacking and blaming victims until the end. It is a tragedy that so many stood by and watched these abuses happen. I am thankful for the attorney general, the

investigators and all those who have pursued the truth despite intimidation and threats of retaliation.”

New York’s experienced lieutenant governor, [Kathy Hochul](#), will become the first woman to hold the state governorship when she succeeds Cuomo in two weeks.

02:00

Andrew Cuomo resigns after sexual harassment allegations – video

“I agree with Governor Cuomo’s decision to step down. It is the right thing to do and in the best interest of New Yorkers,” she said.

The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters on Tuesday that Joe Biden, who had led Democratic calls for the governor to quit, had not spoken to Cuomo since the New York attorney general, Letitia James, issued the report of her five-month investigation into Cuomo’s conduct last week.

“This is a story about courageous women who told their stories,” she said.

The New York City mayor, Bill de Blasio, also praised the 11 women detailed in James’s report as victims of Cuomo’s harassment.

“Make no mistake, this is the result of survivors bravely telling their stories. It was past time for [Andrew Cuomo](#) to resign and it’s for the good of all New York,” said the mayor, who has had a contentious relationship with his fellow Democrat throughout their time in office despite the level of cooperation needed between their offices.

New York’s US senators – the majority leader, Chuck Schumer, and Kirsten Gillibrand – also commended the women and spoke of the need for all leaders to work together to get the state through the health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

Several New York state assembly members and US representatives also welcomed Cuomo’s resignation.

It was unclear on Tuesday afternoon if the [impeachment process](#) that had been under way in the state legislature would continue.

A successful impeachment and conviction would have barred Cuomo from standing for public office again in New York.

The assembly member Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn told CNN: “Resignation will not bar him from running in the future,” although it appears the impeachment process, which had been expected to continue well into September, cannot continue once Cuomo leaves office.

Hermelyn said that by speaking up “with solidarity”, victims of harassment now had a better chance of justice in a changing workplace and that their actions would encourage more women to run for office.

[pic.twitter.com/ixvI2X6O8n](#)

— Sen. Stewart-Cousins (@AndreaSCousins) [August 10, 2021](#)

Andrea Stewart-Cousins, state assembly majority leader, who will step into the lieutenant governor’s shoes when she becomes governor, said: “Today is a somber day for the state of New York, but one that demonstrates our ability to build a more accountable system of government.”

Letitia James said the resignation closed a “sad chapter” but was also an “important step towards justice”.

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Algeria

Wildfires in Algeria: dozens of civilians and soldiers reported dead

Prime minister says request made for help internationally as forest blazes erupt in Kabyle region and elsewhere

00:53

Wildfires in Algeria leave more than 40 dead including soldiers – video

Agencies in Algiers

Tue 10 Aug 2021 16.03 EDT

More than 40 people, including 25 soldiers, have died in wildfires that erupted east of the Algerian capital, the country's prime minister, Ayman Benabderrahmane, said.

Benabderrahmane also told state television that the government had asked for help from the international community and was in talks with partners to hire planes to extinguish fires. So far, 42 deaths have been reported.

Dozens of fires started up on Monday in the Kabyle region and elsewhere, and Algerian authorities sent in the army to help citizens with the blazes and evacuations.

Multiple fires were burning through forests, destroying olive trees and killing cattle and chickens.

The Kabyle region, 60 miles (100km) east of Algiers, the capital, has many difficult-to-access villages and limited water. Some villagers were fleeing, while others tried to hold back the flames themselves, using buckets, branches and rudimentary tools. The region has no water-dumping planes.

Kamel Beldjoud, the interior minister, went to Kabyle to assess the situation yesterday and accused arsonists of igniting the flames, without providing more details on the allegations.

“Only criminal hands can be behind the simultaneous outbreak of about 50 fires across several localities,” he said.

Other northern areas of [Algeria](#) also had active wildfires. The civil protection authority said on Algerian radio that seven people had died, including six in Kabyle plus a man in his 80s who had been trying to save his animals in the Setif region to the east. The authority recorded 41 blazes in 18 *wilayas*, or regions, as of Monday night, with 21 of those burning around Tizi Ouzou, the Kabyle capital.

The country’s president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, tweeted his condolences for 25 soldiers killed as they worked to rescue people in the areas of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou, the epicentre of the blazes.

“It is with great sadness that I have learned of the martyrdom of 25 soldiers after they were successful in rescuing around 100 citizens from the flames in the mountains of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou,” the president said.

A 92-year-old woman living in the Kabyle mountain village of Ait Saada said the scene Monday night looked like “the end of the world”. Fatima Aoudia told the Associated Press: “We were afraid. The entire hill was transformed into a giant blaze.”

Aoudia compared the scene to bombings by French troops during Algeria’s brutal independence war, which ended in 1962. “These burned down forests. It’s a part of me that is gone. It’s a drama for humanity, for nature. It’s a disaster.”

Climate scientists say there is little doubt that climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is driving extreme events, such as heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, floods and storms. A worsening drought and heat both linked to climate change are driving wildfires in the US and in Siberia. Extreme heat is also fuelling the massive fires in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey.

A civil protection ambulance driver, who asked not to be named, told the AP that the death toll in Kabyle was higher than the six victims cited by the interior minister.

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Greece

Firefighters battling wildfires to save homes on Greek island of Evia

Almost 900 firefighters fighting what the Greek prime minister called ‘a natural disaster of unprecedented dimensions’



Two firefighters from Greece and one from Slovakia try to extinguish a wildfire in Avgaria, Evia. Photograph: Stelios Misinas/Reuters

Two firefighters from Greece and one from Slovakia try to extinguish a wildfire in Avgaria, Evia. Photograph: Stelios Misinas/Reuters

Helena Smith in Athens

Tue 10 Aug 2021 09.29 EDT

In scenes more resonant of war, trained firefighters backed by a ragtag army of local people waged a “superhuman” battle overnight to extinguish wind-whipped blazes raging for an eighth day on the Greek island of Evia.

With yet another village ordered to be evacuated on Tuesday, a multinational force of nearly 900 firefighters were at the scene in a desperate bid to stop

the conflagration enveloping the northern town of Istiaia.

The fire service said that in addition to 873 firefighters, 50 ground teams and 229 vehicles were fighting the blaze.

In tinderbox conditions created by unprecedented summer temperatures, [Greece](#) has been in the eye of a storm of forest fires also witnessed in Italy and Turkey.

In a televised address late on Monday, the prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, said it was clear the country was enduring “a natural disaster of unprecedented dimensions”. He said firefighters had been forced to deal with 586 blazes triggered and exacerbated by a heatwave expected to intensify again this week. Mitsotakis has said the crisis reflects the reality of climate change.

“These last few days have been the hardest for our country in decades,” said the leader, who apologised for failings in what has been an often chaotic response to the emergency.

00:51

Sky glows red over ferry evacuating people from Greek island fire – video

Infernos in Evia, Greece’s second-largest island, have been by far the worst in the country, decimating vast tracts of pristine pine forest and destroying an untold number of homes. In the municipality of Mantoudi more than 1,000 homes have been burned, with communities farther north now confronting the same prospect if the fires are not put out.

In Evia and the southern Peloponnese, where infernos have also raged, the phenomenon of fires rekindling after previously being extinguished has hampered efforts as the blazes, propelled by unpredictable winds, have leaped back into life.

“We’re talking about flames 30 metres high that suddenly appear,” a woman on Evia told the state broadcaster, ERT, as her husband bemoaned the absence of water-dropping planes and helicopters coming to the rescue.

Skies blanketed by smoke and ash hampered visibility for pilots from the 22 nations that have weighed in with help. Yesterday, Turkey and Russia said they would also send in planes to boost reinforcements already dispatched by [Europe](#), countries in the Middle East, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the absence of planes over Evia, bulldozers could be seen early on Tuesday creating firebreaks in forests. Since the crisis began last week with wooded suburbs on the northern fringes of Athens going up in flames, local people have been seen using anything they can – from garden hosepipes to rudimentary buckets – to protect their homes.

By Monday, about 2,600 people had been evacuated from Evia on a flotilla of boats, with elderly and infirm people being forced to seek refuge on ferries, or sleep on sun loungers on the beach.

Mindful of the devastating fires that left 103 dead in the seaside towns of Mati and Kokkino Limanaki in July 2018, the government has prioritised saving lives. But some residents say evacuation orders have been premature and have only allowed properties and prime forests that might otherwise have been saved to go up in flames.

Mitsotakis has vowed to compensate fire victims with immediate effect. Following an emergency cabinet meeting on Tuesday a raft of relief measures was announced, including an initial payment of €150,000 in state funds for those who have lost homes. Victims will be relieved of tax obligations for the next three years and will receive 70% compensation for other losses. Evia, which lies north-east of Athens, is to be the focus of a huge regeneration program that will include plantation of fire-resistant trees when the wildfires finally end.

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Defamation law

Sydney surgeon wins \$450k payout after ‘appalling’ online campaign to destroy his reputation

Judge says false posts and Google reviews from a woman he declined to operate on caused ‘extreme’ damage to his prior ‘impeccable’ reputation, but he may never see a cent of the awarded damages



A judge has found online comments and Google reviews about a Sydney plastic surgeon appeared to have been calculated to “inflict maximum damage” on the his professional reputation. Photograph: Fairfax Media/Fairfax Media via Getty Images

A judge has found online comments and Google reviews about a Sydney plastic surgeon appeared to have been calculated to “inflict maximum damage” on the his professional reputation. Photograph: Fairfax Media/Fairfax Media via Getty Images

Australian Associated Press
Wed 11 Aug 2021 02.58 EDT

A scorned patient has been ordered to pay \$450,000 for an “appalling and entirely unjustified and unjustifiable” negative internet campaign designed to destroy a [Sydney](#) plastic surgeon’s reputation, a judge has found.

Catherine Cruse set about posting a series of “sustained, far-reaching and virulent” attacks on the internet over eight months in 2018 after Dr Warwick Nettle declined to operate on her.

A federal court judge on Wednesday said the effect of the false posts caused “extreme” damage to both the surgeon’s emotional and mental state and his prior “impeccable” reputation.

His five-star [Google](#) rating dropped to 3.5 stars after the first two posts were published.

The highly regarded Bondi Junction surgeon had declined to operate on Cruse after her former surgeon called him and cautioned about operating on her.

That call and decision were “entirely professionally appropriate and justifiable” and undeserving of adverse comment, let alone the “scandalous and misleading criticism that was subsequently meted out”, Justice Michael Wigney said.

[ABC's Louise Milligan to pay Liberal MP Andrew Laming more than \\$80,000 after defamation claim](#)

[Read more](#)

The subsequent posts were “full of falsehoods, gross misrepresentations of the facts, entirely unjustified criticisms of Dr Nettle”, the judge said.

The comments appeared to have been calculated to “inflict maximum damage” on the surgeon’s professional reputation.

The court orders include costs and a permanent ban on Cruse publishing any further untrue defamatory statements.

But Nettle may never see a cent of the substantial compensatory and aggravated damages he's due.

Despite her prolific online activities, the respondent couldn't be located and had "effectively disappeared", Wigney said.

She filed no defence and appeared at no hearings.

Private investigators were employed in the extensive effort to locate and serve her with court documents.

But it appeared she deliberately evaded service and concealed her whereabouts, the judge said.

The court in 2020 permitted service via email and ordered she be alerted to that fact by phone.

Despite Cruse's continued silence, Wigney was satisfied she was behind the four publications and that each carried the defamatory meanings, as claimed by Nettle.

Two posts remain online, hosted by defamatory complaint websites whose operators make extortionate demands of those wishing to remove adverse reviews.

A since-removed post on a third website included images falsely claiming to be results of botched surgeries by Nettle.

The post also featured headshots of the surgeon with the phrases "the devil himself", "inhumane medical care", "abuse of power" and "compulsive liar" superimposed on them.

The court heard direct evidence about Nettle's patients seeing the posts, including one who said she started to have doubts about continuing treatment.

When she saw the post with images of botched surgeries, she was particularly disturbed and felt that she could no longer trust Nettle, the judge heard.

The surgeon also gave evidence about the great distress and anxiety the posts caused over an extended period of time. He also worried about the safety of his staff and family.

“To refer to the emotional trauma wrought on Dr Nettle by the publications as ‘hurt to feelings’ is to rather underestimate the effect that the publications had on his mental and physical health and wellbeing,” the judge said.

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[US Senate](#)

Biden hails Senate passage of giant \$1tn bipartisan infrastructure bill

- Nineteen Republicans join Democrats to vote in favor of plan
- ‘Today, we proved that democracy can still work’ – Biden



Joe Biden with Kamala Harris at the White House on Tuesday. Biden said: ‘We can still come together to do big things, important things, for the American people.’ Photograph: Oliver Contreras/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

Joe Biden with Kamala Harris at the White House on Tuesday. Biden said: ‘We can still come together to do big things, important things, for the American people.’ Photograph: Oliver Contreras/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington, [Rebecca Klein](#) in New York and agencies

Tue 10 Aug 2021 20.22 EDT

The US Senate passed a giant new bipartisan infrastructure bill on Tuesday, with 19 [Republicans](#) joining the entire Democratic caucus in helping to get the bill over the finish line.

[Senate Democrats poised for voting rights push to counter Republican restrictions](#)

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It was a key affirmation of Joe Biden's strategy to push bipartisanship in his legislative agenda, and the White House on Tuesday afternoon trumpeted that it would create "millions of jobs", as well as support greener policies such as expanding networks of charging stations for electric cars, and boosting train travel and electric buses.

The \$1tn bill – which still has to navigate another passage through the [House of Representatives](#) before reaching the president's desk – would invest new federal funds in upgrading roads and bridges but also boost greener policies.

"Today, we proved that democracy can still work," Biden declared at the White House, noting that the 69-30 vote included even Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell.

"We can still come together to do big things, important things, for the American people," Biden said.

The lead Republican negotiator, Rob Portman, said the work "demonstrates to the American people that we can get our act together on a bipartisan basis to get something done". Democratic senator Mark Warner of Virginia called the agreement "a little balm to the psychic soul of the country".

The bill focuses on updating the nation's power grid to make it more resilient against extreme weather in the era of the climate crisis, invest in protecting public utility systems from cyber-attacks and helping to make the nation's coastlines more protected from rising seas.

It could face some opposition in the House from progressive legislators who have said they would withhold their support until the Senate passes a

separate, \$3.5tn package more focused on social welfare policies, like childcare and elder care.

The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, also previously said that she won't take up a vote on the bill in the House until the Senate works on the follow-up social spending package.

On Tuesday, though, she applauded the bill's passage through the upper chamber, when other pieces of legislation, such as on voting rights, have stalled and died there in recent months.

Pelosi said: "Today is a day of progress ... a once-in-a-century opportunity."

The bill has received support from big business and labour unions.

Democrats said they expect the bill, which tops off at 2,700 pages, to touch nearly every corner of American life.

"There's been detours and everything else, but this will do a whole lot of good for America," said the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer.

Donald Trump worked to torpedo the bill's success, previously threatening to withhold support from any Republican lawmaker who voted for it.

"Joe Biden's infrastructure bill will be used against the Republican party in the upcoming elections in 2022 and 2024. It will be very hard for me to endorse anyone foolish enough to vote in favor of this deal," the former president said in a statement on Saturday.

But the Republicans who held steady in support of the bill included McConnell, though some conservatives complained about its high cost.

"This infrastructure bill is not the perfect bill," said Senator Lisa Murkowski, a moderate Republican from Alaska and one of the bill's negotiators, but added: "It's better to get some of what our constituents want rather than none of it."

The bill also aims to help replace lead drinking pipes, modernize and expand transit, upgrade passenger and freight rail, and improve broadband internet.

About \$65bn is to be provided for broadband, a provision the Republican senator Susan Collins negotiated because she said the pandemic showed that such a service “is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity.”

What comes next in the Senate is expected to be more contentious – [Biden’s bigger \\$3.5tn package](#), a more liberal undertaking of childcare, elder care and other programs that is much more partisan and expected to draw only Democratic support. That debate is expected to extend into the fall.

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Australian immigration and asylum

UN urges Australia to release dangerously ill refugee who has ‘given up on living’ after eight years

UN human rights committee says Kaveh, who lies emaciated in a Melbourne hospital, should be moved to community detention



Kaveh, a refugee from the Middle East, is seriously ill in hospital in Melbourne and says ‘I can’t stand another day in detention’. The UN human rights committee has urged Australia to release him into the community.

Kaveh, a refugee from the Middle East, is seriously ill in hospital in Melbourne and says ‘I can’t stand another day in detention’. The UN human rights committee has urged Australia to release him into the community.

[Ben Doherty](#)

[@bendohertycorro](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 22.54 EDT

A dangerously ill refugee held within Australia's immigration detention regime for eight years has secured an interim order from the [United Nations](#) human rights committee urging the Australian government to release him into the community.

Kaveh, a refugee from a Middle Eastern country, is currently in a [Melbourne](#) hospital, emaciated and suffering a range of complex physical and mental health issues. Standing at 176cm tall, he weighs just 47kg.

"I can't stand another day in detention," Kaveh said from hospital. "I am a sick person, I can't heal in detention. I need freedom to heal. I need your kind support. My health and condition will only improve once I have freedom."

The United Nations human rights committee, an [independent panel of international human rights experts](#), wrote to the Australian government in July requesting Kaveh be placed "in community detention while his case is under consideration by the committee". The committee's decision on Kaveh's ongoing detention is likely to come next year.

[Afghan refugee may lose permanent residency in Australia – for supplying identity document](#)

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Kaveh, who fled persecution in his homeland and whose family remains in significant danger, arrived in Australia by boat in 2013. He spent six years held offshore by Australia, first in the Manus Island detention centre – [later found to be illegal](#) – and then in Port Moresby.

His claim for refugee protection has been formally recognised: Australia is legally obliged to protect him. The Guardian is not reporting his surname, nor displaying his picture, out of concern for his family's safety in his home country.

Kaveh was moved to Australia in August 2019 under the now-repealed medevac laws for urgent medical treatment. While most of those he was detained alongside have been released into the Australian community, Kaveh was held in immigration detention in Melbourne until he was moved to hospital, where he remains in detention.

He was one of a number of refugees and asylum seekers in the Melbourne detention centre who commenced a hunger strike in June. Kaveh suffers severe gastrointestinal complications which make it hard for him to eat: even after abandoning the hunger strike after more than 30 days, and being hospitalised, he has barely been able to eat and remains dangerously underweight.



Kaveh remains in detention in hospital in Melbourne and is dangerously underweight.

An interim measure request from the United Nations human rights committee, signed by special rapporteurs Helene Tigroudja and Arif Bulkan, has urged the Australian government to release him into community detention while Kaveh's ongoing detention is assessed.

The Australian government has not responded to the UN committee's order.

A spokesperson for the Australian Border Force said it could not comment on individual cases, but that “transitory persons” brought to Australia from a regional processing country were only in Australia temporarily and “are managed in detention or the community according to their individual circumstances, until they are able to depart Australia”.

The spokesperson said that portfolio ministers had “personal intervention powers … that allow them to make a residence determination, placing a person in community detention, if they think it is in the public interest to do so”.

But those powers are non-compellable, that is, ministers are not required to exercise them, nor are ministers bound by any time restrictions “and it is for portfolio ministers to define what is in the public interest”.

“Australia’s border protection policies remain steadfast,” the spokesperson said. “Persons who travel to Australia illegally by boat will not settle here. Temporary transfer to Australia to receive medical treatment is not a pathway to settlement.”

Alison Battisson, director principal at Human Rights for All, which is representing Kaveh, said his situation was unique, and critical.

“His weight is dangerously low, but he is not on hunger strike. Instead, he has merely given up on living. His body is rejecting food,” Battisson said. “As such, there is an immediate risk to his life and his long-term health. This is the level of despair and illness that Australia’s offshore detention regime has driven people to.”

Battisson said there was currently no domestic mechanism to urgently seek a refugee’s release. If Kaveh was not granted community detention, she said, he faced the very real risk of long-term medical issues or dying.

“We were left with no choice than to involve the United Nations,” Battisson said. “The Australian government should be very concerned that they could cause another death due to offshore processing and lack of care and compassion for people medically evacuated to Australia.”

Battisson said it was “insulting” that the Australian government had failed to respond to the human rights committee in Geneva.

“Australia’s lack of response makes a mockery of Australia’s engagement with the United Nations. Australia portrays itself as a good international citizen, but does not respect UN processes enough to even respond.”

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Handball chiefs urged to resign over bikini bottoms rule

Women's sports associations accuse heads of IHF and EHF of 'blatant sexism' after Norwegian team fined



The Danish women's beach handball team celebrate after winning gold at the 1st ANOC World Beach Games in Doha in 2019. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

The Danish women's beach handball team celebrate after winning gold at the 1st ANOC World Beach Games in Doha in 2019. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[*Angela Giuffrida*](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 08.43 EDT

Women's sports associations across [Europe](#) have called for the resignation of the presidents of both the international and European handball federations, accusing them of "blatant sexism" for rules that require female players to wear bikini bottoms.

The Norwegian women's beach handball team [was fined €1,500 \(£1,270\) for wearing shorts](#) in protest against the rule during a European Beach Handball Championships match against Spain in Varna, Bulgaria, on 19 July.

The European Handball Federation (EHF) said the Norwegian team were disciplined because of "improper clothing". In a subsequent statement, the EHF said that, alongside the International Handball Federation (IHF), it was "committed to popularising beach handball" and that the matter of players' uniforms would be discussed during a meeting of the newly elected commission in August.

The fine, which equated to €150 for each player, was paid for by the Norwegian Handball Federation, which had previously made an official complaint against the bikini bottoms rule.

According to the IHF [rule](#), female players playing beach handball must wear "tops and bikini bottoms and eventual accessories", while male players wear "tank tops and shorts and eventual accessories".

"This is a blatantly sexist custom that needs to be eliminated," said Luisa Rizzitelli, the president of Assist, an Italian association that promotes and defends the rights of female athletes.

Assist is one of seven associations, including the Alice Milliat Foundation in France and Discover Football in Germany, that have written to the IHF president, Hassan Moustafa, and his EHF counterpart, Michael Wiederer, calling on them to resign.

In the letter, they wrote that both federations "have established an embarrassing point of no return regarding their image as international sports institutions".

Rizzitelli said the IHF's clothing requirements "shouldn't mean exploiting the body of a woman", adding: "Not only did they not immediately drop the rule [after the incident with Norway], but they confirmed the fine – that's the shameful thing."

When contacted for comment, the IHF referred the Guardian [to an earlier statement](#) and added that a proposal for new uniforms could be presented to the body's council in November.

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FBI

FBI offer to release some Saudi files not enough, 9/11 families say

Victims' families demand comprehensive declassification review of all documents, particularly into Saudi Arabia's role in attacks



The 9/11 memorial in New York. The families want information on who financed and supported the attacks. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

The 9/11 memorial in New York. The families want information on who financed and supported the attacks. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Tue 10 Aug 2021 14.28 EDT

Families of 9/11 victims say an FBI offer to release some documents from its investigation into the attack has not gone far enough, and are demanding a comprehensive declassification review of all relevant material, particularly on Saudi Arabia's role.

The FBI offer on Monday followed a call by some victims' families and first responders for [Joe Biden](#) to stay away from ceremonies marking the 20th anniversary of the attack next month, if the president failed to honour a campaign pledge to lift the secrecy surrounding the multi-agency investigations.

[Former Saudi officials to be questioned about alleged links to 9/11 attackers](#)
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The families want information on who financed and supported the attacks, and are currently suing the Saudi Arabian government in a federal court in New York. As part of that case, three former Saudi officials [were questioned](#) in June by the plaintiffs' lawyers about their links with two of the 9/11 hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, who spent several months in southern California before the attack. Their testimony cannot be shared with the families under secrecy rules.

In a letter in the court on Monday, the Biden administration said the [FBI](#) had recently closed part of the investigation and was reviewing classified documents and evidence to determine whether more can be disclosed.

“The FBI has decided to review its prior privilege assertions to identify additional information appropriate for disclosure,” the letter said. “The FBI will disclose such information on a rolling basis as expeditiously as possible.”

Biden said he backed the move and called on the FBI to review documents as quickly as possible.

Terry Strada, the co-chair of a families and survivors group, [9/11 Community United](#), said the offer was a sop that did not go nearly far enough in providing transparency.

“The FBI came out and said they’re going to start to dribble this out and piecemeal this as much as they possibly can to try to appease us, and it’s just not good enough. It’s a half measure,” said Strada, whose husband Tom died in the attack on the World Trade Centre, when the youngest of their three children was four days old.

She said she had not joined calls for Biden to stay away from 9/11 anniversary events, but pointed out that the White House had so far failed to respond to a request from families and survivors for a meeting with the president delivered over a week ago. Most importantly, Strada and 9/11 Community United are calling on full presidential backing for bipartisan legislation introduced last week in Congress.

The September 11th Transparency Act requires the justice department, the CIA and the director of national intelligence to conduct a comprehensive review of all key documents related to 9/11 investigations. The agencies would have to provide justification to Congress for any decision not to declassify a particular document or record.

“It will mandate that they produce everything in full. They can’t just keep cherry picking what they want us to have,” Strada said.

“This has been drawn out long enough. We’re tired of it. Personally I’m tired of it. I lost my husband when my children were young, and we’re tired of fighting our own government just to get documents that they have in their possession regarding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Enough is enough.”

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[Rights and freedom](#)[Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum](#)

Princess Latifa campaigners disband after cousin says she is ‘happy and well’

Free Latifa’s co-founder, Latifa’s cousin Marcus Essabri, was photographed with her in Iceland



Princess Latifa in Iceland with her cousin Marcus Essabri and Sioned Taylor.
Photograph: @shinnybryn/Instagram

Princess Latifa in Iceland with her cousin Marcus Essabri and Sioned Taylor.
Photograph: @shinnybryn/Instagram

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[Sarah Johnson](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 13.05 EDT

The organisers of a campaign to free Princess Latifa, who was captured three years ago trying to leave Dubai by her father, [Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum](#), have disbanded it after the latest photograph of the princess out with friends emerged, and her cousin, the campaign's co-founder, confirmed he had seen her looking happy and well.

A photo of Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed al-Maktoum and her cousin, Marcus Essabri, in Iceland along with Sioned Taylor, a British woman who has previously appeared in pictures with Latifa, was [posted on Taylor's Instagram account](#) on Monday. Latifa has not yet spoken publicly.

In a statement released by the Free Latifa campaign group, Essabri said: "I had an emotional reunion with my cousin Latifa in Iceland. I feel blessed that I got to spend time with her. It was reassuring to see her so happy, well and focused on her plans."

The statement added that "the most appropriate step at this time" was to disband the organisation. "The primary purpose of the Free Latifa campaign

was to see Latifa free leading the life she chooses for herself,” it said.

“We have clearly gone a long way towards achieving that goal over the last three years, with bodies such as the United Nations now monitoring the current and future wellbeing of Latifa.”

David Haigh, co-founder of the Free Latifa campaign, [told the BBC](#) that the princess was in “the best position she has been in, in terms of freedom … for two decades”.

But he added: “It’s quite right and understandable that everyone needs to look at everything that’s happening now with extreme caution and monitor the situation closely.”

Several images of Latifa have emerged in recent months. One appeared on Instagram in June showing Latifa posing with Taylor at Madrid airport, saying they were having a “Great European holiday”. Others showed Latifa at a shopping mall and a restaurant in [Dubai](#).

In June, a statement issued in the name of Latifa [declared she could now “travel where I want”](#). The remarks, released through her lawyers, were the first time that Latifa had been quoted since her dramatic failed escape from Dubai three years ago.

Eight days into a journey across the Indian Ocean, the boat Latifa was on was caught by commandos who forcibly removed the princess and returned her to Dubai.

[Data leak raises new questions over capture of Princess Latifa](#)
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Dubai’s ruler, Sheikh Mohammed, has come under international pressure to demonstrate that Latifa is free and well after she said her life was heavily controlled [in a video](#) released after her unsuccessful attempt to flee.

The princess, 35, is one the sheikh’s estimated 25 children by several wives. Sheikh Mohammed is the vice-president and prime minister of the [United](#)

Arab Emirates, as well as being the hereditary ruler of Dubai, one of seven emirates that make up the country.

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Thousands flee Greek island as wildfires raze forest and homes

Firefighters tackle blazes on two fronts on Evia as heatwave-driven devastation across southern Europe continues

00:51

Sky glows red over ferry evacuating people from Greek island fire – video

[Jon Henley](#), [Bethan McKernan](#), and [Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Sun 8 Aug 2021 13.50 EDT

Thousands of people have fled wildfires that are destroying vast swathes of pine forest and razing homes on Greece's second-largest island, Evia, as devastating summer blazes rage from southern [Europe](#) to Siberia.

“We have ahead of us another difficult evening, another difficult night,” Greece’s deputy civil protection minister, Nikos Hardalias, said on Sunday, adding that nearly a week after the blazes started, strong winds were driving two major fire fronts in the north and south of the island.

Seventeen firefighting planes and helicopters were in action on the island, just north-east of the capital, Athens, where fires in a northern suburb and the nearby Peloponnese region were stable, although the risk of rekindling remained high.

[Locator](#)

Wildfires have devastated large areas in southern Europe for a fortnight as the region endures its most extreme heatwave in three decades. Ten have

died in Greece and Turkey, with many admitted to hospital. Italy has also suffered million of euros of damage.

Huge fires also have been burning across Siberia in northern Russia for several weeks, forcing the evacuation on Saturday of a dozen villages. Wildfires have burned nearly 6m hectares (15m acres) of land this year in Russia, while hot, dry and windy conditions have also fuelled devastating blazes in California.

Rain eased the situation in [Turkey](#) over the weekend, but record temperatures, linked by experts to the climate crisis, continued unabated in Greece, where a helicopter airlifted an injured firefighter from Mount Parnitha, north of Athens, on Sunday.

The coastguard has evacuated more than 2,000 people by sea, including 349 on Sunday morning, from densely forested Evia, a popular summer holiday destination, and ferries stood by for more to be taken off as the inferno forced authorities to order residents to leave several dozen villages.



The Greek coastguard has evacuated more than 2,000 people from Evia by sea. Photograph: Petros Karadjias/AP

A further 23 people trapped on a beach were rescued by a Greek coast guard boat patrolling Evia's shoreline late on Sunday. With temperatures as high as

45C (113F) and conditions bone dry, the coastguard said three patrol boats, four navy vessels, one ferry, two tour boats plus fishing and private craft were ready to evacuate more people from the northern seaside village of Pefki.

“I feel angry. I lost my home ... nothing will be the same the next day,” Vasilikia, one resident, told local journalists onboard a rescue ferry. “It’s a disaster. It’s huge. Our villages are destroyed, there is nothing left from our homes, our properties, nothing.”

As 260 firefighters from Greece and 200 more from Ukraine and Romania battled the flames, young people carried old and infirm residents to safety across the sand. Others fled their villages on foot overnight amid apocalyptic scenes.

01:59

‘Greece has burned’: thousands flee Athens suburb as wildfire spreads – video

The heat was so intense that water evaporated before reaching the fires, witnesses said. The governor for central Greece, Fanis Spanos, said the situation in the north of the island had been “very difficult” for nearly a week.

“The fronts are huge, the area of burned land is huge,” Spanos said. More than 2,500 people have been accommodated in hotels and other shelters, he said. Greece has deployed the army to help battle the fires and 10 countries including France, Egypt, Switzerland, Spain and Britain have sent help including personnel and aircraft.

Hardalias said conditions on Evia were particularly tough for the firefighting planes and helicopters, whose pilots faced “great danger” with limited visibility, air turbulence and strong wind currents from the fire, he said.

On Sunday, Serbia announced it was sending 13 vehicles with 37 firefighters and three firefighting helicopters to Greece, where over the past 10 days 56,655 hectares of land have burned, compared with an average between 2008 and 2020 of 1,700 hectares.

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The causes of the fires are being investigated, with several thought to have been started deliberately. A Greek police spokesman, Apostolos Skrekas, said 10 people, including a 71-year-old man in the Peloponnesean region of Messinia, had been arrested on suspicion of arson; a further nine were being questioned. Five hundred police had been sent to monitor areas where fires had been put out, he said.

Many villages on Evia had been saved only because young people had ignored evacuation orders and stayed behind to keep the fires away from their homes, Giorgos Tsapourniotis, the mayor of Mantoudi on Evia, told local media.

Many villagers criticised the authorities response. “The state is absent,” one village from the north of the island, Yannis Selimis, told Agence-France Presse. “For the next 40 years we will have no job, and in the winter we are going to drown from the floods without the forests that were protecting us.”

In Turkey, firefighters earlier described the herculean efforts many had put in. Günaydin Sözen, 48, of the Istanbul fire service, told the Guardian that he had been a firefighter for 21 years but had never been called to battle a wildfire before.

He said he and 24 departmental colleagues had helped [fight a fire near the Kemerköy thermal plant](#) in Muğla province for five days, “working day and night … the area of the fires is so big it’s created its own climate and the sea air makes more wind that actually makes it flare up even more”.

Sözen said the fire acts “in a different way, because of the olive trees. They are very oily, so hosing the bark is not enough – they burn on the inside, because of the oil, so we have to get close enough to run the water down the trunk from the top”.



Residents fight a wildfire in the village of Gouves on Evia. Photograph: Angelos Tzortzinis/AFP/Getty Images

Local people had been “a massive help”, he said, bringing everything from food to cold water to clean shirts. But his team had “seen so many dead creatures, lizards, everything you can think of”, he said. “We saved a tortoise.”

Yusuf Doğan Gürer, 36, deputy head of the Avrupa Yakası (European side) Istanbul fire department, said the firefighters had pushed their vehicles and their own bodies to the limit to try to get as close to the fires as possible.

“You need to be in good physical condition, much more than what we are used to in the city,” he said. “We had to evacuate the area three times – that has never happened before when we work anywhere else. Once, we got stuck inside the flames.”

The experience had been hard, he said, but had “taught us a lot. The way the flames move, and how fast they move, are things we need to adapt to. Phones are not working properly, so coordination is hard. We will stay here as long as we are needed.”

Agence-France Presse, Reuters and Associated Press contributed to this report

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Wildfires

Fires rage around the world: where are the worst blazes?

Extreme heat and dry, gusty conditions fuel wildfires in countries across Europe and North America



A local resident reacts as he observes a large fire during an attempt to extinguish forest fires approaching the village of Pefki on Evia island, Greece's second largest island Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

A local resident reacts as he observes a large fire during an attempt to extinguish forest fires approaching the village of Pefki on Evia island, Greece's second largest island Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff with agencies
Sun 8 Aug 2021 23.45 EDT

Wildfires are raging across Europe and North America as scorching temperatures and dry conditions fuel the blazes that have cost lives and destroyed livelihoods.

The combination of extreme heat and prolonged drought have in many regions led to the [worst fires in almost a decade](#), and come as the [IPCC is poised to hand down a landmark report](#) on the climate crisis.

Scientists warn rising global temps due to greenhouse gas emissions are increasing the risk of fire conditions across the planet.

Parts of Europe are enduring severe heatwaves, while hot, bone-dry gusty weather has caused devastating wildfires in California. The US state is fighting to contain its largest blaze in its history. More than 100 other large fires are raging in other parts of America.

Here are some of the countries currently battling severe fires:

Greece

Greece has been fighting some of the worst blazes in Europe amid blistering temperatures. Fires have raged across the country for nearly two weeks, leaving dozens needing hospital treatment.

Evia, Greece's second largest island, was under severe threat over the weekend and thousands packed up their belongings and fled their homes.

[Thousands flee Greek island as wildfires raze forest and homes](#)

[Read more](#)

Already, the extent of the destruction is greater than previous fire seasons.

In the 10 days to 7 August, nearly 57,000 hectares (140,000 acres) were burnt in Greece, according to the European Forest Fire Information System. The average area burnt over the same period between 2008 and 2020 was 1,700 hectares.

Turkey

Blazes have swept through swaths of the southern coast for the past 10 days, killing at least eight people.

Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes, and fire has devastated vast tracts of pine forest and agricultural land. Rain brought some respite over the weekend.



Firefighters battle a blaze in Mulga, Turkey, last week Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Italy

Fires continue threaten parts of southern [Italy](#), with Sicily and Sardinia among the regions hardest hit.

The first significant wildfires in the country, between 24 and 26 July, destroyed 10,000 hectares (24,710 acres) of forest and forced the [evacuation of 800 people from their homes in south-west Sardinia](#).

Russia

Authorities in Siberia moved to evacuate several villages in the vast region on Sunday, where 155 blazes are burning. The hot weather, coupled with the

neglect of fire safety rules, has caused a growing number of infernos, which have destroyed scores of homes and buildings.



A view of Byas-Kuel village after a wildfire, in Russia's vast Siberia region
Photograph: Vadim Skryabin/AP

United States

In the US, firefighters in northern California are battling the largest single wildfire in state history.

[The photo that has come to define Turkey's wildfires](#)
[Read more](#)

[The Dixie Fire](#), named for the road where it started nearly four weeks ago, has grown to an area of 725 square miles (1,875 square kilometres). Just 21% of the blaze is contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. It has scorched an area more than twice the size of New York City.



A burned fire station in downtown Greenville, California Photograph: Josh Edelson/AFP/Getty Images

Heatwaves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American west. California's fire season is on track to surpass last year's season, which itself was the worst fire season in recent recorded state history.

California's raging blazes were among 107 large fires burning across 14 states, mostly in the west.

Canada

Fires continue to burn across British Columbia despite some rains over the weekend. Local media reported 279 wildfires raging in the province on Sunday, with tens of thousands of residents subject to evacuation alerts.

[British Columbia has seen nearly 5,800 sq km of its forest burned](#) since the spring, with months still left in the fire season.

With Associated Press and Agence-France Presse

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Exams

‘Students have worked very hard’: headteacher rejects grade inflation fears

Rachel Kitley of Cowes Enterprise College says A-level and GCSE grades are as good as previous years despite cancelled exams



Rachel Kitley, the headteacher of Cowes Enterprise College on the Isle of Wight, says students should be proud of their hard work. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

Rachel Kitley, the headteacher of Cowes Enterprise College on the Isle of Wight, says students should be proud of their hard work. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

[Richard Adams](#) Education editor

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Students getting their A-level and GCSE results this week should ignore complaints about grade inflation and instead be proud of their hard work, according to a headteacher who has overseen a remarkable turnaround at a struggling secondary school.

Rachel Kitley, the headteacher of Cowes Enterprise College on the Isle of Wight, said her students had every right to believe their grades this summer were as good as those awarded in previous years, despite the government's decision to cancel national exams and replace them with teacher assessments.

"I'm so proud of our staff and children for coping with not knowing what was going to happen. I'm certain that our grades and results have as much value this year as any year," said Kitley, who rejects claims that teacher-assessed qualifications will cause an unwarranted spike in higher grades.

[Record A-level scores will mean fewer places in university clearing](#)
[Read more](#)

"Students have earned their grades through very, very hard work, to the best of their abilities in difficult conditions – far more difficult than most years. Our teachers have also had to work so hard, with great expertise and trust," Kitley said.

Like most secondary schools, Cowes Enterprise College had its share of Covid-related closures and burst bubbles since the pandemic began. But this year, more than half of its 80-strong sixth form have received offers to study at selective universities, including medical schools and Oxbridge. That's a far cry from a few years ago when the college's sixth form was rated as inadequate by Ofsted inspectors and the school placed in special measures.

Kitley arrived in 2017, after the college had been taken over by the [Ormiston Academies Trust](#). She said her first task was to improve the quality of teaching that had been severely criticised by inspectors. But efforts to attract staff were sabotaged by claims from the chair of Ofsted that the Isle of Wight was blighted by "crime, drug problems, huge unemployment" and underperforming schools.

David Hoare [quickly resigned as Ofsted chair](#) after his comments that the island was "a ghetto" rife with inbreeding came to light. But the damage had been done.

Kitley said she used her own example of leaving a senior leadership job at a London secondary school to persuade others to join her: “We’re not just in a coastal location that’s quite disadvantaged, we’re also on an island and the challenges of attracting staff in those circumstances are quite well known.

“All of our staff share our commitment to this kind of school, on a mission to want to improve things for the community. That’s what compelled me to come and relocate here, and I’ve tried to encourage that approach in the teachers we’ve recruited.”

The result has been “an extraordinary shift” in students taking academic subjects at GCSE and A-levels. “I believe that all students from disadvantaged backgrounds or communities must be on a level playing field with better-off students, to open doors to wherever they want to go next,” Kitley said.

On Tuesday, the Cowes sixth formers will join hundreds of thousands around the country awaiting their A-level results and, for those going on to university, hoping to gain a place during what promises to be a difficult year for those who miss out.

Predictions of record-breaking A-level results and applicant numbers mean universities may have too many students qualifying for some courses – with oversubscribed courses prepared to offer financial or other incentives to students willing to defer matriculation.

James Wharton, the former Conservative MP who chairs the Office for Students, the higher education regulator in England, warned that universities needed to honour the offers they have made to students. Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, Wharton said: “If a student has kept up their end of the bargain and earned the grades they need to start their course this year, they should be certain there is a place waiting for them.”

[Universities report record A-level grade acceleration in England and Wales](#)
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Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, also defended teachers against accusations of unwarranted grade inflation. “Teachers know what their

students can do and, in the absence of formal exams, there is no person or system better placed to fairly judge young people's abilities," he wrote in a commentary.

"I can assure you that we have put a system in place to make sure grades are double checked and to root out any queries or inconsistencies.

"We are also working hard behind the scenes with the university sector to make sure that as many young people as possible can take up a place at university, and we are hoping that more students than ever do so."

Last week, Williamson announced there would be more places at medical and dental schools, after it was revealed that more students would meet their offers than the cap on places originally set by the government.

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Schools

Spike in students calling ChildLine about exam stress, report reveals

Labour say the government failed to act early enough to ensure the results operation ran smoothly



A-level and GCSE pupils will be graded by their school this year.
Photograph: John Birdsall/Alamy

A-level and GCSE pupils will be graded by their school this year.
Photograph: John Birdsall/Alamy

Aubrey Allegretti

@breeallegretti

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Ministers' chaotic handling of how students should be graded due to Covid disruption piled unnecessary stress on those awaiting their results, Labour has claimed, as a dramatic spike in the number of people calling ChildLine with concerns about exam stress was revealed.

Anticipation is mounting for the tens of thousands of pupils who will find out how they performed in their [A-levels](#) and SQAs on Tuesday, and GCSEs on Thursday.

After the havoc caused last summer by an algorithm downgrading students' grades, this time marks will be decided by teachers, with exams called off for a second year in a row.

Sir Keir Starmer, the leader of the Labour party, said the prime minister, Boris Johnson, and the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, had failed to act early enough to ensure the results operation ran smoothly, and called for a better appeals system and more support for teachers.

"It frustrates me immensely that this week's big moment in so many young people's lives is being risked by the chaos and incompetence at the top of this government," Starmer said.

"This abject refusal of Johnson to get a grip has created huge extra stress for students and baked unfairness into the assessment process. Young people and our dedicated education staff have worked incredibly hard, but they have been let down time and time again by Johnson's failure to stand up for their futures."

Instead of exams, pupils will be graded by their school on mocks, coursework and in-class assessments using questions from exam boards, with headteachers needing to submit a declaration that they believe the marks awarded are accurate.

It came as ChildLine revealed the number of young people who rang with concerns about exam stress rocketed from 861 between April and June in 2020 to 1,812 over the same period this year.

A 17-year-old girl who spoke to the service admitted she felt "lost", saying: "I feel bad saying that I want them to mark my coursework less strictly or something along those lines but I wish that they'd consider how unwell I've been mentally and how that has affected my performance."

An 18-year-old boy told ChildLine: “I used to get good grades but have been hindered this past year by Covid because I have found it hard to work and revise.”

Wendy Robinson, service head of the charity, said: “The last year has been incredibly tough for young people with school closures, exam cancellations and changes to the assessment process, so it is vital that they are supported and listened to.”

Labour also released new figures, showing that the number of pupils in classes of more than 30 students had grown by 20% in the last 10 years – from 747,531 in 2010/11 to 900,672 in 2020/21.

A spokesperson for the Department for Education defended the government’s handling of exams, saying they were usually “the best form of assessment”, but that in their absence “there is no one better placed to judge young people’s abilities than their teachers”.

They said: “We recognise the unprecedented challenges pupils and students have faced over the last year and a half, and have been working with Ofqual, universities and other providers for months to ensure as many students as possible can progress.

“This includes putting in place a rigorous system to ensure grades are fair, and this week we have adjusted the cap on medical and dentistry places so that more students than ever will have the opportunity to study on these courses in 2021.”

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UK set to ‘hoard’ up to 210m doses of Covid vaccine, research suggests

Exclusive: Pressure grows on government to do more to help poorer countries left ‘fighting for scraps’

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A coronavirus vaccine is prepared at the UK's first nightclub vaccination centre in Birmingham. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

A coronavirus vaccine is prepared at the UK's first nightclub vaccination centre in Birmingham. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

[Aubrey Allegretti](#)

[@breeallegretti](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

The UK is on course to “hoard” up to 210m spare coronavirus vaccines by the end of the year, research suggests, as ministers were accused of leaving poorer countries “fighting for scraps”.

Pressure is growing on the government to do more to help nations where tiny proportions of their population have had a first jab given that the UK is opposing a temporary waiver to intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines that would allow more companies abroad to manufacture the doses themselves.

[NHS still not recognising British citizens' overseas Covid jabs, says peer](#)

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About 467m jabs are on order, with 306m due to be delivered to the UK by the end of 2021, data from life science analytics company Airfinity found. However only about 95m jabs will be needed to fulfil the expected demand of vaccinating all over-16s and giving a booster dose to the most vulnerable in autumn.

Given the average level of take-up for adults who have received a first and second dose stands at just over 80%, if the same level was maintained for those eligible accepting all doses they are offered this year, that would leave a surplus of 210m vaccines. Even if take-up were 100%, the figure would be 186m.

These leftover jabs would help inoculate the about 211 million people living in the world’s 10 least vaccinated countries, said campaign group Global Justice Now, which collated the figures.

Nick Dearden, director of the organisation, told the Guardian it was an “insult to the thousands dying each day” that the UK was offering third

doses and preparing to vaccinate teenagers while low- and middle-income countries were left “fighting for scraps”.

He said the issue was compounded by the UK’s efforts to “obstruct” a temporary waiver of intellectual property rights on coronavirus vaccines. The bid was tabled at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in October 2020 by India and South Africa – and has since been backed by countries including the US, France and Italy.

Minutes from the most recent WTO meeting to discuss the proposal concluded that “disagreement persisted on the fundamental question of what is the appropriate and most effective way to address the shortage and inequitable access to vaccines”, with a decision now pushed back until October 2021.

Dearden said the UK was “keeping the global south dependent on donations while hoarding limited vaccine supplies for ourselves” and called it an “obscene injustice”.

The government’s drive to roll out third doses from next month flies in the face of a call by the World Health Organization [this week for a moratorium on booster shots](#) in a bid to vaccinate 10% of every country’s population by the end of September. It estimates at least 60-70% of the world needs to be inoculated to reach “global immunity”.

The 10 countries with the smallest proportion of people vaccinated, according to Oxford University’s Our World In Data, are: the Democratic Republic of Congo (0.005%), Haiti (0.003%), Burkina Faso (0.01%), Vanuatu (0.03%), South Sudan (0.04%), Yemen (0.04%), Chad (0.04%), Syria (0.05%), Guinea Bissau (0.06%) and Benin (0.1%).

The situation was akin to “vaccine apartheid”, said Max Lawson, Oxfam’s head of inequality policy. He told the Guardian: “The British government is ignoring the WHO’s advice, issuing booster shots and dogmatically defending vaccine patents. It’s only going to prolong the pandemic, leading to more deaths and, ultimately, to mutations of coronavirus that could undermine the UK’s own vaccination programme.”

Shami Chakrabarti, a former Labour shadow attorney general, said the UK and other wealthy nations “have a responsibility to do all we can to save lives in the global south” but ministers were instead “closing down every avenue for low- and middle-income countries to access vaccines with sufficient speed and scale”.

“For the government to see such suffering and impede every solution is an utter failure of common decency let alone human rights obligations,” she added.

A government spokesperson said: “The UK is committed to supporting a global recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic and improving access to vaccines.

“We have committed to donate 100m doses by June 2022, with the first deliveries starting last week. On top of this, UK funding is helping to provide more than a billion vaccines to low- and middle-income countries through Covax.”

This article was amended on 9 August 2021. About 95m jabs will be needed to fulfil the expected demand of vaccinating all over-16s and giving a booster dose to the most vulnerable in autumn, rather than 256.6m as an earlier version said. It has also been amended to clarify that, while about 467m jabs are on order, only 306m are due to be delivered to the UK by the end of 2021.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/aug/09/uk-set-to-hoard-up-to-210m-doses-of-covid-vaccine-research-suggests>



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Vaccines and immunisation

NHS still not recognising British citizens' overseas Covid jabs, says peer

Lord Paddick accuses government of 'broken promises' after Pfizer jabs received in Norway go unrecognised

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Brian Paddick was dropped by his GP in the UK due to living overseas for more than three months. Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

Brian Paddick was dropped by his GP in the UK due to living overseas for more than three months. Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

Robyn Vinter

Sun 8 Aug 2021 09.13 EDT

Britons vaccinated abroad are still struggling to get their jabs registered with the [NHS](#), a Lib Dem peer has warned, despite government promises that measures would be in place by the end of last month.

Brian Paddick, a former London mayoral candidate and a member of the [House of Lords](#), said the government was “yet again, promising things that they fail to deliver” after his GP was unable to register vaccinations he had in Norway, where he has been staying.

This means that Lord Paddick, like many British nationals vaccinated abroad, cannot get an NHS Covid pass, which is needed to avoid quarantine when returning from amber-list countries and, from September, may be required to enter some bars and venues.

The former deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan police, who has spent the last three months in [Norway](#) where his husband lives, has already had three vaccinations. His first jab, a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine delivered in the UK, was not recognised in Norway, requiring him to have two Pfizer shots to be considered fully vaccinated there.

He said that if the UK fails to recognise the jabs he received in Norway, he may end up needing a fourth jab in order to have a complete vaccination record in the UK, where he lives and works.

“Which bearing in mind the worldwide shortage of vaccines, seems to be ridiculous,” he said.

To make matters worse for Paddick, he has been dropped by his GP as a result of living outside the UK for more than three months, and now he cannot access the NHS Covid pass app.

He said: “I wanted to desperately come back to the UK, but it just wasn’t practical with the cost and the need to quarantine. Plus, the advice not to travel.

“It wasn’t [necessary to travel] because I could work remotely, and so many people are in the same situation.”

He has called for a relaxation of the rules to allow people who have spent longer than three months outside the UK access to their GP.

“Lots of things have changed because of Covid and it just seems to me a ridiculous waste of everybody’s time and money to de-register somebody who is only going to go beyond the three-month limit by four weeks.”

Paddick has written to the vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, and is yet to receive a response.

He said: “The Conservatives’ broken promises on registering foreign vaccinations and muddled travel advice is likely to leave many vaccinated overseas with problems at the UK border and without a GP on their return home.

“This government promised to work with vaccine regulators around the world to have this problem fixed by the end of July. It is unsurprising that, as with so many other promises they made during the pandemic, they have failed to meet their commitments.”

The House of Lords has been using a remote system during the pandemic, which will end after the parliamentary recess at the end of this month.

From September, Lords will need to be present in the chamber for debates and in order to vote.

A government spokesperson said: “We are urgently working to access the data for UK residents who have received their vaccinations abroad to ensure eligible individuals can demonstrate their vaccination status via the NHS Covid pass.”

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[Austin](#)

Austin warns of ‘catastrophe’ as Texas again becomes center of pandemic

City implores residents to stay home, mask up and get vaccinated as ICU capacity in hospitals dwindles to single digits



Downtown Austin, Texas, in March 2021. Photograph: Eric Gay/AP

Downtown Austin, Texas, in March 2021. Photograph: Eric Gay/AP

[*Alexandra Villarreal in Austin, Texas*](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 09.11 EDT

With Covid-19 cases [skyrocketing exponentially](#) and intensive care unit capacity in hospitals dwindling to single digits, officials in the Austin area

are warning of “catastrophe” as Texas again becomes a center of the pandemic.

Austin’s local governments [issued an urgent message](#) through [their emergency notification system](#) Saturday, imploring residents to stay home, mask up and get vaccinated.

The entreaty comes mere days after Austin Public Health elevated its risk-based guidance to stage 5, the [highest possible tier](#).

[Texas governor appeals for out-of-state help to fight latest Covid wave](#)
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“The situation is critical,” Desmar Walkes, Austin-Travis county’s health authority, said in a statement. “Our hospitals are severely stressed and there is little we can do to alleviate their burden with the surging cases.”

The Texas trauma service area that includes Austin [only has six available ICU beds](#), 499 available hospital beds and 313 available ventilators – a stunning dearth of resources for a population nearly 2.4 million strong.

In Austin’s metropolitan statistical area, 510 Covid patients are currently hospitalized, 184 are in the ICU, and 102 [are on ventilators](#).

[About a third](#) of recent hospitalizations have been among patients younger than 50, underscoring [the Delta variant’s serious threat](#) to younger Texans who have opted against vaccination.

“Hospital bed availability and critical care is extremely limited in our hospital systems, not just for Covid-19 patients, but for anyone who may need treatment,” Walkes said. “The community has to come together again and stave off disaster.”

As a whole, Texas currently ranks second behind Florida for the highest daily average Covid-19 cases, [with infections up 134% over the last 14 days](#). And between early February and mid-July, roughly 99.5% of Texans who died from the virus were unvaccinated, [the Texas Tribune reported](#).

In Austin's Travis county, almost 64% of kids and adults 12 and older are fully vaccinated, compared to about 53% statewide. But in some neighboring counties and suburbs, vaccination rates are even lower than the state average.

Recently, San Antonio's Bexar county had its daily average caseload jump by more than 300%, according to the New York Times. And infections are also surging in Houston's Harris county, where only about 56% of those 12 and older are fully vaccinated and the 14-day average test positivity rate is a whopping 17.7%.

Meanwhile, local officials who want to implement proven public health measures to mitigate the spread have been hamstrung by the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, who has implemented a sweeping order restricting vaccine and mask mandates.

But some public servants, like Houston's mayor, Sylvester Turner, have simply defied Abbott's order despite threats of retribution.

"The governor is preventing the city from keeping kids and adults safe," Austin city council member Alison Alter told the New York Times. "He's going to have a lot of deaths on his hands here. This is a matter of life and death for our community."

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Coronavirus

UK competition watchdog to look into pricing of Covid tests for travel

CMA to investigate PCR tests market after concerns about vastly different prices being charged

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PCR tests are needed to travel to some overseas holiday destinations and on return from amber and green list countries. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

PCR tests are needed to travel to some overseas holiday destinations and on return from amber and green list countries. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Sun 8 Aug 2021 08.11 EDT

The competition watchdog is to look into fees for the Covid-19 tests required for international travel after concerns about the vastly different prices being charged for them.

The [Competition and Markets Authority](#) will provide advice and intelligence on the market in PCR tests to the health secretary, Sajid Javid, to enable the government to act.

This route is being taken because a formal investigation, which could lead to criminal action, would take months to complete, so that its impact would come long after the key holiday season.

PCR tests are needed to travel to some overseas holiday destinations and on return from amber- and green-list countries.

Similar tests for day 2 and 8 after return to England [listed on the government's website](#) can cost more than £300 or as little as £20. On average, prices in the UK are £75, compared with about £40 in France and Greece.

Javid wrote to the CMA on Friday asking the body to help stamp out “exploitative behaviour” and “unfair practices” among the 400-plus firms which offer the tests and he said the government was determined to take action.

“The cost of PCR testing can act as a barrier, especially for families who want to travel together,” Javid said in a letter to Dr Andrea Coscelli, CMA chief executive, first reported by The Sunday Times.

He asked the watchdog to carry out “a rapid high-level review” of the market and assess what action might be taken “to ensure that consumers do not face unnecessarily high costs or other poor provision”.

A CMA spokesperson said: “We are aware of concerns about the evolving markets for Covid-19 tests for international travellers. We look forward to

providing the secretary of state with advice on how best to ensure that travellers have access to tests that are affordable and reliable.”

The latest probe comes after the [Advertising Standards Authority](#) said it was investigating, after receiving complaints from consumers about what it described as “inconsistent pricing” of tests on the government website.

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While there are more than 450 alternatives listed on the government portal, the supply of tests and processing is done by only a handful of labs, with seven handling about 75% of the market.

[Analysis of the deals](#) advertised by the first 50 companies on the list recently showed that of the 36 offering on-site tests or click-and-collect packages, the cheapest options for travellers, two-thirds could not be bought or had no appointments until September.

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[Rhik Samadder tries something newGymnastics](#)

Rhik Samadder tries ... backflipping: ‘My shorts are too tight – being upside down doesn’t help’



Rhik Samadder, poised and ready, with his instructor Davide Buzzi.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Rhik Samadder, poised and ready, with his instructor Davide Buzzi.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Inspired by a YouTube video and high on a dose of Olympic spirit, this week the activity is gymnastic. But will the results be fantastic?



Rhik Samadder

@whatsamadder

Mon 9 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

I once saw an inspirational video of a man teaching himself to backflip in a park, with a mattress behind to break his fall. He got closer and closer, but kept landing on his knees. The breakthrough moment came when he realised the 20cm mattress was taking up space. *The cushion that kept him safe was also keeping him from his dream.* He removed it and completed the flip. I wept. It's not about jumping, OK? It's profoundly existential.

The jumping did suggest an urgent question, though: could I do a backflip? Do you have to be Superman, or one of seven lords-a-leaping? I never dared to learn. The optics of dragging a mattress into a park – especially when some people are already confused about how you earn a living – are not good. Yet, with Olympic spirit still hanging in the air, the timing is right.

I am not using a mattress in the park and I don't recommend you do, either. (If you land upside down in dog mess, on your head be it.) Instead, I have come for a personal coaching session at OverGravity, an adult gymnastic space in Bromley-by-Bow, east London. Imagine a warehouse of giant Lego, but it's all soft and there are no children in sight. Imagine paradise, if that is

easier. All abilities are welcome. Total beginners learn tumbling, tricking and handstands, while movie stunt performers work out action choreography. I watch a woman leap on to a gunman, straddling and pinning him, then neutralise a second assailant with the confiscated weapon. I feel giddy.



Attempt one ... Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

My instructor, the studio co-owner Davide Buzzi, comes over to say hello. I was expecting Henry Cavill, but Buzzi's even more compact than me. We are not seven lords a-leaping, I think; we are more likely going to be two small men falling over.

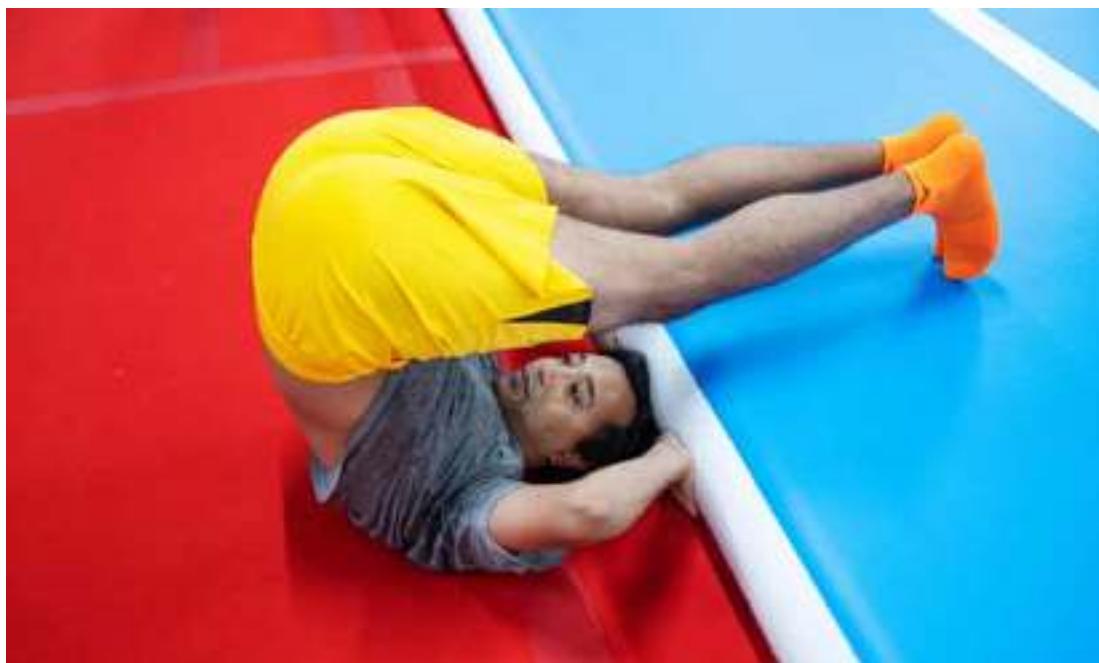
Then he takes his glasses off and flies. Demonstrating a routine, Buzzi powers down the runway, morphing into a catherine wheel. He is executing multiple handsprings so fast that he looks like Sonic the Hedgehog. I can hear gold rings spilling everywhere, far more than five. He dives vertically upward, time slowing. Gaining enormous height, he flips back and over like a dolphin, legs straight. Touchdown is soundless – my jaw makes more noise as it hits the floor. A new thought occurs: I am going to break my spine.

Buzzi senses my fear, because I voice it several times. He takes me to a 1-metre square block – it's a coordination test, to see if flips are in my future. I

leap from standing, swinging my arms like an orangutan, landing two-footed on the block. “Perfect,” he smiles. “You have the power.” Has anyone ever said this to you? Other than in a flyer for a broadband provider? It’s really very encouraging. I take to drills with vigour, learning to kick my knees into my body, extending my arms. We take it to a trampette. I’m going to do this, I think. I can do anything.

The mechanics of a backflip are simple and Newtonian; a rotation about a single axis, maximising angular velocity. The real hurdle is psychological. To direct their rotation, the flipper needs to throw their head backwards, eyes open, opening their chest. The self-protective instinct is to tuck the neck and stiffen, which inhibits spin, increasing the risk of injury. In other words, to succeed, I must throw myself wholeheartedly into that which I cannot see, trusting my body. I told you gymnastics was existential.

My mind is bursting with new experience; unfortunately, so is my body. My sports shorts are very tight, and being upside down doesn’t help. I feel faint, certain my next hurl will be oesophageal. I sit on the floor and ask Buzzi questions instead. Why did he set up OverGravity? Because no one else was teaching adult gymnastics – especially in southern Sardinia, where he grew up. Can anyone learn to backflip? Almost – he has a female student who is 70 and can flip. Erm, how does he like his pancakes?



‘Do I succeed? No, I overtuck, roly polying off the mat.’ Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

“Do you want to call it a day?” he says.

A week later, I return. Never give up! I put in another hour of yoinking myself backwards. We mount a camera so I can watch my form. Slowly, I finesse my technique. All that is left is to stick the landing – no wobble – but we are running out of class time. “One last try,” Buzzi says, looking in my eyes. I settle myself. Breathe.

Do I make that last attempt? No. I tense up, unfolding my legs too early. Does he give me another go, because he believes in me? Of course he does. Do I succeed? No. I overtuck, roly polying off the mat. But is there a last ditch effort? There is! And in the course of that third and ultimate attempt, do I finally land my perfect backflip? Also no. This isn’t YouTube.

Almost anyone can backflip; I can’t. I am an uninspirational video. Call me a dolphin stunt performer, because I am not-quite Flipper. I flipped out. I am a flip-flop. As for those seven lords, they were probably only a-leaping to a-void inheritance tax. Don’t follow your dreams; life is pain.

00:34

See Rhik Samadder's back flip attempts – video

Did I go back?

The next weekend, I honour Newtonian physics by staying in bed. A body at rest wants to stay at rest.

Smugness Points

5 in theory, 0 in practice. Average: 2.5.

Want to suggest an activity for Rhik to try? [Tell us about it here.](#)

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Pregnancy

Unspeakable grief: breaking the silence around terminations for medical reasons



‘At the 20-week scan, what can go wrong? You just find out whether you’re having a girl or a boy.’ Illustration: Sarah Tanat-Jones/The Guardian

‘At the 20-week scan, what can go wrong? You just find out whether you’re having a girl or a boy.’ Illustration: Sarah Tanat-Jones/The Guardian

In the UK, at least 5,000 pregnancies a year are terminated after a scan for foetal anomalies. The grief and guilt of parents can endure for years - and they often feel unable to openly discuss their experience



Zoe Williams

@zoesqwilliams

Mon 9 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

Silma and Binit had been married for two years when they found out they were expecting a “planned, unplanned” baby in December 2019. “We weren’t actively trying, but we knew we wanted to have a baby the following year,” says Silma, sitting in her garden in London. “So we were ecstatic. Really, really happy.” Everything was normal at the 12-week scan in January, and they felt ready to tell their friends, family and colleagues. Silma is a pharmacist at a busy London hospital; Binit works in finance.

Fast forward to March 2020; the day before the couple’s 20-week scan was scheduled, lockdown was announced. The local hospital they had booked in with had already been badly hit by Covid admissions, as well as staff shortages as medics were redeployed or self-isolating. “It was all a bit of a panic,” says Silma, “so I went in on my own, thinking – how naive it was of me to think this – I was there to find out if it was a boy or a girl. I didn’t even want to know, particularly. I had just always thought that’s what the 20-week scan was about.” Binit, who was not allowed to accompany Silma, was waiting outside. He is a softly spoken man who says as much about his

feelings with his eyes and his silences as with his voice; he is clearly still traumatised by the memory of that wait.

Their baby, Mia, was moving too much for the sonographer to get a proper reading, but they could see enough to suspect a ventricular septal defect, or hole in the heart. As more tests were done over the coming days, more problems emerged: defects in the aorta, a potential problem with the aortic valve. Scanning for foetal anomalies is extremely advanced, and yet it can rarely deliver with absolute certainty what parents need to know: whether their baby will survive after birth, and for how long; how much surgery he or she will need, and what the success rates are.

Jane Fisher is the chief executive of [Antenatal Results and Choices \(ARC\)](#), which supports parents after scan findings. “Once you’ve put the probe on, you can’t unsee what you’ve seen,” she says. “You can’t unsee a brain defect – not fatal, but horrific, very, very minimal brain function.”

“Some foetal abnormalities will be not survivable,” says Dr Brenda Kelly, a consultant in obstetrics and fetomaternal medicine at Oxford University Hospitals NHS trust, “and in many respects, those are easier to work with. If you can see that the foetus has developed without kidneys, you know that’s incompatible with life. But ventriculomegaly [enlarged ventricles of the brain], what does that mean for future development?”

At least 5,000 pregnancies a year in the UK end in a termination for medical reasons (TFMR). Three pregnancy charities – ARC, Petals and [Tommy’s](#) – are trying to lift the taboo around the issue, after surveying more than 1,300 people who have been through the experience. Almost three-quarters didn’t feel their loss was treated like a miscarriage or stillbirth – they didn’t feel they would get the same compassion, or that they could talk openly about their experience. Afterwards, 87% felt guilty, 80% isolated. While grief is the unavoidable consequence of tragedy, the wall of silence makes everything worse.

“Terminations have always been the hidden part of this whole journey, the shameful bit we don’t really want to talk about,” says Karen Burgess, [the founder of Petals](#), whose background as a counsellor in the field of pregnancy loss is audible in her deeply compassionate voice. “Then parents

are sucked into that vacuum – they feel as though they have to hide away in shame.”

Samantha and Sam, from Bristol, discovered anomalies at a 17-week scan; it was later confirmed that their baby’s skull was not developing and she would not survive more than minutes if she went to term. Samantha, who had got pregnant naturally after a long struggle, while they were just about to embark on IVF, uses almost the same words as Silma: “At the 20-week scan, what can go wrong? You just find out whether you’re having a girl or a boy.”

Roughly half of couples don’t even know what anomalies a scan might reveal before they get a diagnosis. But Fisher believes the problem is not just a lack of public awareness. “Sonographers say: ‘If only they had better information, it would be all right.’ It wouldn’t be. Everyone is completely shattered by the reaction they have. We get a lot of calls from women who are really shocked by how shocked they feel. They feel like it undermines the unconditionality of their love. That it’s still their baby. That they should still love it. There are women who feel like their whole identity has collapsed.”

Suddenly, couples find themselves in a world of diagrams and complicated terminology, odds that can’t map neatly on to emotions. Kelly has to deliver bad news to parents “at least one Monday a month. It’s like the policeman’s knock in the middle of the night. Part of you is doing a jigsaw puzzle – you’re picking up the bits and pieces to make a diagnosis and you’re trying to work out what the next test is going to be. Part of you is walking up a path, at three in the morning, dead of night, and you know that as soon as the door opens, you’ll crush the parents with the news you’re going to give them.”

Depending on the accuracy of the estimated due date, and the battery of further tests, time is often now very short. Twenty-four weeks is the legal limit for most terminations in the UK (except for Northern Ireland, where a termination between 12 and 24 weeks can only be performed if there’s a severe risk to the mother). After that, termination is still legal if there is a “substantial risk of significant handicap”, which would be for a doctor to decide.

Silma and Binit were already further along than they thought – 22 weeks at the 20-week scan – waiting for genetic test results that would take 10 working days. The picture looked bleak: not only did Mia have congenital heart defects, but cardiologists also expected problems with her lungs. Binit recalls being told about the possible outcomes, and thinking: “Fine, there might be an x% chance of the baby surviving all the surgeries and leading a normal life, but what if it’s not that? What if she’s the per cent that doesn’t make it through the open heart surgery?” Covid added a layer of uncertainty, as communications between departments got lost in the chaos, and labs were overwhelmed processing coronavirus tests. “My fear was getting lost in the system because of all the Covid issues,” Silma says.

“On the psychological side,” Fisher says, “people’s capacity for dealing with uncertainty was really impacted by the pandemic background. They may have been able to cope with a bit of uncertainty, but it was just too much.”

Silma and Binit decided to terminate their pregnancy on the weekend of the 22nd week. On the Monday, Silma went into work; after all, she was still a pharmacist, and her team had never been so busy.

“On Tuesday, we went to the hospital thinking everything would happen then, and it would be over and done with within the next day or so. And they said: ‘You did know that you have to have an injection into her heart, to stop her heart beating?’ And I said: ‘No, no one explained that to me.’”

This is a very common experience for couples having what’s known as a medical termination, Burgess says. “There’s not enough information about what it means. They’re going to go through labour and birth a baby. That has a massive impact; the woman is often not ready for that. The partner will then say: ‘I don’t want that – there must be something else that can be done.’” So then they go through what they call a surgical termination, which a lot of hospitals can’t provide. So then the woman has to go and find an abortion clinic.”

Kelly says: “These things aren’t discussed in a public arena because people find them distasteful.” The “most difficult part” of the process, she adds, is stopping the baby’s heartbeat. “It is just unspeakably tragic, for families who desperately wanted that child.”

[After my miscarriages I didn't need to talk – I needed access to better care |](#)

[Jennie Agg](#)

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Counsellors in the field generally agree that, if the hospital has the right level of support, the right facilities – a bereavement suite to labour in, so women don't have to be among women who are carrying healthy pregnancies to term – a medical termination is better, psychologically, than a surgical one. But that's a lot of ifs, and there is an unspeakable amount of trauma and distress either way. When Silma went in to deliver Mia, they didn't even know if Binit would be allowed to be with her; it was up to the staff on the day (in the event, he was). Neither remembers the labour clearly – to Binit “it was a blur”; “I was completely numb,” Silma says. They could hear other women having their babies, or walking out with them. Mia died on 3 April and they said goodbye the following morning, a moment Silma starts to describe before being overwhelmed. Binit takes over, looking at Silma. “It was tough, seeing her. You couldn't let go. It was really hard.”

Samantha, similarly, went through a medical abortion, and afterwards “we went into our shell. Obviously we'd told our parents and very close friends, but I hadn't openly told loads of people that I had a termination, I just said: ‘We lost the baby.’ I don't really know why. And does it matter? At the end of the day, you lost your baby.”

Silma and Binit “were open with everyone”, he says, and Silma’s colleagues in particular were a rich source of support. “It's very different from if you've had a miscarriage or a stillbirth,” Silma says. “It's not a natural death. You've ended your own baby's life. I think that guilt was probably most intense after the postmortem and the funeral but for me, it was when we started the counselling that I acknowledged it and we only really started processing what had happened then.”

[Woman with Down's syndrome takes Sajid Javid to court over abortion law](#)

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If anything, the taboo around termination for medical reasons has got more, rather than less intense, with views particularly polarised around Down's syndrome, which accounts for 20% of TFMRs. Most of the people who get a

Down's diagnosis do still terminate, and many feel boxed into silence afterwards. "This raises a challenge for all of us," Kelly says, "to try and help families break the taboo. It has to come from the profession as much as from the women who are brave enough to speak openly about their own experiences."

A grief that is unspeakable is very isolating, never more than when parents go into a subsequent, successful pregnancy. "The number of times they will have triggering events," Kelly says, "whether it's a scan, or a throwaway remark. They can't speak about a previous pregnancy, nor do they feel that they even deserve to have a subsequent pregnancy. Often I'm the first and only person they can have that conversation with. So the complexity of their grief and trauma is enormous."

More than that, the overriding fear shared by Silma and Binit and Samantha and Sam was that their healthy baby would make them and others forget the baby they lost. Samantha is 33 weeks pregnant, and says: "When people lose babies, people may think they don't want to talk about it. But actually if someone asks me about my baby, I do want to talk about her. I'm coming up to almost a year after losing her, and now I've got another baby on the way. You worry that people are going to forget about your first baby."

"My main concern," Silma says, "was that if we did get pregnant again after Mia, would we stop thinking about her? Would we be able to keep her memory alive?" Silma and Binit had a beautiful baby girl in June. "I think that she has a lot of Mia's traits," Silma says.

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[The G2 interview Alexandra Burke](#)

Interview

Alexandra Burke: ‘I got asked to bleach my skin after X Factor’

[Arifa Akbar](#)



Alexandra Burke: ‘My plan B was the same as plan A; I was determined to be a singer.’ Photograph: Laura Lewis

Alexandra Burke: ‘My plan B was the same as plan A; I was determined to be a singer.’ Photograph: Laura Lewis

Her career has taken her from pop success to Strictly and the stage. She discusses the pain of racist comments, the joy of duetting with Beyoncé – and the enduring influence of her late mother



[@Arifa_Akbar](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

Alexandra Burke has come out of the pandemic running. Since lockdown eased, the singer has taken part in a reality TV series (she can't say which) that left her with broken bones and hypothermia, acted in her first film, Pretty Red Dress, and segued to a starring role in the West End musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

What makes this surprising is that Burke describes the enforced stillness of the past year as “the best thing that ever happened to me”. After 12 years of almost unstoppable hard graft since winning [The X Factor](#), she decided to take six months out in 2020 even before lockdown was announced, after the suicide of a close friend. “I hadn’t seen him in a long time and I meant to reach out to him. Instead, I was running on stage thinking I’d talk to him next week and then he was gone. My mental health was really struggling with not putting friends and family first.” She took on a life coach, bubbled with her close friend and assistant Nalini, and switched to a plant-based diet. It all left her feeling fitter, happier and calmer.

Effervescent and gym-fit, and blazing with smiles, she is clearly thriving on the latest burst of activity. An hour from now she will be on stage for Joseph

("I'll gargle with TCP to clear my throat"), and before the night is over she will be performing a private gig. Yet she almost turned down the role of the Narrator – a big, all-singing, dancing part that holds Joseph together. The biblical show wasn't her first foray into musical theatre – that was in 2014 with a storming debut in *The Bodyguard*, followed by several more. However, she says, "I didn't know if my brain could retain it because I hadn't worked in a year. Then they sat me down and said: 'You'll be the first ever black Narrator to do this [in the West End]', and the answer couldn't be 'No'."



Burke stars in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* with Jason Donovan (left) and Jac Yarrow (right). Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images

The significance of that first, for her, extends far beyond theatre – to the murder of George Floyd last May, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the part she came to play in it. When Floyd was killed, she says, "I cried for two weeks straight. Every single day. All I could think about was my two brothers, who are constantly stopped by the police, and the black men in my family – my cousins, nephews. My [white] ex couldn't understand why I was crying. When I tried to explain about white privilege, the first thing he said was: 'Don't attack me – I'm not racist.'"

Even though she hadn't planned to become part of the bigger conversation about race, she was taken over by the urge to go public with her experiences in the music industry. She made a video and uploaded it on Instagram. "I had no intention of doing it," she says. "I was working on a song about BLM in a studio session Zoom call. I was talking about how I felt about the movement when a shiver went through my body and I heard a scream in my ear. I said: 'Guys, I need a minute', shut the laptop, walked upstairs, put my phone camera on and just started talking."

In [the video](#), she described the microaggressions she had faced in the industry, [from advice to bleach her skin](#) to being encouraged not to braid her hair. She had quietly been feeling their sting for years. "We're talking about it openly now because we feel safer to speak out. Otherwise I'd be too scared."

I cried for two weeks when George Floyd died. All I could think about were my two brothers

Her late mother, Melissa Bell, a singer with the 1980s band Soul II Soul and Burke's manager until she was 15, had made her aware of the industry's entrenched prejudices at an early age. "She'd warned me that people would inevitably bring up colour. When she was in Soul II Soul, she used to get certain comments: 'If you were slimmer, or if you were white, you'd have a much bigger career.' She was advised not to have kids because: 'Women who are black already struggle.'"

Burke's own experiences began at 12 after her first TV appearance, in the talent show Star for a Night. "I started getting comments like: 'Because you're black, you won't get that far.' 'Because you're black, you need to work 10 times harder.' Industry people were saying it as well as Joe Bloggs. The remarks came quite often and were difficult to digest."

It escalated after she won The X Factor in 2008 at the age of 19, going from playing pub gigs to singing with Elton John at London's O2 Centre. "It only really hit me when I got asked to bleach my skin after X Factor," she says. She won't comment on who suggested that, only that it was "a certain person on the creative side who was working with me".



Burke with her mother, Melissa Bell, who died in 2017. Photograph: Courtesy of Alexandra Burke

There was one especially upsetting incident with her then record label, as she prepared to perform at the London Palladium. “It was a beautiful show in honour of Sir Bruce Forsyth and I had my hair in a bun, with a couple of baby hairs. It was classic, classy; I had a black dress on. Half an hour before I was due on stage, my hair stylist came up to me and said: ‘I’ve just been told you look quite aggressive with this hairstyle. We need to change it.’ I said: ‘What?’ He said: ‘Your record label’s just told me you look aggressive, so we have to change it.’ I said: ‘What part of me looks aggressive?’ He said it was the baby hairs stuck to my head.”

When, in 2017, she became a contestant on [Strictly Come Dancing](#), she says she was told to “smile more” by her then management team. “That’s why I let them go. They used to say to me: ‘Every time you don’t smile, nobody warms to you.’”

At the time, unbeknown to viewers of Strictly, her 53-year-old mother was in hospital, dying of kidney failure caused by diabetes. “So to be sat down and told: ‘You’re not smiling. You don’t look approachable. No one’s going to like you’...”

Has the music industry learned any lessons since last summer? Yes, she says, but a lot more needs to be done, in music and beyond. “I’m hoping people are not just going to forget about it. I really pray that one day it changes completely – but it won’t be in our lifetime.”

Burke knew she wanted to be a singer from the age of five when she saw her mother on Top of the Pops. Bell became her hero and even now remains a strong presence in her life, only ever a few sentences away. “I feel her every night as I go on that stage,” she says. “I tell myself: ‘You are Melissa Bell’s child. You’ve got this.’ I say it as that curtain opens up. I wear her perfume (Chanel No 5) on press nights. Every time I’m nervous about something I think: ‘Melissa Bell raised you.’”

I tell myself: 'You are Melissa Bell's child. You've got this.' I say it as that curtain opens up

As a starry-eyed child, she saw her mother sing backing vocals for Whitney Houston, Lisa Stansfield and many others. “A documentary came on about George Michael recently and I saw my mum doing the backing singing! I paused it and thought: ‘There’s Mum!’”

The family grew up in north London, in Islington, opposite Pentonville prison, and Burke went to Elizabeth Garrett Anderson girls’ school, where many of the women in her family had gone. Did she like school? “I loved it, but I refused to go to college. My mum disapproved and said: ‘You’ve got to have a plan B.’ But I said my plan B was the same as plan A; I was determined to be a singer.”

She already knew how hard that life could be. She was six when her mother separated from her father, David Burke, and from then on Bell was a single parent with four children. “Trying to live her dream and be a mum was very difficult. When people say to me: ‘Slow down’, I feel I don’t have an excuse to slow down.”



Burke appearing at the 2018 We Day at Wembley Arena, London.

Photograph: James Gourley/REX/Shutterstock/James Gourley/Rex/Shutterstock

Sometimes, Burke followed her mother around the globe for gigs (“We lived in Bahrain for three months!”) and at other times the children were looked after by their aunt or grandfather while Bell toured. Did she mind the uprooting? “No, because I was following in my mum’s footsteps. I was like her little shadow.”

Now that her mother has gone, is she close to her father? “Yeah, we got close just before X Factor and he’s amazing. But Mum was the queen of the family. She held everyone together and all I’m now trying to do is what she did: be the glue.”

Her mother’s death has also changed her relationship with her body. Diabetes, often triggered by pregnancy, runs in Burke’s family, with too many female relatives dying of kidney failure linked to the disease. “I’m trying to break that chain,” she says. “For me it’s about being in the best shape that I can be and I feel, at 32, that I’m at my healthiest, my fittest and my happiest.”

First, though, she had to get over Strictly. As well as bereavement, Burke had to contend with a swarm of negative press coverage, including tabloid reports of diva-like behaviour backstage. When you meet Burke, it's hard to square those stories with her unboundaried warmth; even now people tell her they are surprised she is "so nice", she says. "I've had it so many times where I've walked into a supermarket and people talk to me. The last bit of the conversation is: 'Gosh, you're not a bitch, are you? We read that you're vile.'"



Burke with her dance partner Gorka Marquez on Strictly Come Dancing in 2017. Photograph: Guy Levy/BBC/PA

She was so distressed by the stories that she tweeted Dan Wootton, then a journalist on the Sun: "I'm finding it very hard to read all of the lies you have published about me ..." She has since talked to Wootton, at the beginning of this year, and says they have cleared up any bad feeling.

Did he apologise?

"Yes, he did. I've known Dan for years. He's not a terrible person. He explained that, unfortunately, there were people inside the Strictly show who were giving him the stories. To this day, I still don't understand where the stories came from because they were absolutely lies. I loved my time on the

Strictly dancefloor but I've had to put the rest of that period behind me and I've had to have therapy to do that. I just really encourage people not to believe everything they read."

I wasted all the rehearsal time with Beyoncé crying. Everyone's crying because I'm telling Beyoncé how much I love her

Looking back at her time on The X Factor, was *that* an entirely positive experience? Some former contestants have been critical about its gladiatorial format, and ITV recently announced the show's cancellation after 17 years. She's "actually quite sad" to see it go, she says. "I did have a wonderful experience on it." But maybe she was luckier than some. "I had a mum in the industry so you couldn't walk over me – not with the mother I had. My mum would be there and she'd be very strong. Not everyone has that person in their life."

But did she ever feel pushed into creating a certain kind of music, or siloed into R&B, as some black artists are said to have been? Quite the opposite, she says. It was Simon Cowell who pushed her towards pop because she could sing and dance at the same time, and she has been happy with that musical trajectory.

There was also the unforgettable moment on the show when she duetted with Beyoncé. Burke lights up at the memory, delivering a blow-by-blow account. "I only found out about that less than 24 hours before. Simon [Cowell] gave me the call at midnight. He'd just secured the deal and said: 'Kid, we've got Beyoncé singing with you tomorrow.' I hung up the phone and then called him back to say: 'Sorry, babe, did you say Beyoncé?'

"When Beyoncé arrived, I walked in, I cried. I wasted all our rehearsal time crying. Her mum [Tina Knowles] cried. Cheryl [Cole] cried. Everyone's crying because I'm telling Beyoncé how much I love her."



With Beyoncé on The X Factor in December 2008. Photograph: Ken McKay/Shutterstock

Since then, she has met Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, whom she spoke to after singing at the Commonwealth Day service in Westminster Abbey last March. They both support the same charity, Smart Works (the duchess is patron, Burke an ambassador) and they were reported to have bonded at the service, which was the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's final official engagement before they left royal life. Does she feel the duchess was hounded out of the country by racism? "Look, when I sit and read certain things about her, as a black woman I *do* think they were racist comments. It's hurtful to read and you can only imagine how she felt. There are so many opinions out there about her and I feel like saying: 'Guys, leave the woman alone. Let her just be a mother and a wife.'"

Burke is in a relatively new relationship with Darren Randolph, the goalkeeper for West Ham. "I'm told I'm in safe hands," she says, saucily. Having watched the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy with him at home, she speaks ruefully of the onslaught of racism in its aftermath. "So much abuse. This is why I say it's a slow change and I don't know if it's going to completely change in our lifetime. That was just a few weeks ago when we saw monkey emojis and other horrendous abuse."

But all the while, there are gains – inches perhaps, but forward movement nonetheless. She recently had a thrilling moment on the set of Joseph, when talking to a child in the cast. “A little black girl asked me how long I had been the Narrator. I said this was my first time and that I was the first black woman to do it in the West End. She was flabbergasted by that and said: ‘So you’re telling me I could do this too?’

“It had me in tears and it reminded me that I was her once: a little girl with a dream who didn’t see what was possible for me because of my colour.”

Alexandra Burke is in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the London Palladium until 5 September. Tickets: josephthemusical.com

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Interview

‘They wanted my meerkat to sound like a Russian Alan Sugar’ – meet TV’s secret superstars

[Alex Mistlin](#)



Clockwise from top left ... Captain Saru; meerkat Aleksandr; the Prince of Wales; Wendy from Bob the Builder; Dipsy the teletubby. Composite: CBS/Alamy/Rex/Shutterstock/ BritBox/Avalon/PA/BBC

Clockwise from top left ... Captain Saru; meerkat Aleksandr; the Prince of Wales; Wendy from Bob the Builder; Dipsy the teletubby. Composite: CBS/Alamy/Rex/Shutterstock/ BritBox/Avalon/PA/BBC

They are TV's unsung heroes, adored yet unrecognised. But do voice artists and mask-wearers ever crave fame? From the man behind the meerkats to Star Trek's prosthetic-laden Captain Saru, we find out

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

A prolific career in TV means fame, right? Actually, the reality is often very different. Many great performances are delivered anonymously, either in a recording booth or under a mountain of prosthetics. That can lead to a strange sort of celebrity status: rubbing shoulders with screen legends on the red carpet one minute, shopping in Tesco without so much as a selfie request the next. So who are these unrecognisable TV icons? How do they bring their much-loved characters to life? And do they long for screaming fans?



Captain Saru from Star Trek and Doug Jones. Composite: CBS/ Bruce Smith

'I'm not sure how much more rubber I want in my life'

Doug Jones: plays Captain Saru, a Kelpien, in Star Trek: Discovery

When you say yes to playing something that doesn't look human, you're saying yes to the entire process. I don't get to shout: "Get this off me! It's so hot and sticky." I need the mindset of a performer, but also the endurance of an athlete, one who can take five or six hours of makeup application, then get through a long day of shooting.

Because of all the parts I've played, I often end up skipping the conventional casting process. People in creature effects just say: "It's a tall skinny alien – we need Doug Jones." I was playing the amphibian in the Oscar-winning film [The Shape of Water](#) when [Star Trek: Discovery](#) approached me. I was actually thinking "I'm not sure how much more rubber and glue I want in my life," but there was no way I could turn it down. For Saru, I wear a four-piece prosthetic over my head that comes down past my collarbones, with gloves to change my hands. It's all been moulded to my shape and pre-painted so getting it all glued on is only a two-hour process. I wear a Starfleet uniform like everybody else, but I do have special hoofed boots that add five inches to my height. That makes me about 6ft 8ins!

I just have to look in a mirror to know I'm not a romantic lead. For 35 years, my career has been about being either funny or scary. In my 20s, I was seeking fame. I would have loved to be on billboards and magazine covers, but I've grown to enjoy working under the radar. It's nice to be able to go to a coffee shop with a friend and nobody knows who I am. But then I can go to a red carpet event where they announce who you are and you can act like a celebrity, before going back to anonymity.



Wendy from Bob the Builder and Kate Harbour. Composite: PA/Courtesy: Kate Harbour

‘We knocked Westlife off the top of the charts’

Kate Harbour: voices Wendy and Dizzy in Bob the Builder

Bob the Builder wasn’t just a show to us. We believed in the characters and their message of reduce, reuse, recycle. Bob was selling recycling years before it was cool! Wendy, his business partner and love interest, was one of the first strong female characters in kids’ TV. It’s nice to know you’ve played a vital part in getting that message to so many people.

We knew we had something exciting, but no one had any idea how massive it was going to be. We even got the 2000 [Christmas No 1](#) with Can We Fix It? – knocking Westlife off the top of the charts. But the biggest pinch-yourself moment came when we recorded an album at Abbey Road. It was out of this world to be invited to such an iconic place for a show that, let’s face it, is about a builder banging nails in, a cement-mixer that talks, and a cat that goes “Miaow”.

I was at a gathering recently with a group of mums from the playground and they were talking about the vital work they do as teachers, nurses and social workers. I had a major wobble. I just thought: “What’s the point of me?” Weirdly, shortly after, I got this lovely fan letter that said: “Your little characters bring me so much joy.” And I thought: “That’s my purpose then? That can’t be half bad.”



Dipsy and John Simmit. Composite: Shutterstock

'It was like being stuck inside a letterbox'

John Simmit: plays Dipsy in Teletubbies

I was a relatively experienced standup when I auditioned for Teletubbies. [It was called Teleteddies back then](#) and hadn't even been commissioned. I was the only black person there and the oldest, too. So I stood out, which is a good thing. I was the first to be cast and I remember getting the train to the studio to try on this prototype suit innard that's best described as one of those joke sumo-wrestler outfits. It weighed three stone, had limited air and no peripheral vision. It was like being stuck inside a letterbox. The whole thing felt surreal.

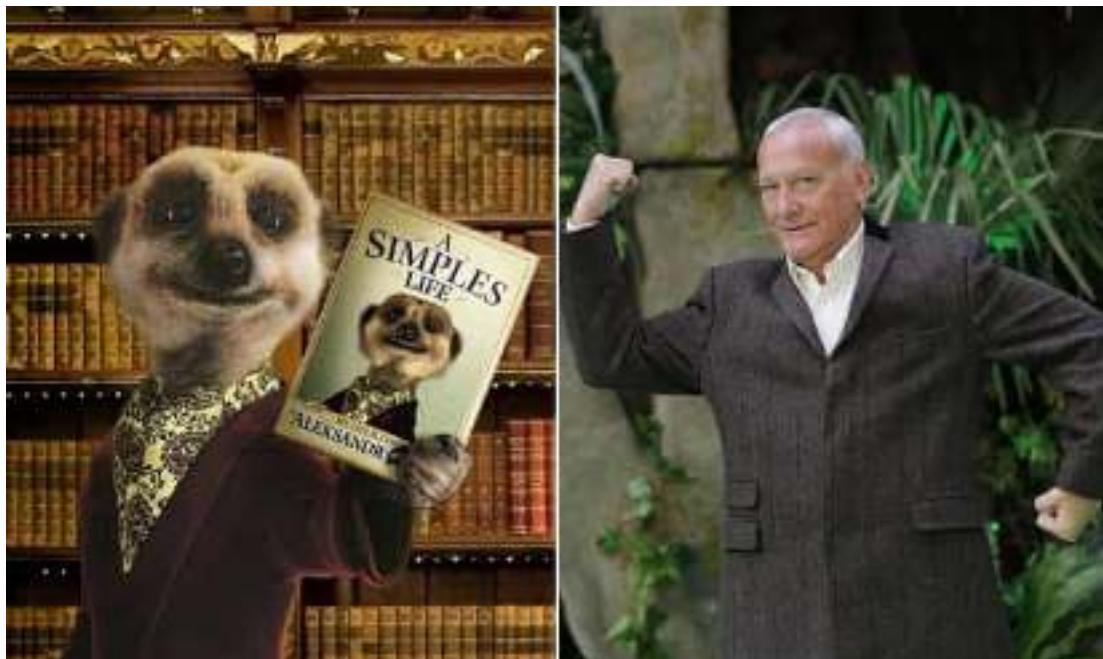
Rehearsals began at the end of 1995. That's when I met the other three teletubbies: Pui Fan Lee, an actor; Dave Thompson, a standup; Nikky Smedley, a dancer. We were given our character names, but we were encouraged to "bring ourselves" to the roles. Pui Fan has Chinese heritage and spoke in Cantonese on the show. I brought reggae to the part with things like Dipsy saying "Papa come papa come to Po," which is ripped straight from a classic reggae track called [The Whip](#). And I'd slip in Jamaican dance moves, a bogle here and a tatty there.

[How we made: Teletubbies](#)

[Read more](#)

If you look at Dipsy's face it was actually darker – nothing on the show was accidental. We filmed for six years before finishing in 2002. Five years later, the production company invited us out to dinner and said: "Would you like to go to America?" I thought: "How many gigs will pay me to spend a week in New York?" It was an amazing experience. We got the keys to the city: we went on the morning shows in New York and took pictures in costume outside the Statue of Liberty.

The show made a huge impact. People still talk about it. If I was hit by a bus, I know Teletubbies would be in the first line of my obituary. But being attached to such a phenomenon is no bad thing.



Meerkat Aleksandr and Simon Greenall. Composite: Rex/Shutterstock/Getty Images

'They wanted one meerkat to be a Russian Alan Sugar'

Simon Greenall: voices the meerkats in the Compare the Market adverts

I didn't speak until I was about six. Not a word. But when I started to speak, I could do different voices and accents. My dad was a garageman and was very good at engine noises, so it's an inherited skill. I didn't actually start acting until my late 20s, though, and was in my 50s when I began voicing the meerkats.

In the beginning, they wanted Aleksandr to be threatening, a tough-guy businessman like a Russian Alan Sugar, telling people: "Don't go to this site, go to that site." But I thought: "Well, he's an animal, he's little and funny." I took the pitch right up, but played it deadly serious and the effect is quite charming. That squeak he does at the end – I put that in for kids.

It's a strange career, voice acting, but voices don't know how lucky they are! It's good fun, well paid and you can become very good at it very quickly. We're like computers: you just feed in an idea like "a meerkat talking Russian" and we fire out a voice that fits.

My fanbase is made up of different age groups now. There's the meerkats, of course, but there's [the Octonauts](#), too. I play Captain Barnacles, the brave polar bear leader of these little creatures who go underwater. That show is educational and environmental. It's ultimately about kindness and citizenship.



Postman Pat and Lewis MacLeod. Composite: Cosgrove Hall Films/Alamy

‘There I was on the set of The Phantom Menace’

Lewis MacLeod: voices Postman Pat and, on Spitting Image, Prince Charles, Matt Hancock and more

As well as Postman Pat, I play two other characters: Alf the farmer and Ben Taylor, who runs the delivery office. I also sing the theme tune, which I’m chuffed about. I got to meet Prince Charles and he said: “So you’re Postman Pat? What does he sound like?” I replied: “Hello, Mrs Goggins!”

I’ve always been obsessed with audio and it’s got me on some huge projects. Voicing the vicious podracer Sebulba in The Phantom Menace was amazing. As a kid, I would build Star Wars sets out of Coke bottles and papier-mache. And there I was on set taking notes from George Lucas.

As I got into satirical comedy on shows like Spitting Image, I found myself having to master politicians, from Alex Salmond to Nigel Farage. David Cameron was very difficult and I just couldn’t get Trump – until I saw an interview where he noticeably softened his voice. My early impersonation was oddly reminiscent of Alec Baldwin in [Glengarry Glen Ross](#).



Ashley Ailes, a contestant on The Weakest Link, and the show's voice, Jon Briggs. Composite: NBCU Photo Bank/Getty Images/Katie Vandyck

'We paved the way for other quiz shows'

Jon Briggs: best known for narrating The Weakest Link and [voicing British Siri](#)

When I was asked to be the voice of a BBC Two daytime quiz show, my initial reaction was: "Oh God, another nail in the coffin of my career." I had no idea it would turn into this behemoth that paved the way for other quiz shows. The biggest one is probably Pointless. They've ridden on our coat-tails ever since.

We started in 2000. One of the reasons it was successful was that it was the only thing on during the Olympics that wasn't sport. People who can't stand sport were desperate for something else to watch. I did all 13 years. That's 1,875 episodes. There were only two I didn't do: a Eurovision special where they got Terry Wogan, and an Apprentice special which I've never understood to this day.

I have the performer gene. I like being on stage and I'm happy being the centre of attention, but I soon realised I was nowhere near good enough to be an actor. In the end, I went into radio because I absolutely loved it. My A-level grades were crap because I spent every waking moment when I wasn't in school down at the local radio station. If you told me that I'd be making money from my voice 40 years later, I would have said you were barmy.



Kate and her dog Gin on Britain's Got Talent and Peter Dickson, the show's voiceover. Composite: Talkback Thames

'Any career in entertainment is a rollercoaster'

Peter Dickson: voice of The X Factor and Britain's Got Talent

I have never wanted fame, fortune and recognition. I still don't. I've been close to many well-known stars and witnessed how fame can destroy people. I've never wanted that. A lot of people want to be famous without actually having any skills: fame is the end product they desire. I've never understood that. I have no regrets about working on The X Factor or Britain's Got Talent: they're entertainment shows and genuinely give people an opportunity to showcase their talent. It's what goes on afterwards that can be the problem.

[How do I become ... a voiceover artist](#)

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Any career in entertainment is a rollercoaster. Look at Bruce Forsyth, who I worked with for many years on The Price Is Right. There was a period after The Generation Game where he couldn't get booked for anything. He was largely forgotten until being rediscovered by a new generation. I've done

voice work on everything from lifts and bin lorries to cinema booking systems, which is probably why people recognise my voice all the time but never know where from! It's been 43 years and I've loved every second.

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Harder borders are a legacy of Covid we should reject

[Nesrine Malik](#)

Rules driven more by politics than Covid are taking a heavy emotional toll on families around the world



Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Mon 9 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

Moira Hunt hasn't seen her mother in over 18 months. Hunt and her husband, Shane, live in the UK but are from Australia, where Moira's mother is about to be admitted to hospital. In her 70s, she has had to cope with the pandemic and her own illness without her daughter by her side. Shane has also, despite a family crisis, been unable to go back to Sydney to see his father and relatives.

Moira and Shane can go home, but would need to shell out £10,000 each for plane tickets, and then another A\$3,000 (£1,600) for hotel quarantine, even though they are fully vaccinated. As of last Friday, they also have to prove that they have a “compelling reason” to travel. Shane can just about stomach the separation, but the unfairness of the financial element has made it a bitter pill to swallow. “If you have disposable income and disposable time, if you aren’t a normal everyday member of the public, you’re fine. When you realise it all comes down to money, it becomes harder to accept. It makes the emotional toll even harder to bear.”

You will hear a different version of this story in most countries across the world. Border closures, strict and expensive quarantine rules, and costly airline tickets have effectively trapped millions since the beginning of the pandemic. The conditions these people are in, and any support they have access to, depends entirely on where they were when the music stopped. Some were trapped visiting their families, so they were saved from being separated, but then had to navigate the stress of losing jobs or academic places due to their absence. Migrant workers in the Gulf laid off during the pandemic are stuck indefinitely without income or rights to benefits. Families with roots and branches between western countries and their red-listed nations across Africa, South America and Asia are split by lack of flights and lack of resources.

[Brexit and Covid have created the perfect moment for the politics of crackdown | John Harris](#)

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The result is a global loss of life milestones – weddings, births, graduations. Also lost are the little things that accumulate into heavy burdens – the first steps of a first grandchild, the bloom of a new relationship frozen by distance at the start of the pandemic. Not knowing the scale of what was in store has made it all harder to cope with. When sharing stories of my own separations with others in a similar situation, the one thing we all had in common was the fact that it crept up on us.

When the first restrictions started in March 2020, we assumed it was going to be a short, sharp bout of pain, before things reverted to normal. Many even booked travel tickets, then rebooked and rebooked, before giving up.

“We spent most of 2020 second-guessing,” Shane told me, but now “we’ve had to give up that sense of: well, maybe Christmas, maybe in the new year, maybe we’ll make the next round of birthdays”. If anything, it has been 2021 that has heralded the most severe and complex travel and quarantine restrictions.

Trying to figure out how to meet quarantine and travel requirements and save money feels like playing snakes and ladders – one right move will advance you another few steps, and one wrong move sends you hurtling back to square one. Every stage reveals another layer of complexity, another tier in a privilege hierarchy that this pandemic has sharpened. At the top of the pyramid sit the holders of “high-value passports” who don’t need visas to travel to most places and who live in countries with high vaccination rates. At the bottom are those who live in countries with no access to vaccines in the foreseeable future. Political conflict also plays its part: when Egypt was placed on Britain’s red list earlier this year, UK-based Palestinians visiting Gaza were trapped, as Egypt is the only port of entry and exit.



Relatives embrace at Heathrow’s terminal 5 last week. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

These are tolls to be added to the others we have all paid in the past 18 months. Like the other policies we have become accustomed to, from wearing masks to social distancing, there are justifications for travel restrictions. Most of them stem from scientific modelling and an abundance of caution – a reasonable mixture to follow in a pandemic. If we are to minimise the spread of the virus it makes sense to limit movement, within countries and between them. But it's becoming clear that, in many cases, such policies are not being revised in line with the progress made in reducing infection and rolling out vaccinations. Something murkier is afoot. It's hard to shake the impression that there is a desire not to return to normal rates of ebb and flow, but to use this opportunity to make it permanently harder to move around, particularly if your starting point is in the global south.

The bluntness of this enforcement reaches even those who have been vaccinated, some of whom still cannot easily return home to countries with strict travel measures. They are collateral damage in a display of quarantine theatre. Rigid border rules reassure domestic audiences that the problem is external, which provides a false sense of security when virus management at home is poor. At various points over the past year, the US and the UK banned entry from countries with far lower infection rates than their own.

Border regimes in general, and western ones in particular, are built to be inflexible. They run on the principle, “if in doubt, keep out”. In a pandemic, these large, lumbering bureaucracies are incapable of the modulation and nuance required to create fair, sensible mechanisms. The outcome is a crude and cruel system that has relegated the human toll of separation to the bottom of government priority lists.

And despite the universal pain of these policies, there is little political pressure on governments to revise them. Toughening up borders is a popular measure at the best of times, let alone when we are told virus variants are at the gates. While people might demand easier access to their favourite holiday destinations, there's no political capital to be gained in loosening restrictions for less glamorous places, ones associated in the popular imagination with poverty and migration inflows.

With this inbuilt inertia, another threat looms – separation without end. “Living with the virus”, in the familiar phrase, might mean a world in which reuniting with friends and family is a perk, rather than a right. This is not a return to “normal”. It is the hoarding of it.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion Vaccines and immunisation

Here's why your efforts to convince anti-vaxxers aren't working

[Brooke Harrington](#)

People don't listen to outsiders. They need enlightened insiders to offer them a ladder to climb down



A protest in London against vaccine passports, 24 July 2021. Photograph: Jack Dredd/REX/Shutterstock

A protest in London against vaccine passports, 24 July 2021. Photograph: Jack Dredd/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 9 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

What should we do about people who refuse to get vaccinated, or who continue to deny that Covid is real? Debate on this issue has raged for months in the US. “[Respect them!](#)” scolded conservative commentators. “[Shame them!](#)” urged some. Others counselled [empathy](#) for them as [victims](#) of disinformation.

But as the surging Delta variant ushers in the “[pandemic of the unvaccinated](#)”, uncertainty about persuading pandemic holdouts has given way to anger and despair. This was exemplified by the recent public reaction to a [viral news video](#) showing a Louisiana man recovering from a severe Covid-19 infection in a hospital bed, stating that he would still rather have had to be in hospital than accept a vaccine. It was the first time many of us saw the human face of a puzzling phenomenon which healthcare workers have been telling us about since last year: patients [denying the realities](#) of the virus even as they lay sick and dying from it.

As Leo Tolstoy famously asked of another seemingly hopeless social problem – poverty – “what then must we do?” The sociology of fraud, one of my [research specialties](#) for the past decade, offers some answers.

In 1952, the sociologist Erving Goffman analysed the art of the con in a seminal essay, [On Cooling the Mark Out](#). To understand the phenomenon, he identified a cast of characters: first, the “operator”, who perpetrates the con; second, the “mark”, the target of the con; and third, the “cooler”, an ally of the con artist who attempts to console the victim once the fraud has become apparent “in a way that makes it easy for him to accept the inevitable and quietly go home”.

Goffman observed that all “marks” eventually come to understand that they have been defrauded. But strangely, they almost never complain or report the crime to the authorities. Why? Because, Goffman argues, admitting that you have been conned is so deeply shameful that “marks” experience it as a kind of social death – the painful end of one of the many social roles we all play.

[Contempt for the unvaccinated is a temptation to be resisted | Dan Brooks](#)
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Instead, many “marks” simply deny the con, claiming they were “in on it” the whole time. This saves their pride and cheats social death, but it allows the con to continue unchecked, entrapping others. By prioritising their self-image over the common good, “marks” make a cowardly, selfish choice. Goffman doesn’t shrink from calling this out as a “moral failure”.

In 2021, this “moral failure” takes the form of Covid-infected pandemic deniers and anti-vaxxers ranting from hospital beds: they have chosen saving face over saving other people’s lives. They could do this by telling the truth and exposing the con, saying: “Covid is real, get vaccinated.” [Some do](#). But many won’t. It’s difficult not to conclude that some are making a conscious choice to protect themselves socially and emotionally at the expense of the rest of us.

Goffman’s work suggests two parallel strategies for dealing with people who have committed themselves to false ideas. The first is to let them experience the shame of what he terms “social death”. But the second, and perhaps the more productive, is to identify and deploy “coolers” to coax the pandemic holdouts back into the fold of mainstream society.

The most effective “coolers” are figures that the “marks” trust, people whose opinion they value. Most people aren’t interested in earning the good opinion of just anyone. Rather, we care about status and “face” within specific communities that matter to us, what two other sociologists of the mid-20th century, Herbert Hyman and Robert Merton, called “[reference groups](#)”.

Everyone belongs to multiple reference groups, many of which overlap, including their families, neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces, and their political affiliations. These groups not only structure our social networks, but serve a gatekeeping function: we generally trust information gleaned from our reference group, and seek approval from others within it.

Covid deniers and anti-vaxxers are just like everyone else in this regard: they don’t crave validation or seek information from *everyone*. This is why the “respect them”, “shame them” and “empathise with them” approaches haven’t worked and won’t change a thing. Respect, shame and empathy only have currency and impact within specific social networks; so, too, with the trustworthiness of information. For someone who considers themselves part of the “[Fox Nation](#)” reference group, pandemic precautions recommended by the “lamestream media” are to be disregarded. But if the same information were to come from Sean Hannity or Tucker Carlson, it would probably be taken far more seriously.

From a purely pragmatic perspective, it's good news for everyone that some influential [conservative figures](#) are beginning to act as "coolers" in relation to pandemic holdouts by encouraging vaccination – even if the "coolers" have often been, as in Goffman's theory, complicit in the con. The call back to reality has to come from inside the house.

But there are still too few Fox News hosts and Republican politicians encouraging vaccination, masking and other Covid precautions. We need more "coolers" – and we need them quickly.

One way to do this is by seeking out *other* reference groups besides the big ones in media and politics, ones that matter to pandemic deniers and anti-vaxxers. Social media, as damaging as it has been in spreading disinformation, also makes it relatively straightforward to identify and sometimes to join groups that foment anti-vax sentiment.

Within those groups, we can pinpoint influential members who may be turning their backs on Covid denialism, and encourage them in their journey. We can message them offering support, particularly if our reference groups overlap – whether that means sharing the same home town, or practising the same faith. The more shared social space, the better. We might offer to back them up if they get trolled for expressing misgivings about Covid denialism. Or we could let them know that we would admire them for telling the truth.

Those people may not have a television audience of millions, but they nonetheless have the potential to act as "coolers" for those in their reference groups – both online and off. The higher their status within the groups, the more influence they will have in reconciling their fellow travellers to the reality of the pandemic, perhaps enabling them to rejoin society, or at least preventing them from endangering the rest of us.

- Brooke Harrington is professor of sociology at Dartmouth College
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OpinionTrees and forests

The gift we should give to the living world? Time, and lots of it

George Monbiot



Planting 10 saplings does not replace a twisted old oak. ‘Slow ecology’ is the only way to preserve and restore ancient habitats



Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor National Park, where many oaks are more than 500 years old. Photograph: ASC Photography/Alamy

Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor National Park, where many oaks are more than 500 years old. Photograph: ASC Photography/Alamy

Sun 8 Aug 2021 09.00 EDT

We have a slow food movement and a slow travel movement. But we're missing something, and its absence contributes to our escalating crisis. We need a slow ecology movement, and we need it fast.

The majority of the world's species [cannot withstand](#) any significant disruption of their habitat by humans. Healthy ecosystems depend to a great extent on old and gnarly places, that might take centuries to develop, and are rich in what ecologists call "spatial heterogeneity": complex natural architecture. They need, for example, giant trees, whose knotty entrails are split and rotten; [great reefs](#) of coral or oysters or honeycomb worms; braiding, meandering rivers full of snags and beaver dams; undisturbed soils reamed by roots and holes. The loss of these ancient habitats is one of the factors driving the global shift from large, slow-growing creatures to the small, short-lived species able to survive our [onslaughts](#). Slow ecology would protect and create our future ancient habitats.

At the moment, we're going in the opposite direction. Self-serving nonsense cooked up by governments and their advisers, such as "[natural capital accounting](#)" and "[biodiversity net gain](#)" treat one habitat or feature as exchangeable for another. Don't lament the twisted old oak we're felling: we'll plant 10 saplings in plastic rabbit guards in its place. Then we'll call it a "net gain".

But there's no substitute for an ancient tree, or an ancient anything else. Big old trees are the "[keystone structures](#)" of forests, on which many other species depend. The very trees that foresters have tended to weed out – forked, twisted, lightning-struck, rotten, dead – are those that harbour the most life. For example, a single species of [bracket fungus](#), which grows on rotten branches (dryad's saddle), harbours 246 species of beetle.

[Planting trees is only a good news story if it's done right | Bibi van der Zee](#)
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Bats shelter in splits in the trunk. Forks hold tiny pools of water or pockets of soil. Jagged wounds where limbs have sheared, burrs and excrescences, scrapes from which resin bubbles, ivy, vines, lichens and mosses, tangles of twigs and derelict nests, peeling bark and fire scars are all crucial [wildlife habitats](#). But the most important features of ancient trees – and many other habitats – are holes.

Between 10% and 40% of the world's forest birds and mammals need [holes in trees](#) in which to nest or roost. Many [other animals](#) – amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates – depend on them. But these species suffer from a void of voids, an absence of absences.

Holes take many forms: hollow trunks or branches, galleries mined by insects, cavities dug by woodpeckers. Woodpeckers are keystone species, whose tunnelling [makes homes](#) for other nesting birds and mammals. They appear to spread [fungal spores](#) on their beaks in the same way that bees spread pollen, and this helps create the soft wood into which they can drill. The trees they need are big, old and [rotten](#).

But almost everywhere, trees like this are disappearing. Research in [Poland](#), France, [Scandinavia](#), the Balkans and the [Carpathians](#) shows that forests

unmanaged by people have far greater numbers of crucial features than even those whose trees are harvested in the most sensitive ways. In [France](#), for example, the number of broken forks increased by nearly 300% in the 50 years since forests were last harvested, and holes made by woodpeckers by 500%.

A study in [Australia](#) showed that, following a major wildfire, the great majority of trees with holes were wiped out. It will take up to 120 years without further disturbance for their full ecological complexity to recover.

[The Great Barrier Reef is a victim of climate change – but it could be part of the solution | Peter Thomson and Ove Hoegh-Guldberg](#)

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Our [tidy-minded forestry](#) and our habit of treating trees as interchangeable are devastating to wildlife. “Replacing” an old tree is no more meaningful than replacing an old master. The same applies to all ecosystems. When a trawler ploughs through biological structures on the seabed, they can take hundreds of years to fully recover. When a river is dredged and straightened, it becomes, by comparison to what it once was, an empty shell.

So what would a slow ecology movement look like? As Henry David Thoreau said, we are rich in proportion to the number of things we can afford to let alone. To the greatest extent possible, we should allow our complex natural architectures to recover. This means keeping trawlers out of all the places farcically listed as “marine protected areas”, most of which are nothing but [lines on the map](#). It would mean, in nature reserves, less reliance on grazing by livestock, which tend to keep living systems in a state of arrested development. It would mean letting rivers run free.

Wherever possible, we should allow the trees killed by ash dieback and other diseases to remain standing. If one good thing arises from these plagues, it could be an increase in the amount of standing and fallen dead wood, both of which are crucial habitats. “Salvage logging” – removing dead or [dying trees](#) – is one of the most damaging human activities. Perhaps it also means a general preservation order for all trees, living or dead, greater than 100 years old: you would need express permission to fell one. It would mean a new and deeper respect for the entanglements of nature.

We need to create today the knurled and wizened ecosystems that only our grandchildren will see. Restoring the living world means restoring complexity, and complexity takes ages to develop. So it's time we began.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
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New York City, I've been taking you for granted

[Emma Brockes](#)



It's the second summer of alternative plans, and the city's parks, libraries and pools suddenly seem remarkable



Little Island, a new public park in the Hudson river, New York City.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Little Island, a new public park in the Hudson river, New York City.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sun 8 Aug 2021 10.00 EDT

The rules of New York City's public swimming pools are stringent: no flotation aids, no coloured T-shirts, no food, no diving – and, most remarkably in this city of punitive cost, no charge. For the space of the summer, the 50-odd outdoor pools across the city's five boroughs provide relief and recreation for thousands of New Yorkers – and something more nebulous, too. The locker rooms might be shabby, but every few years, when a local news outlet tests the water in a cross section of pools, the results are deeply satisfying and often the same. While the water in the city's most expensive hotel pools is discovered to be teeming with germs, [the public pools](#) are almost always sparklingly clean.

This reminder of how good public services in the city can be feels particularly pertinent this summer, the second in a row of altered plans. If last year was the summer of reduced expectations – no one expected to go anywhere and made alternative local arrangements – this year is much choppier, with Covid rules changing seemingly every five minutes and travel

plans being repeatedly cancelled. As a result, and by default, many of us have ended up doing something we might not have done for years, which is spending August in the city. [New York](#), famously hostile to life in the summer, is suddenly a great place to be.

Some of this has to do with our own changed expectations. In previous years, one of the perceived advantages of August in the city was its relative emptiness. It doesn't appear empty, now, which after 18 months of speculation about whether [the city](#) is “over” [or not](#), feels like cause for celebration. Where tourists got underfoot and made every experience in the city infinitely worse, this year queueing up outside the Museum of Natural History with a crowd of out-of-towners in roughly pre-Covid numbers brings on only gratitude and nostalgia. Last year the kids and I went up the Empire State Building and were the only ones there, a thrilling – and chilling – experience. This year, at the museum, everyone’s in masks and a stressed steward is shouting, but it is still a glimpse of the back-to-normality that most of us crave.

Other small reopenings elevate to the status of novelty latterly unremarkable things. The library reopens for browsing, and it's frankly amazing to be able to roam the shelves and let the kids run down the aisles, pulling out books on a whim. Downtown, [the High Line](#) raised park reopens – a relatively sedate outing for two six-year-olds, but it's a novel experience in a year of grinding repetition, and from the kids' reactions you'd think we were visiting Disneyland. The same goes for a walk round [Little Island](#), the new “floating park” propped up on stilts in the Hudson. Meanwhile, the water taxi to Brooklyn blows everyone’s minds.

Behind all these experiences is a reminder of something you can go years in New York without giving much thought to, which is the value of public space. Before Covid, I'd given little consideration to this aspect of the city since my children were babies, when I longed for somewhere to sit that didn't rest on a commercial transaction. In those days, I would push the double stroller to Lincoln Center and sit staring at the reflection pool, with its Henry Moore statue parked squarely in the middle, and have intense, nerdy thoughts about architecture. I remembered something the architect [Renzo Piano](#) had said to me years earlier, in an amazing tirade about the difference between a piazza and a plaza. (“A piazza is not a plaza,” he said,

furiously. “The plaza is the theme park of the piazza; the plaza is the commercial version. A piazza is an empty space with no function. This is what Europeans understand.”)

The urban planners of New York understood this, too – that, as Piano said, “you don’t have to struggle to give function to every single corner. You can just wait and see and enjoy”. Last Tuesday, we met a couple who had recently moved to New York from Los Angeles for a playdate in the park. It was weird adjusting to not using a car, they said, and figuring out the subway was taking a moment. The thing that most amazed them, however, was the density of experience that came simply from moving through public space in the city. “You don’t have to do anything to *do* something,” they said, and I felt a shock of recognition at something I’d taken for granted to the point of disparagement.

This weekend we did what we’ve been doing every weekend this summer: went to the pool, biked to the park and wandered the city, waiting, seeing, enjoying.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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Major coup for Taliban as fighters take Afghan city of Kunduz

Insurgent group seizes important political and military hub as pro-government forces retreat



Shops after fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

Shops after fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

[Akhtar Mohammad Makoii](#) in Herat and [Luke Harding](#)

Sun 8 Aug 2021 17.49 EDT

The Taliban have claimed a huge symbolic victory after their fighters seized a large city for the first time in northern [Afghanistan](#) as part of a seemingly unstoppable offensive in which they have captured five provincial capitals in just three days.

Armed men swept into Kunduz on Sunday, a strategic city close to the border with Tajikistan and an important political and military hub. By mid-morning they controlled the city centre while pro-government forces retreated to the nearby airport. Residents [fled as smoke from the city's burning market engulfed the sky.](#)

Videos posted by Taliban fighters showed the city's [abandoned police compound](#), complete with cars and its [main security](#) and [intelligence buildings](#) intact. "The enemy left behind vehicles, weapons and equipment," tweeted the Taliban's spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, promising further advances.

د کندز ولایت امنیه قومندان د مجاہدینو په بشپړ کنټرول کې ده
مزدور د بینمن شپږل شوی او
مجاہدین په کې فعال او ثابت حضور لري pic.twitter.com/hTEi16WIev

— Zabihullah (@Zabehulah_M33) [August 8, 2021](#)

On Sunday, the [Taliban](#) also overwhelmed the provincial capital of Sar-e Pol and the city of Taloqan. Before communications in Taloqan were cut off, a senior local official spoke of intense street-to-street fighting.

"Taliban fighters are some 200 meters away," the official said. "It is possible that the city will fall as the security forces could not hold the lines. No help arrived from Kabul yet." Officials later confirmed the city had been captured by the Taliban.

Of the five provincial capitals to have fallen since Friday, the northern city of Kunduz was by far the most significant gain for the Taliban. Previously, the insurgents entered the city in 2015 and again in 2016, but were unable to hold it either time.

Kunduz was also the [scene of the Taliban's surrender in 2001](#), when its northern army together with [foreign fighters](#) abandoned their weapons in the wake of the US-UK led invasion. The Biden administration's decision in May to withdraw American troops two decades on from what it regards as an unwinnable war, prompted a precipitous collapse in security and a rampant Taliban offensive across the country.

"Kunduz provincial capital fell into the hands of Taliban at around 10am this morning," a local official said by phone. "Kunduz city has been under Taliban attack for the past two months. They intensified their attacks from several directions on the city on Friday. They totally captured it today."

[Map of Afghanistan.](#)

According to the official, the Taliban began their main attack at about 5am on Sunday after the insurgents received reinforcements from neighbouring areas including Jawsjan province. The Taliban [captured Sheberghan, the provincial capital of Jawzjan province on Saturday](#). The city was a stronghold of the notorious Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum. On Friday, the Taliban overran the south-western financial hub of Zaranj.

"The heaviest clashes were for the intelligence and police headquarters and local governor compound," another local official in Kunduz said. "The security officials fought with them, and then retreated toward the airport. Several bodyguards of the local governor were killed when the compound was hit by mortars."

The Taliban have seized control of much of rural [Afghanistan](#) since international forces began the last stage of their withdrawal in early May. The Taliban are now besieging more than a dozen more provincial capitals.

A spokesman for the Taliban's political office told Al Jazeera on Sunday that there was no agreement on a ceasefire with the Afghan government, and warned against further US intervention in the country.

Government forces withdrew on Sunday from Sar-e Pol, the capital of a northern province of the same name. Security forces along with the local police commander and governor retreated to an army post on the outskirts.

By afternoon, this was under heavy Taliban fire. The insurgent group [posted video](#) claiming the situation inside the city was now back to normal.

“Sar-e Pol city fell to the Taliban this morning and now it’s under Taliban control. They now have control over the wider Sar-e Pol province,” a local said. “The local police commander and governor along with some forces have retreated to an army post in the outskirts of the city, which is also under Taliban attack now. We are now concerned about the situation of people in the city.”

“They [the Taliban] started their assault on the city last night. The attack came from several directions. They overran the provincial capital at around 9am this morning. The very first thing they did was to break into the prison and release the inmates,” the official said.

With most US and other western soldiers now gone, the Pentagon has sought to halt the Taliban’s advance using air power. The defence ministry in Kabul confirmed that the US launched airstrikes on Saturday night to support the beleaguered Afghan military in the city of Sheberghan.

“The Taliban was targeted by a B-52 in Sheberghan city, Jawzjan, at 6.30pm on Saturday. The terrorists have suffered heavy casualties as a result of a US air forces airstrike,” said Fawad Aman, the deputy spokesman for the defence ministry.

Local residents in Kunduz and Sar-e Pol said the insurgents were freely patrolling with captured Humvees in downtown areas and that many people had already fled.

Latif, a resident, said: “The situation in Sar-e Pol city is devastating. There were heavy clashes overnight and in the morning we had a new ruler. They took over the city in the morning and are now freely riding on their motorbikes in the city. People are terrified. I can tell you that half of the city’s population had already fled their homes. Some people are out. There is sporadic gunfire in this corner of the city.”

In Kunduz, residents said several shops caught fire after they were targeted by mortars. One, Jamal, said: “The entire city of Kunduz is burning at this

moment. Many shops caught fire and a shadow of panic and fear hangs over the city. Many people fled to other areas, even to areas under Taliban control to escape from the war. Most families have one member remaining in their house to look after the properties.”

Fighting also continued elsewhere in Afghanistan as Taliban combatants advanced towards the provincial capital of Samangan on Sunday afternoon. Intense fighting was also under way in parts of the economically important western city of Herat on Saturday night.

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Afghanistan could become terrorist base again, UK general warns

Sir Richard Barrons says withdrawal of western troops a 'strategic mistake' as Taliban make territorial gains



Afghans inspect damaged shops after fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

Afghans inspect damaged shops after fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

[Ben Quinn](#)
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Sun 8 Aug 2021 13.13 EDT

Afghanistan could once again become a base for international terrorism, according to a former senior UK military commander who has described the withdrawal of western troops as a “strategic mistake”.

As the Taliban continued to make sweeping territorial gains, Gen Sir Richard Barrons warned that attacks in Europe could be the outcome of groups re-establishing themselves in the country.

“I don’t believe it’s in our own interest – in making that decision to leave we’ve not only, I think, sold the future of Afghanistan into a very difficult place, we’ve also sent a really unfortunate message to the west’s allies in the Gulf and Africa and Asia,” he told BBC Radio 4’s The World This Weekend.



Sir Richard Barrons said the withdrawal of British troops suggested ‘we don’t have the stomach to see these things through’. Photograph: Harland Quarrington/MoD/Crown Copyright/PA

The former head of UK joint forces command, which linked the air force, Royal Navy and army, was speaking as three more regional capitals in Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, bringing the number to have fallen since Friday to five.

In their most significant gain, [armed militants swept into Kunduz on Sunday](#), a strategic city close to the border with Tajikistan and an important political and military hub.

Barrons said that the withdrawal suggested that “we don’t have the stomach to see these things through and we would rather leave than ensure that a humanitarian or political crisis doesn’t occur”.

“We will run the risk of terrorist entities re-establishing in Afghanistan to bring harm in Europe and elsewhere. So I think this is a very poor strategic outcome,” he added.

Warnings about the potential terror threat to Britain and other states were echoed by Tory MP Tobias Ellwood, chair of the Commons defence committee, who used a column in the Mail on Sunday to condemn what he described as a “shabby withdrawal” that was “abandoning the country to the very insurgency that drew us there in the first place”.

“Unless we wake up to the reality of what is taking place, Afghanistan might once again become a terror state. This, remember, is the country that brought us 9/11,” he wrote.

Ellwood, a military veteran, called for the retention of a 5,000-strong coalition assistance force with sufficient ground, air and intelligence support to give the Afghan army the edge over the Taliban.

A UK government spokesperson said: “We recognise that the security situation in Afghanistan is serious, and reports of the escalating violence are extremely disturbing.

“We do not believe there is any military solution to Afghanistan’s conflict, and call on the Taliban to end their campaign of violence and engage in meaningful dialogue with the Afghan government.”

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New movement of religious extremists push ultra-conservative vision in US



A Mormon missionary in Salt Lake City. The conduct of 'Deseret nationalists' has raised questions about how the Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is responding to the movement.
Photograph: Wong Maye-E/AP

A Mormon missionary in Salt Lake City. The conduct of 'Deseret nationalists' has raised questions about how the Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is responding to the movement.
Photograph: Wong Maye-E/AP

Members of 'Deseret nationalist' movement accused of harassing other Mormons and posting racist material on social media

[Jason Wilson](#)

@jason_a_w

Mon 9 Aug 2021 07.45 EDT

A new group of religious extremists in the United States is seeking to promote and defend an ultra-conservative vision of Mormon belief and harass perceived opponents of those beliefs, which are often racist and bigoted or promote violence.

The conduct of so-called “Deseret nationalists” or “DezNats” has raised questions about how the Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is responding to the movement, whose members direct harassment at other Mormons, including those working in church-sponsored institutions such as Brigham Young University (BYU).

Some who identify as DezNats take extreme right positions on gender, sexuality and race. Others describing themselves as Deseret nationalists have advocated for a Mormon-ruled, separatist white ethnostate, located in the Great Basin area briefly claimed by the LDS church in the mid-19th century.

The Guardian’s recent exposure of an assistant attorney general in Alaska – who had posted racist and violent tweets on a DezNat Twitter account – led to that official stepping down from his job. But it also prompted concern about how many DezNat supporters occupy positions of authority across the US.

Last weekend, an anonymous antifascist collective called “DezNat Exposed” published a blogpost alleging that a prominent DezNat account, [@extradeadjcb](#), an associated Substack newsletter and a previous, suspended account, [@jcbonthedl](#), was under the control of Kevin Dolan.

Dolan, who claims on his LinkedIn profile to have US government security clearance, was employed since January by consultancy firm Booz Allen Hamilton as a senior data scientist. The company has extensive contracts with US military and intelligence agencies and has been [labeled](#) “the world’s most profitable spy organization”.

The [blogpost](#) identifying Dolan details not only racist, antisemitic and homophobic posts made from the Twitter accounts, but the links between him and the accounts, which include archived posts from previous incarnations of his blogs and Twitter accounts, which point to his personal Facebook and Twitter pages.

Dolan did not immediately respond to repeated requests for comment on the blogpost, sent both to his professional and private email accounts.

A spokesperson for Booz Allen Hamilton issued a statement saying that company policy prevented any specific discussion of employees, but that “Booz Allen is guided by our firm’s purpose and values and hold all of our employees to those same tenets”. The statement added: “Booz Allen strongly condemns supremacy groups of all kinds.”

In a subsequent statement, the spokesperson said that “Kevin Dolan is no longer an employee of Booz Allen.”

The most recent identification has contributed to a sense that the DezNat movement, whose members often defend the hashtag associated with the group as a simple marker of orthodox LDS belief, is in fact a rallying cry for activists – some of whom are in positions of real world influence – who seek to meld conservative [Mormonism](#) with white nationalism and other strands of far-right doctrine.

Last month, Matthias Cicotte, after being identified by the Guardian as the operator of the prominent DezNat twitter account @JReubenClark, left his job at the Alaska department of law (DoL) after over nine years working there, most recently as chief corrections counsel.

The Guardian’s investigation showed that the Twitter account, under Cicotte’s control, had advocated antisemitic conspiracy theories, anti-Black and anti-Latino prejudices and anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ sentiments.

In a statement emailed to reporters, DoL head and Alaska attorney general Treg Taylor – himself a member of the LDS church – said that “although we cannot talk about personnel matters, we do not want the values and policies

of the department of law to be overshadowed by the conduct of one individual”.

Earlier, between the initial revelations about Cicotte and his departure from the DoL, Taylor had sent an all-staff email that he did not “share or condone the personal views espoused by the subject Twitter handle or in other posts using #Deznat”.

[Amy Chapman](#), a researcher at Teachers College, Columbia University, who has carried out research on the DezNat hashtag and the movement around it, said that while the movement was not as large as other, more secular far-right groups, it had extensive “real world effects” on those whom the movement targeted.

The movement and DezNat Twitter hashtag unites a loose collection of ultra-conservative Mormon activists.

In the past, as well as on public social media platforms, members of the movement have [reportedly](#) gathered in a private chat using the Discord service, where members freely exchanged “violent, racist, homophobic and sexist remarks”.

Some DezNats have denied that the movement nurtures prejudice, including Gregory Smith, who is running for city council in Ogden, Utah, [reportedly](#) has sympathies with the DezNat movement and has repeatedly used the hashtag.

But Chapman said she had long observed the account now revealed as Cicotte’s, and “the thing that struck me the most about the account was its negative attitude towards women and LGBTQ people”, adding that misogyny, homophobia and transphobia are recurring motifs in DezNat discourse.

Often, DezNat accounts claim to be defending the LDS church from advances in the status of women and LGBTQ people in secular society, the effects of which they see as corrupting.

This has led to campaigns of harassment against perceived adversaries, who are overwhelmingly either former members of the church or those perceived as members with progressive social attitudes.

In particular, their ire has been directed at perceived progressives who occupy positions inside church-run institutions such as LDS-sponsored BYU, and are often considered apostates by DezNats.

A member of the faculty at BYU whose identity is being protected for reasons of personal safety told the Guardian that DezNats had weaponized elements of Mormon doctrine in efforts to harass and threaten the employment of people who worked at the university.

That harassment had gone beyond social media mobbing and efforts to have people fired, and crossed over into direct, in-person action. One DezNat aligned activist visited BYU'S Salt Lake City campus to leave photographs of aborted fetuses on the doors of faculty members.

That incident led to the involvement of BYU's police department.

The victims of these campaigns, along with other Mormons opposed to the hard-right tenets of the DezNat activists, have called for the LDS church to disown the movement.

In response to questions about DezNats, and the church's willingness to disown them, Douglas Anderson, the church's media spokesman, wrote in an email that the group was “not affiliated with or endorsed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Anderson added that “in recent months, church leaders have spoken directly on such issues as condemning the recent violence in Washington DC and lawless behavior, the evils of racism … and peacefully accepting the results of political elections”.

Anderson's statement concluded that “anything that encourages or incites violence is contrary to the recent instruction given by church leaders”.

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Rights and freedom Belarus

Belarus regime steps up ‘purge’ of activists and media

Alexander Lukashenko leading ‘vicious operation to eviscerate critical voices’ and civil society, rights groups warn



Belarusian state security detain a journalist (with ‘press’ written on her back) during an opposition rally in Minsk’s Komarovsky Market last year.
Photograph: Natalia Fedosenko/Tass/Getty

Belarusian state security detain a journalist (with ‘press’ written on her back) during an opposition rally in Minsk’s Komarovsky Market last year.
Photograph: Natalia Fedosenko/Tass/Getty

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[Sarah Johnson](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 01.01 EDT

Aleysa Ivanova wakes up each morning wondering when the knock on her door will come.

“You understand you can be next. Every day I wake up, I think ‘maybe it’ll be tomorrow, maybe today. Maybe they’ll come for me this evening’,” said Ivanova (not her real name).

As a journalist in Belarus, her reporting on the country is seen as a threat to the regime of [Alexander Lukashenko](#). Ivanova said the repression had increased in recent weeks, with reports every day of someone else being detained by state security forces.

[Map: Minsk, Belarus](#)

Since July, there has been a state-sponsored obliteration of civil society and media organisations across [Belarus](#), activists have said.

Between 14 and 16 July, there were [more than 60 searches](#) of the homes and offices of Belarusian human rights organisations and their staff, including

[Viasna](#), [Human Constanta](#), [Legal Initiative](#), as well as the [Belarusian Helsinki Committee](#), the [Belarusian Association of Journalists](#) and many others. Documents and IT equipment, including laptops, mobile phones and computers, were seized during searches.

Earlier, on 8–9 and 16 July, the authorities also raided the homes and premises of independent media outlets and their staff and detained several journalists. More than 30 media workers and dozens of bloggers remain in prison.



Belarusian police raiding a private apartment building, allegedly looking for journalists and protesters, during a rally against the Lukashenko regime.
Photograph: EPA

By 23 July, Amnesty International reported that [at least 46 human rights and other civil society organisations in Belarus had been shut down](#). Activists now say about 100 organisations have had to close.

“This is much bigger than just a crackdown,” said Tanya Lokshina, at Human Rights Watch. “At a government meeting on 22 July, President Lukashenko unapologetically described the move to shut down dozens of civil society groups as ‘a purge’ – and that’s what it is, a vicious large-scale mop-up operation aimed at eviscerating critical voices.”

Over the last year, according to the [International Federation for Human Rights](#) (FIDH) and Viasna, a Belarusian organisation documenting torture, [at least 35,000 peaceful protesters have been detained](#), there have been 4,691 documented criminal court cases, 608 political prisoners and about 1,800 reports of torture. Hundreds of human rights activists have been persecuted and thousands have had to flee the country.



Police taking papers and computers from the Belarusian Association of Journalists' office as Andrei Bastunets, right, head of the BAJ, stands at the door. Photograph: AP

Ilya Nuzov, head of FIDH's eastern [Europe](#) and central Asia desk, said this worsening repression had probably been in the works for months. "It's not just all of a sudden. [The authorities] have been preparing diligently. It's a natural progression of a deteriorating situation of human rights in the country."

In the face of such persecution, some human rights organisations, whose staff managed to flee, are continuing their work abroad in the neighbouring countries of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. They remain defiant despite the grim outlook.

Victoria Fedorova, a human rights lawyer, and director of Legal Initiative, fled from Belarus in March after one of her colleagues was detained and his house was searched. She knew she would be next. She is now in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, but realises she is not safe there.

[Danger escalates for Belarusian dissidents in shadow of regime](#)

[Read more](#)

Vitaly Shishov, who headed Belarusian House, an organisation that helped his compatriots escape, was [found dead](#) on Tuesday, hanging from a tree in a Kyiv park in what police are now treating as a murder investigation.

“Even when we fled in March, we understood Ukraine is not safe,” Fedorova said. “We know security forces from Belarus can kidnap people. The plane hijacking [when [a Ryanair flight was forced to land in Minsk](#) so the leading opposition activist and journalist Roman Protasevich could be detained] was very scary because the regime showed total disrespect for international and national law. They can do anything to detain dissidents.”

The home of Natallia Satsunkevich, who works for Viasna, was raided in February while she was on holiday in Egypt. She did not return to Belarus and is based abroad now. Seven of her colleagues have been detained. She said the conditions in the jail were now so bad that they were akin to torture. “There is no shower, you can’t go for walks. You sleep on a metal bed with no pillow.”



Belarusian women marching in the colours of the former Belarus flag in Minsk last month in a show of solidarity with the hundreds of people in detention. Photograph: AFP/Getty

There were other activists still working secretly in Belarus but in the current climate of mass arrests, they were scared, she added. “All day they are in a nervous state but at the same time these people are really brave and will not stop.”

She added: “We will continue to work for all those people who need our help and for our colleagues who are imprisoned.”

Ivanova had her journalist’s accreditation cancelled last year but has carried on with her work. Many of her colleagues have fled the country or are in detention. She watches for strange cars outside her window and posts nothing on social media. Life at the moment was “depressing”, she said.

“Right now, it’s very hard and it’s getting worse and worse. They arrest people every day,” she said. “There’s no stop in the repression.”

“I understand that maybe they will come for me but I want to stay in Belarus and work there. I’m trying to do my best to make the situation better.”

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A-levels

Nearly 45% of A-level entries across UK awarded top grades

Schools celebrate record-breaking return for students in year disrupted by pandemic

- [A-level results day – live news and reaction](#)



Students at Archbishop Blanch school in Liverpool. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Students at Archbishop Blanch school in Liverpool. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Richard Adams](#), [Niamh McIntyre](#) and [Ashley Kirk](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 05.57 EDT

Nearly 45% of A-level entries across the UK have been awarded top grades in A-level results, a record-breaking return for students after more than a year of disruption and school closures during the pandemic.

The 44.8% in top grades in England, Wales and Northern Ireland matched earlier predictions by university admissions officers but was lower than others had feared, following a 13 percentage point increase between 2019, the last time formal exams were held, and 2020.

In Northern Ireland, 50.8% of entries were awarded A* or A, up from 31% in 2019, while in Wales the proportion awarded top grades rose by more than six percentage points compared with last year, to 48.3%.



Lanre Dada receives his A-level results at Kensington Aldridge academy in London. Photograph: James Manning/PA

This year, A-level results in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been awarded through teacher-assessed grades (Tags) overseen by examination boards, while the Scottish Qualifications Authority will use a similar process in making awards. Education policy is devolved to national governments, so each of the four countries have their own systems and qualifications.

[A-level results table](#)

In England alone, 44.3% of entries gained A* and A grades, compared with 38.1% in 2020. Overall, 88.2% of the more than 750,000 entries by 18-year-olds in England received grades C or above, little changed for 2020 when 87.5% did so.

The figures also revealed that 12,945 sixth-formers in England gained three A*s – nearly 7% of all candidates – compared with 7,700 in 2020 and 3,000 in 2019. Nineteen per cent of entries in England were awarded A*, compared with 14% in 2020 when grades were also assessed by schools.

The rise was fuelled partly by a record-breaking increase in grades awarded by independent schools and centres outside the state sector, where 39.5% gained the top A* grade, compared with 27.4% in 2020 and 16% in 2019. Seventy per cent of entries at private schools received A grades or higher, compared with 39% at comprehensives and 42% at academies.



Students at the London Academy of Excellence Tottenham receive their results. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

There were also wide disparities in regional results. While more than 47% of entries in London and the south of England received A* or A, 39% of those in the north-east of England did so.

A grades up

The latest figures are likely to spark further questions about the unequal distribution of grades. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), representing the examination boards, said: “Exam boards looked at student work from all types of school and college as part of the external quality

assurance process. They did not find that any type of school or college was more likely than others to have provided grades that did not reflect the standard of their students' work.

"Indeed, they found that, irrespective of the type of school or college, the grades were largely supported by the quality of students' work."

[A-levels gender gap graphic](#)

Simon Lebus, the interim chief regulator of Ofqual, said it had been an "exceptional" year but said next year's exams would be different.

"We've always said outcomes this year were likely to look different to other years. This has indeed proven to be the case. The pandemic will have had different impacts on students' opportunities to learn and that means the mechanisms we normally use to secure standards over time have not been deployed this year.

"We expect to get back to exams and formal assessments next year because although they are not perfect exams have proven to consistently be the best way of assessing what a student knows, understands and can do," Lebus said.



Students at Archbishop Blanch school in Liverpool celebrate their results.
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The results show the gender gap for top grades at its widest since at least 2011, with the rate of A* and As standing at 46.4% for female students and 41.7% for male students. This marks a gap of 4.7 points, an increase on 3.1 points last year and a reversal of the trend seen in the three years prior, when male students outperformed female students.

The JCQ also issued details of the oversight carried out by exam boards in scrutinising the teacher-assessed results submitted by schools. It said that work from 1,101 centres in England – about one in five schools and colleges – was scrutinised. In 85% of all cases at Ofqual-regulated centres “subject experts were satisfied that the evidence supported the Tags [teacher assessed grades] that had been submitted”.

Of the remaining 165 centres, it said that “in most cases the exam boards were satisfied either with the school or college’s original judgments or with the revised Tags which they submitted”. But it said that “the exam boards were in continuing discussions with a small number of centres either because of issues identified through the quality assurance process or as a result of concerns about a centre’s practice raised directly with the exam boards or with Ofqual.”

Most popular A-level subjects in England

“Results will be withheld for these schools and colleges should these concerns remain unresolved on results day,” the JCQ said.

In Wales, the education minister, Jeremy Miles, told students: “While your experiences and the way in which you have been assessed have been different, the value of these qualifications is not. You can be sure that your grades reflect your hard work throughout this year, and you fully deserve the qualifications you receive.”

Wales cancelled exams two months earlier than in England, which the Labour-led government said had provided greater certainty for centres and learners.

girls comparison maths

This year's results will be pored over by hundreds of thousands of students and their families, with a record 43% of school-leavers applying for places on university courses for this autumn.

Independent schools

Scotland bucked the trend of rising grades, according to figures published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, although A-C attainment rates were higher than in 2019.

Scottish Higher attainment fell from 89% to 87%, while Advanced Higher dropped to 90% from 93%. For National 5 qualifications, equivalent to GCSEs, the attainment rate was 85.8% this year, compared to 89% in 2020.

comparison chart indies

Last year, Ofqual attempted to award qualifications in England using an algorithm that allocated grades to each school based on past results, but that was abandoned shortly after A-levels were published, following an uproar.

This year, grading has been left in the hands of schools without restrictions, but Ofqual and Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, have defended teachers from accusations of causing grade inflation.

“Teachers know what their students can do and, in the absence of formal exams, there is no person or system better placed to fairly judge young people’s abilities,” Williamson said.

Additional reporting by Rachel Hall, Pamela Duncan and Steven Morris.

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A-levels

Boris Johnson congratulates A-level students after nearly 45% of entries get top grades – as it happened

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[Prince Andrew](#)

Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre sues Prince Andrew

Giuffre accuses Andrew of sexual abuse at Epstein's mansion when she was under 18



Virginia Giuffre filed a lawsuit against Prince Andrew in federal court in New York. Photograph: Bebeto Matthews/AP

Virginia Giuffre filed a lawsuit against Prince Andrew in federal court in New York. Photograph: Bebeto Matthews/AP

[Joanna Walters](#) in New York and agencies

[@Joannawalters13](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 19.15 EDT

Virginia Roberts Giuffre, an alleged victim of the sex offender [Jeffrey Epstein](#), on Monday filed a lawsuit against Prince Andrew in federal court in New York.

She accused the British royal of sexually abusing her at Epstein's mansion in Manhattan and at other locations in 2001 when she was under the age of 18, according to court records. Prince Andrew [has denied](#) having sex with her.

"If she doesn't do it now, she would be allowing him to escape any accountability for his actions," Giuffre's attorney, David Boies, told ABC News, the US news network [reported](#).

He added: "And Virginia is committed to trying to avoid situations where rich and powerful people escape any accountability for their actions."

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages. Giuffre accuses Andrew of sexual assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

"Twenty years ago, Prince Andrew's wealth, power, position, and connections enabled him to abuse a frightened, vulnerable child with no one there to protect her. It is long past the time for him to be held to account," according to the lawsuit.

In late 2019, Prince Andrew told BBC Newsnight that he never had sex with Giuffre, saying: "It didn't happen."

[Meet Julie K Brown, the woman who brought down Jeffrey Epstein](#)
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He said he has "no recollection" of ever meeting her and told an interviewer there are "a number of things that are wrong" about Giuffre's account, which alleges the encounter occurred in 2001.

"I can absolutely categorically tell you it never happened," Andrew said. According to the lawsuit, the prince abused Giuffre on multiple occasions when she was under the age of 18.

It said that on one occasion, the prince sexually abused her in London at the home of Ghislaine Maxwell, when Epstein, Maxwell and Prince Andrew

forced her to have sexual intercourse with the prince against her will.

On another occasion, Prince Andrew sexually abused the plaintiff in Epstein's New York mansion, the lawsuit said.

ABC reported that a spokesperson in Britain for Prince Andrew told the company there would be no comment on the lawsuit.

Monday's lawsuit was filed shortly before a New York state law expires that allows people alleging they were sexually abused as children to sue despite the potential block that might be imposed by statutes of limitations otherwise, ABC noted.

Giuffre has previously alleged that the late Epstein, who died in August 2019 awaiting trial in New York on federal child sex trafficking offenses, flew her to New York when she was 17 to have sex with Prince Andrew – something that the prince has repeatedly and vehemently denied.

Epstein's one-time girlfriend and business companion, the British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell, is in jail in New York awaiting trial accused of procuring underage girls for Epstein. He had previously been convicted of child sex offenses in Florida and was arrested in New Jersey in July 2019 and brought to New York to face fresh charges. Maxwell has pleaded not guilty.

Giuffre gave the following statement to ABC News: "I am holding Prince Andrew accountable for what he did to me. The powerful and the rich are not exempt from being held responsible for their actions. I hope that other victims will see that it is possible not to live in silence and fear, but one can reclaim her life by speaking out and demanding justice."

The statement continued: "I did not come to this decision lightly. As a mother and a wife, my family comes first. I know that this action will subject me to further attacks by Prince Andrew and his surrogates. But I knew that if I did not pursue this action, I would be letting them and victims everywhere down."

Prince Andrew was [named in a 2015 court filing](#) by an alleged victim of Epstein, who was not then named but has since come forward to identify herself as Giuffre, in a civil case brought by women who say they were exploited by Epstein, a multimillionaire who was convicted in Florida of soliciting sex with an underage girl after a controversial plea deal with prosecutors.

She claimed she was forced to have sex with Andrew in London, New York and on Epstein's private Caribbean island.

The allegations have prompted a series of denials on [behalf of](#) and [by the prince](#) of any impropriety with underage girls, including that he had sex with an underage Giuffre.

Giuffre is now 38 and lives in Australia. Her court filing on Monday was brought under the Child Victims Act, she said, to allege she was trafficked to Prince Andrew and sexually abused by him.

Giuffre said she “feared death or physical injury to herself or another and other repercussions for disobeying” Epstein, Maxwell and the prince because of their “powerful connections, wealth, and authority,” the lawsuit stated, while also adding that Andrew had known her age at the time.

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UK's green economy four times larger than manufacturing sector, says report

Exclusive: Analysis reveals more than 1.2 million people are currently employed in low carbon industry

- [Green revolution brings fresh hope to north-east England](#)
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‘Green economy’ can create sustainable jobs and improve people’s quality of life, according to experts.

Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

‘Green economy’ can create sustainable jobs and improve people’s quality of life, according to experts.

Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

[Matthew Taylor](#) and [Jillian Ambrose](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

The UK's low carbon economy is now worth more than £200bn, four times the size of the country's manufacturing sector, with growth expected to accelerate in the coming years, according [to new analysis](#).

Despite what experts say has been lacklustre and patchy support from central government, the analysis found more than 75,000 businesses from wind turbine manufacturers to recycling plants employ more than 1.2 million people in the green economy.

Experts say the sector not only has the potential to help tackle the climate crisis but also create sustainable jobs and improve people's quality of life – with cleaner transport, reduced air pollution and better insulated homes.

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But they warn that if the UK is to make the necessary rapid and fair transition to a low carbon economy, the government must mobilise all sections of society – from trade unions to local authorities, community groups to businesses – behind a “national programme of transformation”.

Prof Patrick Devine-Wright, of Exeter University and a lead author with the IPCC, said: “We need everybody to pull together or we have no chance of meeting these ambitious targets and staving off what are going to be really, really damaging climate consequences.”

He said in the coming years many day-to-day aspects of people's lives would need to change, from the way homes are heated to how people get around town and cities, from what they eat to where they work.

“We need nothing less than a societal process of transformation in place alongside this vision of new technology, devices and infrastructures,” said Devine-Wright. “Unless we connect all those dots up, I don't think it is going to happen in the timescale that is required.”

Today's [research shows](#) that the low carbon sector is worth £205.7bn in the UK. Using the same methodology, kMatrix found the manufacturing sector is worth £55.6bn and the construction sector is worth £132.9bn.

Wind, wave and tidal, and solar power have all grown rapidly in recent years, according to the data, which shows that overall the low carbon sector grew by 7.4% during the financial year 2018/19 to 2019/20 and contracted by -9.0% during 2019/20 to 2020/21 but is expected to bounce back in the post-Covid recovery.

Over the next week, the Guardian will highlight low carbon schemes and projects around the UK – from regenerative farmers to private recycling companies, via hydrogen jet fuel, net zero whisky, retrofitting builders, and hemp milk – showing how they are not only helping reduce emissions but also improving communities, creating jobs and improving living conditions.

But the current ad hoc nature of the low carbon economy, with some sectors and regions racing ahead while others are being left behind, has raised fears that existing inequalities could be entrenched unless the government sets out a clear plan.

Experts say trade unions, local authorities and communities must be given a direct role in the process, especially in areas that are dependent on high carbon industries, to ensure the move to a green economy is rapid and fair.

Hannah Martin, of campaign group Green New Deal UK, said there was now "a rich tapestry of climate focused community activity" with "people coming together to build resilient communities that will be the blueprint for how we live in the future".

She highlighted a range of projects, from communal food gardens to regional home retrofit programmes. But she warned: "Change at the community level cannot be done in isolation from a holistic strategy at the speed and scale required from the central government, which must both provide the regulatory support and finance required for local communities to innovate and create responses to the climate crisis that are unique to their situation and experience."

The UK government has been widely criticised for its failure to set out detailed policy proposals to meet its ambitious climate targets.

Nick Molho, the executive director of Aldersgate Group, an alliance of business and policy leaders, said that for the net zero transition to deliver jobs to local communities across the UK, the Government's upcoming net zero strategy should include close collaboration with local authorities and community groups.

Molho called for a UK-wide body to “support the workforce as the UK economy moves to net zero emissions” backed by local transition bodies – made up of local industry, government, unions, and educational sector representatives.

“[They] could be tasked with carefully planning the changes needed in their areas to support a successful transition to net zero emissions,” he said.

During the buildup to the key climate meeting in Glasgow later this year, ministers have faced widespread criticism for a string of failures that include trying to open a new coalmine, issuing [new licences for oil and gas exploration in the North Sea](#), pushing ahead with a £27bn road-building plan, scrapping the green homes grant insulation programme, and [cutting overseas aid](#).

Last month, the government’s own climate advisers criticised the lack of policy detail, with the chief executive of the Climate Change Committee, Chris Stark, saying “progress was illusory”.

Ed Miliband, who is heading Labour’s climate team, said that the failure of the government to grasp the challenge and opportunities offered by moving rapidly to a low carbon economy was holding back communities across the UK.

“Tackling the climate emergency could transform our society and our economy, creating new jobs wherever people live, growing British industries and making our businesses more competitive,” the shadow business secretary said. “It could clean up our air, protect nature, ensure everyone has

a warm home with affordable energy bills, and help to tackle the deep inequalities we face between our regions.”

He said “there were lots of green shoots across the country” but argued this was thanks to “imaginative people, communities and businesses” rather than a comprehensive plan from central government.

“To truly transform our economy, we need government to show leadership and bring forward a green investment plan equal to the scale of the emergency we face and the task of economic transformation.”

The report, by analysts kMatrix Data Services, which produces annual assessments of the low carbon economy for businesses, academics and local authorities including the Greater London Authority, was based on 900 data sources from government, the private sector and academia. It used a different methodology to the [Office for National Statistics](#) annual assessment of the green economy, including supply chains and networks and includes a broader category of sectors from wind and solar power to geothermal and water and wastewater treatment.

The report’s author, Sarah Howard, of kMatrix, said: “This data, by examining the full extent of the low carbon economy from the grassroots up, shows us just how important it already is for the UK economy and the progress already made.

“It also illustrates the chains and networks of supply are present and scalable, enabling the significant growth required in the wider sector. What we need now is a comprehensive policy framework and the required rapid growth can be achieved.”

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GroundworkGreen economy

Green revolution brings fresh hope to north-east England



Port of Tyne has hundreds of acres on both sides of the river set aside for green energy companies. Photograph: Paul White/Alamy

Port of Tyne has hundreds of acres on both sides of the river set aside for green energy companies. Photograph: Paul White/Alamy

Dogger Bank on course to be the world's largest offshore windfarm in a region built on coal

- [UK's green economy four times larger than manufacturing sector, says report](#)
- [Abandoned pits of former mining town fuel green job creation](#)

Jillian Ambrose

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

In north-east England, green shoots are beginning to emerge after decades of economic decline. From the Tyne's former coal heartlands to the Humber, local communities are poised for a green revolution, sparked by plans to build the world's largest offshore windfarm at Dogger Bank in the North Sea.

Paul O'Neill, a manager at the County Hotel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, believes the offshore wind industry could "change the reputation" of the region.

"This city was built on coal money. And there's still this idea in the south that everything up here is grim with coal," said O'Neill, the son of a miner who worked in the Throckley pits just outside Newcastle. "This could be a new revolution for the north-east," he says.

The rush to invest billions of pounds in the UK's offshore wind industry has put the region in line for a green jobs windfall. A recent flurry of [government grants to support offshore wind](#) manufacturing companies in the Humber and [Newcastle](#) is expected to create – or save – almost 2,500 jobs.

On Monday, the Siemens Gamesa turbine factory in Hull, which supplies blades to projects including the Hornsea Two windfarm off the Yorkshire coast, announced it was adding 200 jobs as it doubles in size after an investment of £186m.

The wind industry believes that within the next five years, jobs in the offshore sector could swell from 26,000 to almost 70,000, most of which will be based in communities in north-east England, [Yorkshire](#) and the Humber, as well as East Anglia and Scotland.

"Anything that creates jobs in the north-east is something to be excited about," said Dawn Houlihan, a taxi driver in the Newcastle area for the past 21 years. "Newcastle is a proud city. We like to do a good job, people take pride in their work. And we can match anything they can do down south."

The growth of a renewable energy industry is one of the few economic green shoots for a region more familiar with the terminal decline of most industries

since the 1980s. Today, [Dogger Bank's giant turbines](#) point to a way to build on the community's strong industrial heritage for a green economic future.



Matt Beeton, chief executive of Port of Tyne, is creating a renewable energy hub. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

At the Port of Tyne, which supports 12,000 jobs, hundreds of acres of land on either side of the river have been cleared to make room for the green energy companies, including Dogger Bank's operations and maintenance base. Where coal yards once stood, space stands ready for the manufacturers that will help to build a [renewable energy](#) hub.

“This was a derelict bit of land before,” said Matt Beeton, the port’s chief executive, from a construction site near the river. Work has just begun building the Dogger Bank base there that will directly employ about 200 people once complete.

Equinor was one of the first major companies to join the port’s green revolution when it chose the deep waters of the Tyne for Dogger Bank’s operations and maintenance base in May last year, and its presence has already attracted a rush of supply chain companies to join it.

“Since we signed that agreement I don’t think we’ve ever been so busy with companies wanting to be part of the port,” Beeton said. “Getting an anchor

tenant like Equinor is the start of a new cluster and a new generation of people who will come to work here.

“For some in this community their fathers have worked here, their mothers have worked here, their grandparents have worked here,” he added. “They’ve seen [coal](#) disappear, they’ve seen shipbuilding disappear. So the buzz around here now is fantastic – people can see a future and the region has so much to offer again.”

The promise of a bright, green economic future for the north-east is a large part of why offshore wind has enjoyed near-universal acceptance by local communities. The industry offers hope to a new generation of young people and a green economic reboot for North Sea veterans.

Steve Nicholson worked on the North Sea’s oil and gas rigs for almost 20 years from the mid-80s, where he bore witness to the [Piper Alpha disaster](#) in 1988 and multiple oil market downturns. A visa issue prevented him taking an oil rig job overseas in 2011, forcing him to accept a job in offshore wind, where at the time “the pay was rubbish, and the rota was rubbish”.

“But I took a chance on it, and I’ve mostly been in renewables since,” he said. “In the last 10 years I’ve never been out of work; it’s been so consistent I’ve never considered a U-turn back into oil and gas.”



Tom Nightingale of Equinor sees a future where young people will be working on a wind turbine rather than an oil rig. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

For Tom Nightingale, a community liaison officer for Equinor and a former oil industry executive, helping communities near the Dogger Bank project reap the benefit of the region's shift from fossil fuels to green energy is a full-time job.

This often involves speaking with local service firms to let them know what offshore windfarms will need in the future and how they could adapt their businesses to meet this need.

But it also means encouraging science, technology, engineering and maths (Stem) education within schools and universities, and helping pay for retraining opportunities at local learning centres to help workers with oil and gas expertise transfer their skills to the green economy.

Dogger Bank plans to invest about £1m to put Stem at the heart of 142 schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire and north-east England, which could support more than 25,000 young people. The fund will include 50 scholarships to help students cover the cost of further education qualifications while studying Stem subjects, and mentoring specifically for girls studying Stem.

“A lot of young people might have a parent who worked in the North Sea and they’re switching on to the fact that the future of offshore work – which they know and are familiar with – might be working on a [wind turbine](#) rather than an oil rig,” Nightingale said.

Charlotte Sinnet, a science teacher and careers counsellor at Harton Academy in South Shields, predicted that the growing interest in Stem would accelerate due to major local projects such as Dogger Bank and the growing concern of many young people over the climate crisis.

“It’s going to have a massive and very positive effect on the students,” she said. “A lot of young people are more environmentally conscious, and

having this opportunity on their doorstep is something that will motivate them. It's created a bit of a buzz in the area.”

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The £1m investment also includes a fund to support small local organisations and community projects to the value of up to £500. It's a small sum that can go a long way, according to Joyce Hollingsworth and her husband, Cliff.

The couple, who are regulars at Beeford Bowling Club, applied for funds to undertake maintenance work at the clubhouse when they were unable to carry out their usual fundraising activities during the Covid-19 pandemic and welcome members back when restrictions were lifted last year.

“It was very gratefully received. It really was,” Joyce said, adding that other local sports clubs and community groups in the area were applying for grants, too.

“Really, people are all for it because of the environment,” Cliff said. “And it's good for the youngsters that are getting jobs and things like that. Yeah, we're proud.”

This article was amended on 10 August 2021. Harton Academy is in South Shields, not Newcastle as we said in an earlier version.

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Civil servants in London could see pay cut if they resist return to office

Exclusive: officials consider removing London weighting from staff who continue to work from home



Workers get about £4,000 in extra pay for working in the capital to offset high living costs. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

Workers get about £4,000 in extra pay for working in the capital to offset high living costs. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent
@breeallegretti*

Mon 9 Aug 2021 14.50 EDT

Whitehall officials have held high-level talks about taking away a salary boost awarded to London-based civil servants amid efforts to encourage workers back to the office.

The Guardian understands that several government departments have considered stripping some officials of a wage top-up – known as London weighting and worth about £4,000 to offset higher living costs in the capital – if they resist at least a partial return to Whitehall.

Downing Street stressed on Monday that [flexible working is here to stay](#) and said there were no plans to dock civil servants' pay. But the decision ultimately rests with each department, and some Tory MPs have piled pressure on them to take a tougher approach to end the move to working remotely during the pandemic.

[The empty office: what we lose when we work from home – podcast](#)
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At the weekend, Sajid Javid's health department was revealed to have scrapped plans to end staff's ability to work completely from home next month. Within hours ministers were anonymously briefing that civil servants should return to the office full-time or have their pay reduced.

Sources said that mandarins have held talks about ways to incentivise a mass migration back to Whitehall this autumn, including withholding London weighting. They said that talks had only reached an early stage. A government spokesperson said: "There are no plans to change terms and conditions around London-based pay."

Of about 484,000 government workers, 21% are based in London. They get about £4,000 in extra pay compared to their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Those arguing for cutting London weighting say it would save taxpayers money by lowering headcount expenditure and reflect that workers are

saving thousands of pounds on travel, including rail season tickets.

But opponents say people working from home still face higher-than-average rental costs and are already saving the government money by bearing the brunt of extra costs such as electricity and wifi bills. Departments also make savings by needing fewer catering, security and estates staff.

There are also concerns that Whitehall could not yet manage a full-scale return to the office, given departments and the teams within them have changed size dramatically due to staff being seconded during the Covid crisis. “This will be tricky,” a senior government source said. “There is no consensus at the moment. No department wants to go out on that limb.”

Some Tory MPs ratcheted up pressure for action on London-based civil servants who do not want to be forced back to the office. “If they are – against advice – choosing not to work in the department, then the London allowance should be reconsidered as it’s not fair,” one told the Guardian. Another said: “Absolutely the London-weighted bit [of their salary] should be withdrawn if they are not commuting into or living in London.”

However, a third MP hit out at the “Stalinist” tendencies of central government “dictating where people should be doing jobs they’ve done perfectly well through the pandemic” and a fourth said some officials would “never need to be in” due to the nature of their work.

In a significant intervention, the FDA union that represents civil servants said “insulting and cowardly attacks” on their members had caused upset and anger among committed staff who had “pioneered new ways of working that will inevitably change the world of work for good”.

The FDA general secretary, Dave Penman, wrote to Michael Gove calling on the Cabinet Office minister to send an urgent message to officials publicly distancing the government from the “denigrating” attacks.

He also criticised the message sent to officials working in places such as Darlington or Glasgow about the importance of “face-to-face time” when they are based hundreds of miles away from London.

Ann Francke, chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute, urged employers across the country to “seize the opportunity to embed hybrid working into the UK’s employment culture, rather than risk an employee exodus with an ill thought-out forced return to the workplace”.

Downing Street said individual government departments are separate employers so their drives to return staff to the office would differ. Boris Johnson’s spokesman stressed the benefits of office working but also said “flexible working is here to stay”. He said there were no plans to cut civil servants’ pay if they refuse to return to Whitehall at all and added: “We continue to encourage people cautiously to return to work.”

A government spokesperson said: “Like other employers, the civil service continues to follow the latest government guidance and is gradually increasing the numbers of staff in the workplace, while also retaining the flexibility of home-based working.”

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Think it's all over? Why the Covid experts are not so sure about that

Analysis: the end of restrictions in the UK has not led to a surge in cases, but coronavirus remains unpredictable

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A group of happy racegoers take a selfie to celebrate their return to Ascot last weekend. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

A group of happy racegoers take a selfie to celebrate their return to Ascot last weekend. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 14.33 EDT

They are questions lurking in many people's minds: just how upbeat or pessimistic should we be about the pandemic now? How does the UK compare with other countries? And is the worst of the crisis really over?

Two weeks after "[freedom day](#)" in England and with case numbers across the UK remaining lower than some modellers had feared, the worst seems to have eased. Future lockdowns, [according to experts](#), seem unlikely unless new variants emerge.

But as Covid has shown time and again, the future is unpredictable. While cases in the UK rose over the early summer, they fell dramatically from mid-July – a decline that surprised experts, who suggested explanations from the clement weather to [the end of Euro 2020](#).

Now that decline has stalled and infections may even be rising once more. The Covid case rate is higher in the UK than many countries in Europe, [with Reuters reporting](#) 282 infections per 100,000 people over the last seven days, compared with 236 in France, 68 in Italy and 23 in Germany. Spain is higher at 299 per 100,000. Meanwhile, the UK's much touted vaccination programme is no longer an outlier: six European countries, including Portugal and Denmark, now have [higher levels of fully vaccinated people](#).

And while the number of patients admitted to hospital with Covid remains below 1,000 a day, experts say pressures are growing again.

Prof Ravi Gupta of the University of Cambridge, a co-opted member of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group that advises the government, said the situation in hospitals was already difficult.

"I've just done a ward round and my entire infection ward is mainly Covid," he said, citing a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated patients. "Seeing how sick some of these people have been, it is really ... quite discordant with what is happening in society where everyone is going out [thinking Covid] is not a problem any more."

daily Covid-19 cases

The issue, Gupta said, is that with high levels of Covid and rising levels of other infections, NHS resources are limited. And that is to say nothing of the backlogs that have yet to be cleared.

“It’s too early to be saying it’s all over,” said Gupta. “And seeing the degree of lung damage [on patients’ scans], it is very sobering to think that the government could have said, this is OK, for large numbers of people [to get Covid].”

Prof Andrew Hayward, the director of the Institute of Epidemiology at University College London, who has contributed to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said it was reassuring that cases appeared to have stabilised as it was an exponential rise that threatened to overwhelm the NHS. The UK is now moving from a pandemic to an endemic situation, he said.

But while Hayward said high levels of antibodies and cautious behaviour among the public, among other factors, meant the situation boded well for the summer and early autumn, the picture for the UK becomes more uncertain after that.

As Sage documents have pointed out, the return of schools and office working, waning immunity and other factors later this year mean there is the potential for a Covid resurgence that could place considerable strain on the NHS.

It is a view shared by Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh who contributes to the Spi-M modelling subgroup of Sage.

EU countries comparison

“As this [autumn] is the point where we also will start having concerns about flu transmission, RSV [respiratory syncytial virus] and other respiratory diseases, there remains the question of whether or not the combined stress of these different illnesses will result in substantial pressure

on the NHS,” he said. Some caution – including measures such as mask wearing – is needed, while new variants also pose a concern, he said.

But for now, it seems the contrast between street and ward remains. “A public demonstration of mask wearing is the only thing we pretty much have left to remind us that [people are] still dying in hospital and that there’s a huge challenge faced by this country that is not over yet,” said Gupta.

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Chef's parents and brother die from Covid within week after jab refusal

Francis Goncalves, from Cardiff, wants his family's experience to encourage people to get vaccinated

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Francis Goncalves said his mother, father and brother, who lived in Portugal, were frightened by misinformation from anti-vaxxers. From left-right; Shaul, Francis, Basil and Charmagne Photograph: Wales news service/WALES NEWS SERVICE

Francis Goncalves said his mother, father and brother, who lived in Portugal, were frightened by misinformation from anti-vaxxers. From left-right;

Shaul, Francis, Basil and Charmagne Photograph: Wales news service/WALES NEWS SERVICE

[Steven Morris](#) and agency

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 12.45 EDT

A man from Cardiff has claimed he lost his mother, father and brother from Covid within a week because all three had chosen not to be jabbed after they were frightened by misinformation from anti-vaxxers.

Francis Goncalves, a chef, said he believed that his father, Basil, 73, contracted Covid while in hospital and his mother, Charmagne, 65, and brother Shaul, 40, picked it up at a family dinner.

He said all three, who were living in [Portugal](#), had turned down the chance to be vaccinated and Goncalves said he hoped sharing his experience may encourage other sceptics to be jabbed.



Francis Goncalves, who lost his mother, father and brother in the space of a week to Covid-19 Photograph: Mark Lewis/Media Wales

“They got caught up in a lot of the anti-vaccination propaganda,” he said. “It preys on people who are afraid and they fall into the trap. The message I want to get out is why would the government want to hurt you by giving you a vaccine? What is the purpose behind it? I’ve spoken to so many people who are terrified of the vaccine and it costs lives.”

[Covid vaccine hesitancy halves among young people in Great Britain](#)
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Goncalves, 43, said his parents had underlying health conditions but his brother was the “healthiest person” he knew and believes the vaccine would have saved his life, adding: “If he wasn’t working out in the gym or running, he was going on walks. He hadn’t drunk in 15 years and had a plant-based diet.”

A few days after his relatives had the meal together, Goncalves said his brother began “feeling like he was filled with weight and that he was tired”. Both his brother and father’s health deteriorated as Goncalves tried to find a way to get to Portugal. They died before he got there.

When he arrived, he discovered his mother was struggling to cope with the virus.

Goncalves said: “She was also in an induced coma. They allowed me to go and see her which was already a sign that things weren’t going well and I had to dress up in full PPE.” She died days later and all three were buried in a cemetery in Lisbon.

The family are originally from South Africa and they moved to Cardiff in 2015. A year later, his parents and brother moved to Portugal, where his father was originally from.

Goncalves said: “My father gave everything. He would wear broken shoes so we could have the best. He loved mum and she loved him. My mother would do anything for us. My brother was my best friend.”

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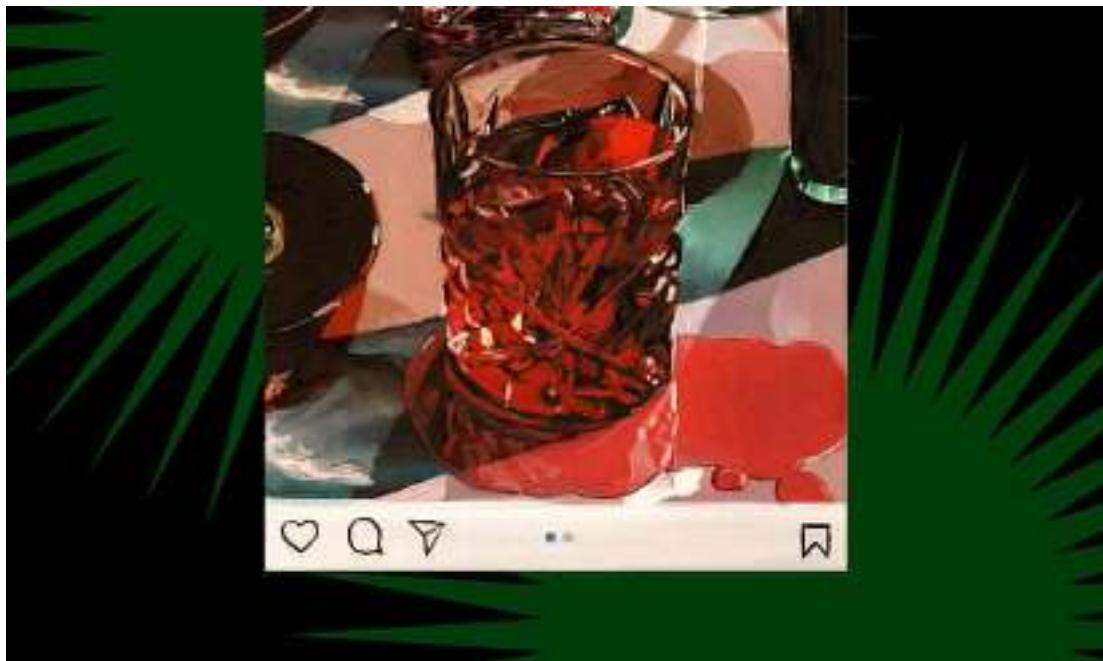
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‘Ginfluencer’ posts on Instagram paint a picture of a magical world of aspirational drinking, where no one seems to get hangovers. Illustration: Alice Tye/The Guardian

Elegantly wasted: has lockdown made booze dangerously aspirational?

‘Ginfluencer’ posts on Instagram paint a picture of a magical world of aspirational drinking, where no one seems to get hangovers. Illustration: Alice Tye/The Guardian

Drinking at home was once a guilty pleasure. Now everyone from bored homeworkers to professional influencers is swapping cocktail recipes and photos of colourful aperitifs. Is gin o’clock turning into unhappy hour?

by [Gaby Hinsliff](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 05.00 EDT

The shadow of a palm frond falls on a young woman in a bikini, holding an emerald-coloured cocktail in one manicured hand. A negroni glows from the depths of a darkened bar; a tray of fruit-laden glasses sits beside a swimming pool. The #cocktail hashtag on Instagram is a passport to a magical land of aspirational drinking, where everything comes garnished with rose petals and nobody ever seems to get hangovers.

Its inhabitants are a mix of amateur enthusiasts reviewing their latest discoveries, and professional “ginfluencers” making a living from creating lusciously photographed cocktail recipes or sponsored posts promoting this rhubarb gin or that new tequila. Colourful drinks are popular, says Inka Kukkamäki, a full-time drinks influencer whose @onthesauceagain account has 21,000 Instagram followers. “Something a bit interesting and unusual, or just something simple like a negroni – any kind of negroni twist becomes popular. The Italian aperitivo culture has really spread into the UK in the last year.”

Originally from Finland, but married to a Scot and living near Florence in Italy, the 33-year-old splits her time between distillery visits or tastings, devising recipes for her blog and social media accounts, and advising food and drink brands on social media management. An entry-level influencer, she explains, might be sent free bottles to review and write about. But the

real money is in working with alcohol brands on paid campaigns, a lightly disguised form of advertising, although she insists she only chooses brands she genuinely likes in order to retain readers' trust. Influencers have, she thinks, clearly affected pandemic drinking habits. "No one could go to bars, they start having drinks at home, but don't want to use the same old bottle of wine and maybe you miss cocktails – so they turn to Instagram and get ideas, and follow the people they feel more connected to."

This has been the year of the home cocktail, shaken up to enliven Friday night Zoom with friends or mark the end of an otherwise formless day's working from home. And the habit seems to be sticking now lockdown is over. Waitrose recently reported a 148% rise in sales of the Italian aperitif Aperol this July compared with last year, and a similar leap in searches for its online espresso martini recipe.

David Powlson, a 44-year-old consultant in paper production, got the bug in lockdown when his west London running club could no longer hold its monthly pub meet-ups, switching to virtual beer, wine and cocktail tastings instead. "Since then I've continued making one pretty much every night," says Powlson, who favours mint juleps. "You feel like you've learned something as well – you start looking things up on YouTube." Social media has helped demystify the whole process, with mixology videos booming on TikTok and furloughed bartenders offering private Zoom lessons in martini-making.

Catrin Roberts, who works for the Welsh television channel S4C, became part of a Saturday night cocktail-making rota among neighbours on her Cardiff street during lockdown. It started, she says, as a spin-off from cooking more elaborate meals to entertain her five-year-old triplets. "We made the children prawn cocktails and they kept asking for that, and one weekend my husband said: 'Why don't we make cocktails for ourselves?'" Not long after, she left one on the doorstep of a neighbour living alone; before long, several households were swapping weekly daiquiris and caipirinhas in a Covid-safe manner. "We'd text to say: 'There's a vitamin supply on your doorstep,'" says Roberts, who scoured the internet for new recipes. "We make different ones, that's been the good thing – we've discovered new cocktails and found out a lot more about people on our street."

Like Powlson, who sometimes halves the alcohol in a recipe, she says they are “relatively measured” about their intake. But having lost their sense of taste to Covid, spirits were one of the first things she and her doctor husband could taste again, and cocktails felt like “a celebratory thing” in dark times. Three units of alcohol is still three units, but drinking it from a pretty salt-rimmed glass feels more elegant. The rituals of muddling and measuring elevate it beyond the realms of just getting sloshed – even if that’s exactly what an alarming number of us have been doing.

The Rev Richard Coles, the radio presenter and author, recently lost his partner to alcohol addiction and, speaking to the Radio Times in June, warned against the “glamorisation” of booze, calling for TV dramas to bring “realism to a distorted picture” of “how we poison ourselves” with alcohol. More people die worldwide from alcohol than cocaine, he pointed out, reflecting the former’s status as a legal, socially acceptable and frequently romanticised drug.

Contrary to popular belief, alcohol consumption fell in England during the first lockdown and held steady in Scotland, according to a study from the Alcohol Research Group at the University of Sheffield. But headline figures conceal more complex individual stories. Andrew Misell of the charity Alcohol Change UK, which campaigns for better treatment for addicts – and for Britons to drink by considered choice not default – says about one-third of people drank more than normal in lockdown, with similar numbers drinking less and the rest seeing no change. But one in four adults in England and Scotland were already drinking over the chief medical officers’ low-risk guidelines of no more than 14 units pre-Covid, and Misell says it’s heavy drinkers who were more likely to increase their intake in the privacy of lockdown.

“There has always been a thing in this country about boasting about drinking,” he says. “It goes across the whole spectrum from blatant bragging about how smashed you were last night, through to more polite euphemisms and mock regret the next day.” Birthday cards revolve around beer, gin and prosecco jokes, while the high street is awash with booze-themed mugs, coasters and cushions. Over the past decade, says Misell, a popular culture that normalises overdoing it has merged with an online culture of glossing over negatives, which teaches us to share elegant pictures of clinking

champagne flutes rather than ugly images of the morning after. “You have the perfect storm, which is the tendency of social media to make us want to present a much better version of ourselves than is actually true, along with our national tendency to make jokes about alcohol,” says Misell.

And all this happens in a commercial grey area where Facebook mums posting about #wineoclock rub shoulders with bars advertising happy hour, conventional brand adverts, and influencers plugging #sponsored content. Accounts like @onthesauceagain carry warnings that they’re for over-18s only, and use the #responsibledrinking hashtag; since her posts emphasise quality over quantity, Kukkämäki says she isn’t worried about her readers overdoing it. “When I drink cocktails, I can’t drink much – you maybe have two and that’s it.” But not everyone is so responsible.

The Advertising Standards Authority’s code on alcohol marketing – which bans the linking of booze to sex, violence, irresponsible behaviour or improved mood – applies to alcohol marketing online, and its reach does extend beyond conventional ads. In 2018, it rebuked the Scottish Gin Society (representing gin producers) for sharing Facebook memes including: “Shut up liver, you’re fine! Gin?” and: “I only drink gin on two occasions: when I’m thirsty and when I’m not thirsty”, prompting the organisation to complain of “po-faced, fun-free, nanny state judgment”.

But similarly booze-soaked content produced and shared by millions of ordinary users is virtually impossible to regulate, and that too can have an impact.

“We’re doing half the job of the alcohol marketing companies for them, because we’re the ones who share the pictures – the Aperol spritzes on holiday or whatever,” says the writer and sobriety campaigner Catherine Gray, whose [2017 bestseller The Unexpected Joys of Being Sober](#) made the case for positively choosing not to drink. She hasn’t touched alcohol for almost eight years but says even she struggled early on with summery images of Pimm’s and strawberries, or ice-cold ciders in a beer garden.

When she first quit, she recalls, the most common response was pity. “It was: ‘Poor you, that must be terrible, what happened?’ It was still that very binary black-and-white thing of two types of drinkers: normal drinkers who

get to carry on, woo hoo; and alcoholics who have to quit and live a terrible life. There was no other story.” Her new book, Sunshine Warm Sober, is however a paean to the longer-term pleasures of staying booze-free in a world she thinks is changing, where not-drinking is beginning to look aspirational too.

“In this country we treat alcohol like it’s another food group, an essential part of life – every teenager, it’s assumed they’re going to grow up to be drinkers,” says Gray. “But a lot of them aren’t now. Rates of drinking are even lower among generation Z than among millennials.” And lockdown may, she argues, have given more of the so-called “sober curious” – people flirting with quitting – a chance to stop without having to explain themselves to friends. Even the original 90s party animal Kate Moss is now teetotal, she points out, and the drinks industry is increasingly investing in alcohol-free brands to suit changing tastes. In a few decades’ time, Gray argues, boozing might become more like smoking; not the unthinking norm, but something a minority choose to do.

But if that idea is too much to swallow, perhaps Britons are at least beginning to recognise that there is more than one path to #goodtimes, leading to more honest conversations about how and why we drink. Who wouldn’t raise a glass to that?

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Interview

‘We’re the weirdos – the joke’s on us’: on the set of the People Just Do Nothing movie

[Alexi Duggins](#)



Worldwide FM ... (l-r) Hugo Chegwin; Steve Stamp; Allan Mustafa; Daniel Sylvester; Asim Chaudhry. Photograph: Universal

Worldwide FM ... (l-r) Hugo Chegwin; Steve Stamp; Allan Mustafa; Daniel Sylvester; Asim Chaudhry. Photograph: Universal

The Kurupt FM crew are back in a big screen, fish-out-of-water adventure set in Japan, complete with lots of eye-wateringly tight DayGlo Lycra

Tue 10 Aug 2021 04.00 EDT

On an Uxbridge film set, the cast of [People Just Do Nothing](#) are clad from neck to ankle in DayGlo Lycra. Frankly, it is not flattering. They resemble giant jelly babies. Or human condoms. Or, if you're being fair, very clever writers with an eye for visual comedy.

“You look like a lemon!” yells [Hugo Chegwin](#), in character as DJ Beats.

“You look like a Teletubby!” shouts back Allan “Seapa” Mustafa – playing bullish head honcho MC Grindah.

“Yeah?” pauses Chegwin. “Well you look like a fat Power Ranger!” And: scene!

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We’re on set for People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan. It’s the big screen follow-up to their BBC mockumentary sitcom centred on inept pirate radio station crew Kurupt FM – and their love of garage music. After series five saw the dimwitted Brentford broadcasters give up on their dream of fame and go their separate ways, the film gives them one last shot at the big time, ie the chance to make it big in Japan after a gameshow starts playing their absurd, A&E-themed track Heart Monitor Riddem.

It is a fittingly daft progression of a career that has seen them headline real-life Ibiza shows and do freestyles with the likes of Craig David. There is one thing about this scenario that feels different. For our interview, the show’s stars are out of character: a rare glimpse behind the mask for comics so committed to their roles that they even turn up to the Brits in persona.

“I’m probably the closest to my character in life,” laughs Seapa, proving his point with an unwittingly Grindah-ish boast. “But in fairness, Steve [Stamp, who plays drug-addled conspiracy theorist Steves] isn’t thick as pigshit and Asim [Chaudhry, who plays inept entrepreneur Chabuddy G] isn’t a 40-year-old!”

A People Just Do Nothing film has been a long time coming. The group shied away from the idea when it was first pitched to them at some point around series two or three. Back then, the silver screen didn't feel like a natural fit for their shenanigans. But when they decided to [end the TV show in 2018](#), the idea for the film cropped up again and seemed worth investigating. So they went away and started watching documentary after documentary to see how it might be done.

They became energised by [Anvil! The Story of Anvil](#) – “One of our biggest inspirations,” says Seapa – and its hilarious tale of the past-it Canadian heavy metal band’s rocky reformation. “And there’s this great documentary called The Show where the Wu-Tang Clan go out to Japan and Method Man thinks he’s ill because he couldn’t get any weed out there.”

After watching a documentary about UK drum’n’bass producer LTJ Bukem also making it big in Japan, they realised that Kurupt FM doing the same seemed both plausible and full of comic potential. A plot about unexpected Japanese stardom also had much broader appeal than a hyper-specific sitcom about Hounslow’s premier garage pirate radio crew. And, best of all, it wasn’t a tired cover version of their previous work.

“We didn’t want to do something like Kurupt FM in Ibiza. That would’ve been the obvious thing – and we never want to do the obvious thing,” offers Stamp.

“Yeah,” smiles Chegwin. “So we thought about setting it in space.”



It's a rap ... Kurupt FM in Japan. Photograph: Ken Hirama/Universal

Cut to the gang filming at James Bond's old set. Each day at Pinewood Studios they walk past photographs of luminaries who once worked here including Marilyn Monroe, Sean Connery and the car from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

“And one day they might say: ‘This is where the character who played Grindah showed off his pear-shaped figure in Spandex!’” laughs Seapa, as he resumes his position on a set decked out like a Japanese gameshow.

The intensely kawaii backdrop features giant sunflowers, pink candy wheels and massive fake toadstools sitting beneath a skyline of cotton wool clouds. Actors playing Japanese crew members wander past clutching massive plastic berries while unitard-clad extras loll on bleacher seating. In the background, people jig about dressed as giant raspberries, squid and a strange object that resembles a UFO dipped in yoghurt.

And Seapa’s role in it all? To swing across a series of wooden platforms that are suspended atop a gigantic, foaming swimming pool, in a Banzai-style gameshow challenge. “Turns out I do all my own stunts,” he says.

It is, frankly, a whole new level of comic ridiculousness compared to the TV show. It’s also part of a ploy to make People Just Do Nothing’s usual lo-fi

mockumentary style feel big enough for the movies without betraying the characters whom fans have loved for a decade.



Crossing over ... the lads filming on location in Japan. Photograph: Ken Hirama/Universal

“If you want people to sit in a cinema for an hour and a half you do have to grip them visually,” says Seapa.

Hence a trip to Tokyo to shoot a series of escapades, building on Kurupt FM’s inability to do even basic tasks and putting them in situations they know even less about than usual. Even being on a plane without getting arrested proves a complex concept. As does the idea that loudly freestyling a “ragga rap” at Japanese record execs might not be the best way to ingratiate yourself.

They met the Japanese pop megastar Kyary Pamyu Pamyu (who cameos in the film), her ginormous entourage leaving them feeling, in Seapa’s words, “a bit like you’re meeting the Queen”. They relished the fact that shooting on the street is blissfully free of interruptions compared to the UK (Seapa: “in Soho people are going: ‘Hello mum!’ into the camera, but over there it’s like everyone’s an extra – they don’t even look at what you’re doing”). And

they fell in love with the country to the extent that they now spend evenings enthralled by YouTube videos about its vending machines.

For all its international outlook, *People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan* still feels very true to the TV show. There are niche references to old-school garage acts such as Heartless Crew. It's overlaid by classic two-step bangers such as [Double 99's Ripgroove](#), partly thanks to personal interventions by some of the artists who waived the kinds of fees normally involved with movie licensing ("Mike Skinner was a G – he really helped us," says Stamp). And, despite pressure to the contrary, it's shot very much in the same style as the televisual version.

"It was suggested that we remove the talking heads, as they wouldn't feel cinematic," says Stamp. "We had to fight for our style."

"We looked at *Spinal Tap*," adds Chaudhry. "That's a mockumentary with talking heads which has cinematic scale. It was a good reference for us."

When Japan is portrayed onscreen, it's often subject to lazy depictions as being extreme or comically bizarre – to laugh at gameshows like Banzai, as though Ant & Dec don't annually force celebs to eat kangaroo bumholes. The *People Just Do Nothing* team took a research trip to Japan to ensure they, in Stamp's words, "didn't fall into the tropes that are too cliched".

On the occasions that they did lapse into lazy stereotypes, they were quickly disabused. "I couldn't find a sex robot out there for love nor money," says Stamp of a plotline that would have seen Chabuddy G engaging in some hot automaton action. "In the end we wrote it out as it would have been fake."

"But also we're the weirdos in this film," says Chaudhry. "Chabuddy is weirder than any of the people he meets. He's a freak! The joke's on us. We're taking the piss out of ourselves and I think that comes across." Given that Chaudhry's character spends half the film sleeping in bushes and trying to impress people by pretending his Kindle is a personal organiser, it's hard to disagree.



Floral pros ... Kurupt FM. Photograph: Universal

These unlikely film stars are also attempting to break the fourth wall. Hot on the movie's heels, they'll release *Kurupt FM: The Greatest Hits (Part 1)*, an album that's referred to within the world of the movie. It carries on a tradition started by their real-life festival shows, which they presented as a live replication of the Champagne Steam Rooms club night that Chabuddy G ran in the TV series.

"It's all part of a Kurupt Cinematic Universe. We call it the KCU," laughs Chaudhry. Presumably meaning we'll get a series of Marvel-style sequels and movies focusing on each character in turn?

"Yeah, the film's part of a trilogy. This is actually the third movie – the whole thing is coming out backwards," says Chegwin.

"The first one will be Grindah's life story, set in the future – in a council estate in Dubai. The second one will be Beats' life story," adds Seapa, then Chegwin jumps in: "Which will be set in Vietnam, but in the Hounslow of Vietnam."

All of which is very funny. Until Chaudhry breaks the laughter and says: "Even if we weren't to ever do anything together again, I personally am

proud of what we've done as a group. I'm not saying this is the end, but in terms of the TV show and that world, it could be the end. I don't know."

And then the camera is rolling again. Japanese extras are walking past dressed like the contents of a fruit bowl. The neon-pink set is once more illuminating the cast. And as Beats and Grindah's ludicrously childish scuffle builds to a scrappy climax, Chegwin, in character, turns and prepares to walk off camera. But before he goes, he prepares a final, emotional, parting line.

"Sayonara, you fat lemon!"

And with that, Brentford's most brilliantly dodgy wordsmiths have wrapped.

People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan is in cinemas 18 August

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Long Covid

‘What is happening to me?’ The teenagers trying to make sense of long Covid



‘It was like I’d been hit by a train’ ... Niamh on her symptoms. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

‘It was like I’d been hit by a train’ ... Niamh on her symptoms. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

More than 100,000 Britons under 25 have endured months of debilitating symptoms, while doctors struggle to help and others fail to take them seriously. Four young people describe what it’s like



Sirin Kale

Tue 10 Aug 2021 01.00 EDT

It took Niamh 20 minutes to wash her face – and she cried the whole time. That was in December 2020 when the 19-year-old first-year student at the University of Leeds had been living with [long Covid](#) for two months. “I didn’t have the energy to move my arms,” she says. She remembers sitting on the toilet, trying to muster the strength to stand up and run the tap. It took all her energy just to switch on the water. “It sounds daft, but I cried,” she says. “I was like, what is happening to me?”

Niamh had led a physically active life until then. She went to the gym regularly and had swum competitively at school. But after catching Covid in freshers’ week, she became a shell of her former self. She would wake up in the morning and feel overwhelmed by a tiredness that felt as if it was deep in her bones. “I have never felt fatigue like it,” she says. “It was as if I’d been hit by a train or run a marathon.” Gentle activities, such as taking a walk with friends, would leave her gasping for breath. [She couldn’t smell or taste anything](#). She had chest pains and palpitations. Mostly, she lay in bed, scrolling through social media and trying to ignore the thought that she was missing out on the student experience she had longed for.

For most of the next year, well into May, the symptoms persisted. Her senses of taste and smell returned to an extent, but Niamh survived on bland foods – potato waffles, vanilla protein powder – because everything else tasted foul. She would faint, or nearly faint, at least twice a month. An outing for her birthday in May ended when she collapsed on the bathroom floor. Doctors told her that she had developed a heart condition, most likely due to Covid, and might need a pacemaker eventually. Today, Niamh still faints and has palpitations, struggles with low energy and can't smell or taste as she did.

"When I stand up, even slowly, it feels like I might collapse," she says. "I ask myself, why can't I be like everyone else? Why did this happen to me?"

Niamh is one of the estimated [106,000 under-25s living with long Covid](#) in the UK. (Of these young people, 72,000 are 17-24 and 34,000 are under 16.) While long Covid is a condition that generally affects older people, teens and children can – and do – become ill. A recent study by King's College London found that one in 50 children with symptomatic Covid had [symptoms lasting more than eight weeks](#), the most common including headaches, tiredness, a sore throat and loss of smell.

"We can definitely say that children get long Covid," says Dr Elaine Maxwell of the National Institute for Health Research. "But the problem with long Covid is that it's not one definition." [Common symptoms of long Covid listed by the NHS](#) include sensory problems, such as loss of smell and taste, brain fog and cardiac-respiratory symptoms. But children tend to have slightly different symptoms – a recent study of 2m insurance claims from the US organisation Fair Health found that under-18s were [more likely to report intestinal issues and "adjustment disorders"](#) (emotional or behavioural reactions to stressful life events).

Due to this divergence, these symptoms are sometimes treated with scepticism. "We are still at the stage where some people are saying that children don't have long Covid," says Maxwell. "Is it just anxiety? Anxious parents?" This disbelief can extend to teachers, social workers and even medical professionals, compounding the stress and uncertainty of life as a

teen with long Covid. (People with similar syndromes, such as chronic fatigue, [often report being dismissed by healthcare workers](#).)

“People are being minimised and not believed,” says Sammie Mcfarland of [Long Covid Kids](#), which has 3,500 members, ranging in age from seven months to 18 years. Mcfarland set up the support group after her 15-year-old daughter Kitty got long Covid in the spring of 2020. At a medical appointment that autumn, Mcfarland – who also has long Covid – mentioned Kitty’s condition to a nurse. “She told me that my daughter was mimicking my symptoms and it was related to lockdown, and she would feel better when she saw her friends again,” Mcfarland says.

We are still at the stage where some people are saying that children don’t have long Covid

Dr Elaine Maxwell

Dr Danilo Buonsenso, from the women and children’s department at the Gemelli University hospital in Rome, says: “Long Covid is more accepted in adults than in children because there is still this dominant narrative that it is mainly psychological.” Buonsenso tells me about a 14-year-old girl he treated. Other doctors had determined that her condition was psychological. After running advanced, non-routine tests, Buonsenso found that she had lung perfusion problems (her lungs were not oxygenating properly), chronic inflammation and cardiac pulmonary issues. “Long Covid is much more rare in children, which is good news,” he says. “But it’s still real.”

Mcfarland knows of schools that have contacted social services to investigate parents of children with long Covid because they have missed so much school. “It’s difficult to prove your child is ill when their symptoms can change on an almost hourly basis,” says Mcfarland. “Their pattern of recovery doesn’t fit the school attendance pattern they are trying to get them to adhere to.” Mcfarland says some schools have been fantastic. “But they are few and far between. [Schools](#) are lacking clarity because there’s no clear guidance from the government on how to respond to long Covid in young people.”

Others can be sceptical, too, says James, 12, from Birmingham. “No one understands it and no one tries to sympathise that much,” he says. He contracted Covid in April 2020. Since then, he has had recurrent episodes of stomach pain and diarrhoea. “I am completely fine most of the time, but every three or four weeks I have an episode for about a week.”

Recently, he almost got into a physical fight with schoolmates who hid his stuff as a joke. “I took it the wrong way because I felt so ill. I couldn’t be bothered to deal with any crap,” he says. “I tried to kick one of them and realised I couldn’t, physically.” Now, he passes the time playing video games such as Fortnite and Call of Duty. Does he ever feel lonely? “I can do,” he replies. “Yeah.”

Taking so much time off school can cause grades to slip, too. “It takes all the energy I have – which is none, really – to drag myself to school,” says Emma, 14, from Berkshire. “And when I’m there I’m thinking, just get through this day.”



‘I can’t afford to get Covid again. I’ve been ill for 15 months’ ... Emma and her dog, Luna. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Emma has had long Covid since May 2020. She is on medication for nausea and to stabilise her heart rate. Her condition has improved slightly in recent

months, but she feels constantly dizzy. “It has totally flipped my life upside down,” she says. Before she contracted Covid, she was a competitive gymnast. Now, she can’t do a handstand. “My arms just cave in,” she says.

Her attendance last year was only 30%. “I’m meant to be starting GCSEs next year,” she says, sighing. “I try to catch up at home, but it’s not the same as being at school. I am seriously behind now and don’t know if I’ll be able to stay in my year in September.” On top of this, Emma is terrified about going back to school now that all restrictions in England have been relaxed.

“There are people in my school who don’t care about Covid. It doesn’t bother them. It’s not an issue, ‘It’s just a cold.’ Knowing that in September I will be going back to school with them, and there will be no restrictions in place, and they’ll probably be going to parties ...” She sighs again. “I don’t really want to go back, to be honest. Especially with self-isolation gone.”

Emma’s views are shared by many of her peers with long Covid. “There’s a lot of concern right now about what will happen in the autumn,” says Mcfarland. “At the moment, we can keep our children socially distanced and in outdoor spaces, but in September there will be no mitigation measures in [English] schools and the fear of reinfection is high.”

Before Tom, 13 who lives in Devon, caught Covid, he played basketball and rugby regularly. Then he fell ill last March, “I got breathless just going up the stairs,” he says. Now, like Emma, he is anxious about returning to school. “I’m worried about catching it again,” he says. He can’t understand why all restrictions have been lifted so abruptly. “I’m not trying to be political or anything, but I find it a bit stupid how people don’t wear masks any more,” he says.

Buonsenso says the vast majority of children will not contract Covid and it is important that schools remain open. “School closures damage children and adolescents,” he says. “But we need to find the best balance. Vaccinations and masking, of course, but also understanding that Covid and long Covid in young people is real.”

The obvious solution would be for the government to offer under-18s the Covid vaccine, as is the case in the US (which recommends that [children of](#)

12 and older are vaccinated) and Ireland (where 16 is the minimum age; due to drop to 12 on Thursday). The UK government announced on 4 August that everyone aged 16 or older can have the vaccine within weeks, but healthy 12- to 15-year-olds remain excluded. “The majority of the parents in our group do want their children to have the vaccine and are extremely frustrated that children haven’t been included on the list of people allowed to get the vaccine at the moment,” says Mcfarland.

Maxwell is perplexed by the government’s refusal to vaccinate under-16s. “I don’t understand why the UK is so hesitant when other countries are going ahead,” she says. “I haven’t seen any significant reporting of adverse events in children in other countries.” Buonsenso agrees, with the caveat that he would prefer to see older adults in low- and middle-income countries prioritised over children in developed nations. “I know there’s a lot of debate in the UK about vaccinating children but, given how things are progressing, and the desire to keep schools open as much as possible, I would say it’s advisable to give children aged 12 to 18 the vaccine,” he says.

For young people, long Covid seems a particularly sharp cruelty. Time passes differently in your teens. Summer holidays spent indoors feel like interminable prison sentences; missed birthday parties and school balls sting. Also, now that the UK is opening up, the peers of teens with long Covid can enjoy relatively carefree summer holidays. “When people say Freedom Day, it’s the opposite of that for me,” says Emma. “I can’t afford to get Covid again. I’ve been ill for 15 months. I can’t go through that again.”

There isn't a magic pill, but my psychologist assessed me and gave me advice for dealing with it as a young person

The psychological toll can affect mental health, too. “I don’t think I’ve ever cried more than I have this year,” says Niamh. Tom struggles with low mood too. “If before you were motivated to go and play sport at school, now you just feel really depressed and want to stay in,” he says. “In your head you think, why would I do that if it’s hard?” He has spent a lot of time in bed, watching the sitcom Rick and Morty or playing video games.

James, likewise, sounds completely miserable. “Mentally, I’ve just dropped off the end,” he says. Because he feels ill, James is constantly irritable. He gets into fights with his older brother. “I have a really short fuse now,” he says. “And the consequences of that fuse are different. It can be anger or sadness or anxiety.”

So much time off school has also left many young people feeling estranged from their friends. Emma’s close friends have been accommodating of her energy levels, but it is still hard to miss out on fun with her wider year group. “You see people on social media going swimming in the lake or shopping in London. I can’t make it to London because even an hour in the car is too much for me. When I see a group of girls in my class going to the beach and I’m just sitting at home, it makes me feel quite useless and a bit stuck.”

The overwhelming sentiment among teens with long Covid is a sense of loss. “I have missed out on everything,” says Emma. “This is an important part of your life, your teenage years.” What does she miss most about her old life? “Sometimes I feel so trapped in one spot,” she says, in a strangled voice. “Just to be able to go to the beach or travel somewhere. And gymnastics. There are a lot of things.”

There are signs of hope and recovery, however. Niamh has visited a long Covid clinic and is doing much better. “They were great,” she says. “They don’t have the answers; there isn’t a magic pill they can give you to sort you out. But my psychologist assessed me and gave me advice for dealing with it as a young person.” She is gradually increasing her time socialising with friends and has festivals booked this summer. “I have to have rest days before, to build up my strength, and to recover afterwards,” she says.

Proper management of long Covid in teens requires investment, as well as specialists to assess and manage each young person on a case-by-case basis. “Understanding long Covid is really expensive,” says Buonsenso. “It needs a lot of investigation and different specialties.” In June, NHS England announced that it will set up [15 paediatric hubs](#) specialising in long Covid. Mcfarland also hopes that the Department for Education will introduce measures to mitigate Covid transmission in schools before the summer holidays end. “We need to see ventilation and Hepa filtration, in addition to

CO₂ monitors,” she says. “Children need to be educated in a place of safety and that is not currently on offer.”

For teens with long Covid, at least there is hope that, with time and proper medical management, symptoms will abate and normal life will resume. “I am not the person I was last year,” says Niamh. “I have been through so much. But I feel mentally stronger than I ever have in my life because I’ve been through it in the last year. It’s like, bring on anything else.”

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org.

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Beats Studio Buds review: Apple's Android-loving noise-cancelling earbuds

Buds have good sound, battery life, compact shape without stalks and work with Android or iPhones



Small and comfortable fit, good sound and effective noise-cancelling, plus the best cross-platform support set Apple's latest Beats Bluetooth earbuds apart. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Small and comfortable fit, good sound and effective noise-cancelling, plus the best cross-platform support set Apple's latest Beats Bluetooth earbuds apart. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[*Samuel Gibbs*](#) Consumer technology editor

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

The latest Apple [Bluetooth](#) earbuds from its Beats brand offer active noise-cancelling and cross-compatibility that goes beyond its competitors – even for Android users.

The Studio Buds cost £129.99 (\$149.99 or A\$199.95) and are Beats' smallest earbuds to date, following on from the sport-oriented [PowerBeats Pro](#) and budget [Beats Flex](#).



Unlike most true wireless earbuds, including Apple's AirPods Pro, the Studio Buds do not have stalks and are fairly compact, with a unique shape and standard silicone tip. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Most of the earbud fits comfortably within the [concha of your ear](#) with a pill-shaped projection that protrudes a little and has a button on the end. Press it once to pause/play, twice and thrice to skip track or press and hold to change noise-cancelling modes.

The controls work great but unlike some competitors, the earbuds don't pause the music when you remove them, and there's no onboard volume control, meaning that you need to reach for your phone to turn the music up or down.

Specifications

- **Water resistance:** IPX4 (sweat)
- **Connectivity:** Bluetooth 5.2, SBC, AAC
- **Battery life:** 5 hours ANC/8 hours off, up to 24 hours with case
- **Earbud weight:** 5.1g each
- **Earbud dimensions:** 15.6 x 21.6 x 19.8mm
- **Driver size:** 8.2mm
- **Charging case weight:** 48g
- **Charging case dimensions:** 51.5 x 73 x 25.6mm
- **Case charging:** USB-C

Case and Battery



The earbuds snap into the smooth, hard plastic pill-shaped case with strong magnets. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The case is medium-sized compared with its competitors, and just about fits into the money pocket of a pair of jeans – significantly smaller than the [PowerBeats Pro](#) case but slightly bigger than the [AirPods Pro](#) case.

It charges via USB-C and stores enough power in it to recharge the earbuds twice. The Studio Buds last about five hours with noise-cancelling active or up to eight with it off. When low, a five-minute charge in the case is enough for about an hour of playback.

Cross-platform connectivity



Open the case near to an Android or iPhone to check the battery levels of each earbud and the case. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Studio Buds are Bluetooth 5.2 earbuds supporting the standard SBC and AAC audio formats but they have greater cross-compatibility than any rivals, even Apple's other earbuds.

That is because unlike previous Beats or AirPods, the Studio Buds use a new chip not made by Apple. That means they have almost the same features whether connected to an iPhone or Android, including one-touch pairing and compatibility with the “Find My” device locator systems on both platforms, making them the first earbuds to do so.

The earbuds support “Hey Siri” for instant access to the voice assistant on an iPhone, as well as Apple’s new “[spatial audio](#)” surround sound for Apple Music.



The earbuds connect to only one device at a time but can seamlessly switch between paired devices without having to manually disconnect from each one first. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Beats App on Android handles settings and updates and shows the charge status of each earbud and case, while the same features are built into the settings app of an iPhone.

There are some limitations with Apple devices compared with the company’s other earbuds. They do not support spatial audio for movies on an iPhone or iPad, unlike the AirPods Pro, nor do they support audio sharing for two earbuds connected to one device simultaneously. Where you need only pair other Apple earbuds to one Apple device to have them available on any other iPhone, iPad or Mac you own, you will have to pair the Studio Buds manually with each device you want to use.

Call quality in a quiet space was good and clear with sidetone, so you can hear yourself and avoid shouting, but the earbuds let a little background

noise into the call, and my voice became slightly garbled when in noisy environments.

Good sound and noise cancelling



The traditional silicone earbud tip makes for a good seal in the ear, while small vents prevent pressure from building up, avoiding the ‘plugged in’ feeling of traditional earbuds. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The new earbuds are some of Beats’ most balanced and best-tuned headphones yet. They produce deep, thumping bass when required but it doesn’t overpower the well-balanced treble and high notes. They handle complex overlapping tones well, with good separation of instruments and super-clear vocals, sounding good with most music genres for everyday listening. There’s no customisation of the sound available, however.

Beats founder Dr Dre sounds better on the Studio Buds than on any of the company’s other headphones. But they lack a little detail and nuance in some more refined tracks compared with the very best earbuds, and a little energy in some more high-tempo songs.

The noise-cancelling is very similar to the AirPods Pro, successfully reducing low rumbles on an aeroplane or that of a passing car. They struggle

a bit with speech and wind noise, and won't trouble the best-in-class [Sony WF-1000XM4](#) earbuds or [WH-1000XM4 headphones](#), but do a reasonable job for the money and size.

The noise-cancelling changes the sound a little, making the treble and higher tones more pronounced. The ambient sound mode is good for listening out for announcements or quick chats but isn't quite as natural-sounding as the AirPods Pro.

Sustainability



The earbuds and case are made from recycled plastic but the batteries cannot be replaced. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple estimates that the batteries in the earbuds and case last far in excess of 500 full charge cycles while maintaining at least 80% of their original capacity but they are not replaceable, ultimately making the earbuds disposable.

Some parts of the earbuds are also not repairable but Apple [offers replacements costing £82.44](#) or a battery service costing £66.44. All internal plastic parts of the earbuds are made from recycled material but Apple does not publish environmental impact reports for accessories such as

headphones. The company offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products.

Price

The Beats Studio Buds cost [£129.99](#) ([\\$149.99](#) or [A\\$199.95](#)) and are available in white, black or red.

For comparison, the AirPods cost [£159](#), the [AirPods Pro](#) cost [£249](#), the [PowerBeats Pro](#) cost [£219.95](#), the [Beats Flex](#) cost [£49.99](#), the [Sony WF-1000XM4](#) cost [£250](#), the [Jabra Elite 85t](#) cost [£219.99](#), the [Samsung Galaxy Buds Pro](#) cost [£219](#), and the [Soundcore Liberty Air 2 Pro](#) cost [£129.99](#).

Verdict

The Beats Studio Buds are a surprising set of earbuds from Apple that support just as many features on Android as they do on an iPhone, including instant pairing and battery-level notifications.

They stay put and are comfortable for long periods, have a good connection to your phone and have easy-to-use button controls. Solid battery life and a good, if slightly larger, case make them easy to live with.

The Studio Buds sound good for everyday listening and have AirPods Pro-matching noise-cancelling, which is very good for the money and size.

However, the noise-cancelling alters the sound slightly and they don't pause the music on being removed from your ears. The earbuds are unrepairable and the battery cannot be replaced when it wears out, ultimately making them disposable and [losing them a star](#).

Pros: good sound and reasonable noise-cancelling, cross-platform compatibility with one-touch pairing for iPhone and Android, good battery life and case, fairly small and comfortable for extended periods, good button controls.

Cons: no onboard volume control, do not pause music on removal, no spatial audio for movies or pairing syncing with Apple devices, not

repairable.



The Studio Buds look particularly good in red but are available in the more traditional black or white. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- [Soundcore Liberty Air 2 Pro review: cut-price noise-cancelling earbuds](#)
- [Galaxy Buds Pro review: Samsung's AirPods Pro-beating earbuds](#)
- [Sony WF-1000XM4 review: the best-sounding noise-cancelling earbuds](#)
- [Bose QuietComfort Earbuds review: just shy of noise-cancelling greatness](#)
- [Jabra Elite 85t review: AirPods Pro-beating noise-cancelling Bluetooth earbuds](#)
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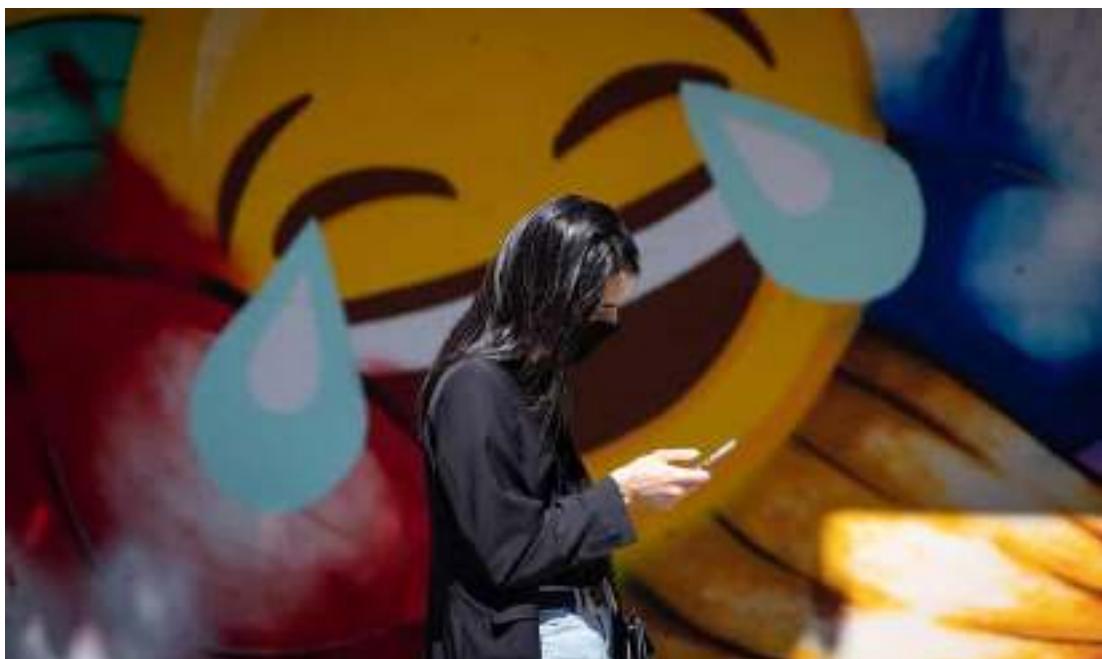
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OpinionEmojis

Emojis aren't debasing language – they're enriching it

Benjamin Weissman

With a new set about to be released, it's time to consider how these little symbols enhance the way we communicate



'Emoji users can't easily create new ones to fit a conversational context, which is how primitive natural languages start to blossom into full-fledged languages.' Photograph: Canadian Press/REX/Shutterstock

'Emoji users can't easily create new ones to fit a conversational context, which is how primitive natural languages start to blossom into full-fledged languages.' Photograph: Canadian Press/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 10 Aug 2021 03.00 EDT

Throughout history, writing systems have reflected available technologies. Ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform featured triangles and lines because the characters were impressed into clay with a dowel; ancient Germanic runes

were distinguished by angular shapes instead of curves because they were etched into stone. Now, with electronic writing and emojis at our fingertips, even those without any artistic talent can easily “write” a number of pictorial symbols, from a smirk to a syringe, from a bento box to a [pregnant man](#).

With emojis on the mind following the Unicode Consortium’s recently released draft of the newest forthcoming set, [Emoji 14.0](#), it is a good time to ponder the relationship between emojis and the mind. Research conducted within the last few years has allowed us to begin answering some of these questions, such as whether emojis are language – and whether we can think in emojis.

This research seems to support the idea that people excel at processing and understanding sentences that feature text and emojis together. If an emoji replaces a word in a sentence, people comprehend it without issue. If an emoji that doesn’t make sense is added to a sentence, we spend more time trying to make sense of it, just as we do with nonsensical words. In [my own research](#), I’ve observed that the electrical pattern our brain produces when we interpret sarcasm in words is also evoked by a sarcastic emoji. Our brains produce a different electrical pattern when we encounter an unexpected word, and that pattern appears when we happen upon an unexpected emoji as well.

And yet, emojis are not words. Consider what happens when emojis stand on their own, without text. Cognitive scientist [Neil Cohn](#) has run several experiments on emojis, including one that encouraged participants to communicate using only emojis. The grammar of the resulting “sentences” was drastically less complex than the grammar found in language. In another experiment, we’ve found that when emojis are strung together one after the other, like words in a sentence, they are harder for people to comprehend than when they are combined to look like one picture.

These findings reinforce the observation that stringing emojis together like this is fairly unnatural. Linguists [Gretchen McCulloch and Lauren Gawne](#) have determined that the most-produced multi-emoji expressions just repeat the same emoji multiple times, a pattern that happens far far far less in multi-word expressions. [Emoji Dick](#), Fred Benenson’s translation of Moby Dick into emoji-only sentences, is both an incredible work and an

impossible read. While emojis can stand in well for concrete nouns such as kiwi and cat, they're inadequate at grammatical concepts such as verb tense, prepositions and pronouns. In addition, emoji users can't easily create new ones to fit a conversational context, which is how primitive natural languages start to blossom into full-fledged languages. These limitations mean emojis will never replace language nor exist as a language all on their own.

So if emojis aren't words, what are they? In some sense, emojis give us something we already have with spoken/signed language. In face-to-face communication, as well as using words we also extract meaning from the tone and pitch of the voice, facial expressions, hand gestures, body language – and even the physical setting of the conversation. [Emojis](#), similarly, give us a way to enrich the text-based medium. Just as facial expressions and gestures are intrinsic to our face-to-face conversations, it's easy for us to use emojis in our electronic conversations to fulfil some of the same functions.

From this perspective, then, emojis aren't necessarily changing the way our brains work. Instead, they capitalise on resources we've already developed over thousands of years, which is integrating different streams of information into a unified meaning. Psychologists David McNeill and Susan Goldin-Meadow [have argued that](#) gestures shouldn't be considered ancillary to language, but rather that the two systems evolved together to provide key cognitive advantages. Even though the neural mechanisms that we use to take in these streams of information may differ, combining the contents of these streams into a unified interpretation is natural. Emojis functioning like gestures or tone markers in electronic communication is an expected and natural outcome, now that the technology allows it.

I'd wager that thinking in emojis may be possible – but would be constrained by the limitations of emojis themselves; without a language-like grammar, these emoji thoughts wouldn't be as structurally complex as the full-sentence constructs we're capable of with language. We can already think in gestures and images, so I don't think it's a stretch to say that simpler thoughts could take an emoji form; sometimes, this may even be more natural than any language-based thought. 😊 seems to be a better representation of an emotional reaction than any words, and if people send

⌚ as a message enough times, they may start thinking of ⌚ as a natural response, even without phone in hand.

- Benjamin Weissman is a lecturer in cognitive science at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the US
 - This article was amended on 10 August 2021. It was the Unicode Consortium that released the latest set of emojis, not Unicode as a previous version said.
-

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[Opinion](#)[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#)

‘We’re not about to back down’: how climate experts hold hope despite the IPCC report

Rob Law, Joëlle Gergis, Rebecca Huntley, Joseph Moeono-Kolio, Bill Hare

The landmark IPCC report paints a bleak picture for our planet’s future. We asked five climate change experts how they are staying strong



A climate rally in Melbourne earlier this year attracted thousands of school students and supporters. It is the rise of climate action groups that brings hope for the future, says Rob Law of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. Photograph: Michael Currie/Speed Media/REX/Shutterstock

A climate rally in Melbourne earlier this year attracted thousands of school students and supporters. It is the rise of climate action groups that brings hope for the future, says Rob Law of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. Photograph: Michael Currie/Speed Media/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 10 Aug 2021 03.03 EDT

‘Let’s ramp it up’

The latest report from the [UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) has left many of us feeling despondent and full of despair for the future of the planet. It is often said that action is the antidote to anxiety and despair. The problem for most people though is what action should that be? Recycling, or riding to work can feel futile when at the same time political leaders announce a new coalmine the size of Sydney. Here is why I am still feeling hopeful.

Over the past few years I have witnessed an enormous growth and diversification in the climate movement compared to when I started out in the early 2000s. In the absence of federal leadership, communities around Australia are stepping up to fill the void. More than 100 jurisdictions throughout Australia have declared climate emergencies across metropolitan, regional and rural communities. There are now thousands of different place-based and interest-based communities of climate action.

The powerful groups and individuals that have purposefully slowed climate action for decades have never been so vulnerable. Across the globe we are seeing markets dramatically shift away from fossil fuels and a crumbling of the empires that have built their fortunes on the planet’s demise. This is because regular people continue to find new ways to challenge, whether it’s through the courts, through the boardrooms and AGMs, or through the ballot box.

We can all lift our ambition on what we can do, some of us in small ways, some of us in big ways. We are continually seeing the ripple effect of small actions. This can be the decade that these ripples combine into a tidal wave of change – before the real tidal waves claim us all. Let’s ramp it up.

Rob Law is the CEO of the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance. He is also a co-producer of End Game Media, a podcast dedicated to the climate crisis, and a film composer

[What does the IPCC’s report mean for Australia, and what can we expect in the future?](#)

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‘There is still so much worth saving’

In the aftermath of the release of the latest IPCC report, it’s very easy to feel crushed by a barrage of unbearable realities. But as one of the scientists involved in the report, I want to say that humans have the inherent goodness to turn this around.

Over the past three years, 234 scientist from 66 countries worked around the clock – throughout ongoing waves of a deadly coronavirus pandemic – to complete the most comprehensive report on climate change ever compiled. We all volunteered our time, working thousands of unpaid hours, attending meetings involving brutal time zones, while navigating the demands of our regular jobs and domestic lives during lockdowns.

Why did we do this? The answer is simply because we care. We care deeply about protecting our extraordinary planet and all life on Earth.

Many of us realise that we are the generation that is likely to witness the destabilisation of the Earth’s climate; that the people alive today will determine the fate of humanity.

Being part of a group of scientists, from every corner of the world, working together to trying to avert disaster at this critical moment in human history, changed my life. It taught me that when we align behind a collective vision guided by strong leadership – no matter how unsurmountable the challenges feel – anything is possible.

Ultimately, we only really have one choice to make – to stay connected with people that restore our faith in the goodness of humanity, or fall into an abyss of cynicism and despair. It really is as simple as that. You can choose to be a person that restores someone else’s faith in humanity, and do what you can where you can, even when all feels lost.

Because once the despair has passed, we need to remember that there is still so much worth saving. How bad we let things get is still up to us – the apocalypse is not a done deal.

Dr Joëlle Gergis is an award-winning climate scientist and writer based at the Australian National University

‘Hope is other people’

Three years ago, inspired by the school strike for climate, I went through a personal and professional transformation that led me to full-time climate change research, strategy and activism.

Stepping into that new world, my biggest concern was that I would find it demoralising. I knew that the science showing climate change was causing extreme weather events and disruption to the natural and human worlds was overwhelming. The projections about the future more than sobering. I prepared myself for a life lived under a cloud of despair and panic.

And yet that hasn’t happened. Every day I meet people in the smallest community organisations to the biggest companies in the world who share stories of transformation like mine, who are pushing and pulling, shouting and whispering, organising in person and online to address the causes and effects of climate change.

To keep going I have to wake up every day making a conscious choice to be hopeful. I got to bed every day with more than a few reasons to be hopeful.

Jean-Paul Sartre once said “hell is other people”. And he had never even visited an Ikea (one of the many companies already signed up to the RE100). He was wrong about so many things. Hope is other people. Read the IPCC report, put it down, and connect with others like you in communities of common interest and concern.

That’s how to stay hopeful. And know we can do this.

Rebecca Huntley is a social researcher and consultant. She is the author of How to Talk About Climate Change in a Way That Makes a Difference (Murdoch Books), and she chairs the Advisory Board for Australian Parents for Climate Action

[Climate crisis ‘unequivocally’ caused by human activities, says IPCC report](#)

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‘Resilient Pacific peoples won’t give in to despair’

As a Samoan, the IPCC findings weren’t surprising, but no less hard to stomach. The warning for the Pacific could not be more urgent.

Despite this, resilient Pacific peoples won’t give in to despair, not with so much at stake. We resolve with hope to fight on. We are already bearing the impacts of climate change so we have no choice but to hope and to fight. Otherwise, it’s our children and grandchildren who will pay and our islands and cultures lost. But we don’t have the luxury of giving up, tired and fatigued as we already are.

Our young people have long led the climate fight, knowing full well what is at stake. Their courage continues to inspire.

Neither have our leaders backed down, despite the, at times, patronising disregard that their counterparts from high-emitting, wealthy countries like Australia have shown towards the climate crisis we face. Pacific leaders are a powerful voice, and we will continue to pressure the world to lift its ambition, using every diplomatic, financial and legal avenue at our disposal.

We come from a legacy of fighting against the odds: against empire, colonialism, plague, slavery, nuclear testing and now climate injustice. We’re not about to back down and lose hope, not now.

And so it must be now, that our fight becomes the world’s fight. Against all odds, we convinced world leaders to strive to limit heating to 1.5C under the Paris agreement – and now the world has seen the wisdom of this. They will continue to see the wisdom in our struggle and the hope that fuels it.

Joseph Moeono-Kolio is Greenpeace head of Pacific

‘We can avoid the worst of it’

The strength of the IPCC’s Code Red for Humanity report is sobering; its dire warning could not be clearer. Yet at the same time, it confirmed that the

Paris agreement's 1.5C warming limit is not lost, and with strong global action, we can still achieve it.

There is [no change to the timeframe](#) at which the global average warming is likely to cross the 1.5C threshold that was set out in the special report on 1.5C published in 2018, essentially mid 2030s. So we still have a chance.

If we act fast, from today, we can avoid the worst of it. We need 50% emission reductions globally by 2030 – Australia needs to reduce 65% by 2030 from 2005 levels. On sea level rise, an issue of great importance to Australians, if we limit warming to 1.5C, this could drastically limit sea level rise to between 0.28 and 0.55m by 2100. And in the very long term, the difference between 1.5 and even 2 degrees of warming could avoid up to three metres of sea level rise.

The report confirms that every single tonne of carbon dioxide we send into the atmosphere will increase the impacts we're already seeing: wildfires, heatwaves, drought, heavy rainfall and cyclones. Yet the report also shows that strong mitigation would have discernible effects on air quality within years and discernibly slow warming compared to a world with high greenhouse gases over the next 20 years.

We await the Morrison government's announcement to cut the country's emissions by at least 65% or more by 2030, especially from fossil fuels, in light of this warning and to get Australia on a 1.5C pathway.

Bill Hare, a physicist and climate scientist, is the managing director of Climate Analytics

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[Joe Biden](#)

UN climate report raises pressure on Biden to seize a rare moment

The US president may have only one chance to pass legislation to confront the crisis: ‘We can’t wait’



Joe Biden at a cabinet meeting last month. Global action on climate could hinge in large part on the US response. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Joe Biden at a cabinet meeting last month. Global action on climate could hinge in large part on the US response. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

[Oliver Milman](#)
[@olliemilman](#)

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.00 EDT

A stark UN report on how humanity has caused unprecedented, and in some cases “irreversible”, changes to the world’s climate has heaped further

pressure on [Joe Biden](#) to deliver upon what may be his sole chance to pass significant legislation to confront the climate crisis and break a decade of American political inertia.

The US president said [the release on Monday of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report](#) showed that “we can’t wait to tackle the climate crisis. The signs are unmistakable. The science is undeniable. And the cost of inaction keeps mounting.”

The [IPCC report](#), developed over the past eight years by scientists who combed over more than 14,000 studies, shows that the US, like the rest of the world, is running out of time to avoid disastrous climate impacts, with a critical global heating threshold of 1.5C to be breached far earlier than previously expected, potentially within a decade.

“This is not a future problem, it’s a problem now. I’m literally seeing climate change out of my window, climate change is in my lungs,” said Linda Mearns, an IPCC report co-author located in Boulder, Colorado, which has been baked in extreme heat and wildfire smoke in recent weeks.

Mearns, who has been involved in IPCC reports since 1990, said the latest iteration was “very thorough and disturbing” and demanded a strong response. “I’m not sure what will be required for people to get it, but my hope is that it will galvanize everyone in Glasgow to meet their agreements,” she added in reference to UN climate talks between world leaders in October.

[Worst polluting countries must make drastic carbon cuts, says Cop26 chief](#)
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Much of that global action will hinge upon the response mustered by the US, the world’s second-largest carbon emitter. Biden’s narrow window of opportunity to drastically cut emissions is dependent upon the contents of a \$3.5tn bill that Democrats hope to pass before midterm elections next year, when the party may well lose control of Congress.

“Congress [didn’t pass a climate bill in 2009](#) and it’s taken over a decade to get us back to serious climate legislation,” said Leah Stokes, a climate policy

expert at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “This summer is the best chance we have ever had to pass a big climate bill. This is it. President Biden is poised to become the climate president we need. But there are no more decades left to waste.”

Stokes said she was “very optimistic” the reconciliation bill would include two critical climate measures to help the US slash its emissions in half this decade – a scheme to help utilities to phase out fossil fuels from the electricity grid and tax credits to encourage renewable energy and electric cars.

The measures will need the support of all Senate Democrats, including Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, who have expressed doubts over the scope of the bill. Republicans, who have long allied with the fossil fuel industry to oppose any significant action to avert the climate emergency, are uniformly opposed to the bill.

01:23

'Nobody is safe': UN warns climate crisis poses immediate threat – video

“If senators truly followed the science in this report, we’d have 100 votes for climate action,” said Ed Markey, a Democratic senator who helped craft the Green New Deal proposal with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Markey said the IPCC report “must be the final warning to the world that time has run out to save the planet from dangerous and irreversible climate change”.

Climate campaigners have urged Biden to do more to match his rhetoric, pointing out that the IPCC report highlights the sharp increase in methane, a potent greenhouse gas produced from oil and gas drilling, as well as from animal agriculture. The federal government is mulling new restrictions on methane, although new leases for drilling are still being issued.

“This latest IPCC report must be a wake up call for Biden and Congress that the half measures they’ve proposed are not nearly enough to end the climate crisis,” said Varshini Prakash, executive director of Sunrise Movement, who said she had woken up “enraged” at the IPCC’s findings. “Our politicians shouldn’t need a report to tell them how bad things are. We’re already living it.”

Scientists, too, have called for their repeated warnings over the climate crisis, so often eclipsed by political intransigence or falsehoods spread by the fossil fuel industry, to finally be heeded by US lawmakers. “There’s really one key message that emerges from this report: we are out of time,” said Kim Cobb, a climate scientist at Georgia Tech.

[What is the IPCC and why is its new climate report different from others?](#)

[Read more](#)

Several climate impacts are now locked in even if planet-heating emissions are severely cut, including global sea level rise of at least a foot and a half by the end of the century, imperiling coastal American cities [already struggling with increasing flooding](#). The increase could even balloon to 7ft if the Antarctic ice sheet collapses more quickly than expected.

The US west is now racked by [prolonged drought, extraordinary record-breaking heat](#) and [enormous wildfires](#) and the IPCC report warns all of these phenomena will get worse, with dangerous heatwaves that once would have occurred every 50 years already becoming more common and expected once every five years at 1.5C of warming.

“The continued dithering is no longer about the lack of scientific evidence, but rather directly tied to a lack of political will and the overwhelming influence of the fossil fuel industry,” said Kristina Dahl, senior climate scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “The scientists keep showing up time and time again. Now it’s time for policymakers to do the same.”

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Concern grows in Kenya after alarming rise in suicide cases

Mental ill-health and ‘warped’ notions of masculinity among reasons mooted for rise of nearly 50% in a year



A mural about mental health and climate issues in Nairobi’s Kibera slum. There were 483 suicides recorded in Kenya in three months. Photograph: Gordwin Odhiambo/AFP/Getty

A mural about mental health and climate issues in Nairobi’s Kibera slum. There were 483 suicides recorded in Kenya in three months. Photograph: Gordwin Odhiambo/AFP/Getty

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[Peter Muiruri](#) in Nairobi

Tue 10 Aug 2021 02.01 EDT

There is growing alarm in [Kenya](#) over a shocking rise in the number of suicides in the country.

[Almost 500 people](#) are reported to have killed themselves in the three months to June this year, more than the whole of 2020, according to the Kenyan police.

The youngest person to take their life was nine years old; the oldest 76. The 483 deaths recorded during the period were a marked increase on the annual average of about 320 cases, the [Ministry of Health](#) reported.

George Kinoti, who heads the police directorate of criminal investigations, said: “We have never recorded such a high number of suicides before and this is not only alarming but calls for urgent remedial measures.”

No reasons have been given for the increase by the Kenyan authorities but a [report published in June](#) by the World Health Organization (WHO) said: “Suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship

breakup or chronic pain and illness.” It added that in 2019, “over 77% of global suicides occurred in low- and middle-income countries”.

Last year the [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights](#) (KNCHR) said 1,442 Kenyans attempted suicide between 2015 and 2018, which it said were conservative figures as only a fraction of cases were reported.

The organisation linked the rise in cases to mental ill-health caused by a breakdown in socio-economic safeguards, saying it was the “last resort and path of escape for individuals with unaddressed mental health needs”.

“Research has shown that structural determinants of mental ill-health such as extreme poverty, lack of access to empowerment opportunities and discrimination increase the likelihood of individuals committing suicide,” the KNHCR said.

“Unfortunately, suicide prevention measures in Kenya have often failed to address these root causes and instead incorporated fewer effective approaches, including punitive measures.”

Data from the [World Bank](#) puts suicide mortality rates in Kenya at 6.1 people in every 100,000, with men being in the highest risk category, with 9.1 men in every 100,000 affected.

Eddy Kimani, a celebrated media personality in the country who battled [bouts of mental ill health](#), said Kenyan men were more prone to bouts of depression that lead to suicide due to stereotypes about what “it means to be a man”.

“Men are generally taking their lives in Kenya because of the warped understanding of what it is to be a man. An African man guards up his feelings because he fears the repercussions in a society that has taught men that they do not cry, that they are not supposed to show their emotions or be vulnerable.

“There are men who would rather go for a prostate check than see a psychiatrist or a counsellor,” he said.

[Hidden scars: mentally ill patients lost in Yemen’s war](#)

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The KNCHR report said efforts to address the root causes of suicide were hampered by the criminalisation of attempted suicide.

Section 226 of Kenya's [penal code](#) says "any person who attempts to kill himself [sic] is guilty of a misdemeanour", which the human rights body likened to "re-victimisation of already vulnerable victims" while placing those already socially and economically vulnerable people at even greater disadvantage.

Globally, 703 000 people take their own life every year, with the WHO stating that suicide was the fourth leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds in 2019. The WHO cited poor data, lack of awareness of suicide as a major public health issue, and the taboo in many societies around openly discussing suicide as obstacles to fighting the problem.

** Help is available in the UK and Irish Republic by contacting Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org. In the US the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international suicide helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org*

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[Nigeria](#)

More than 200 children remain abducted in Nigeria amid ‘kidnap epidemic’

Schools in north of country have become prime targets for ‘bandits’ with 1,000 students taken this year



The belongings of abducted students of Bethel Baptist school lie strewn on the ground as parents pray for their children's return. Photograph: Kola Sulaimon/AFP/Getty Images

The belongings of abducted students of Bethel Baptist school lie strewn on the ground as parents pray for their children's return. Photograph: Kola Sulaimon/AFP/Getty Images

[*Emmanuel Akinwotu*](#) West Africa correspondent

Tue 10 Aug 2021 00.00 EDT

More than 200 schoolchildren remain abducted by armed “bandit” groups in northern [Nigeria](#), among more than 1,000 students taken this year as schools in northern Nigeria have become prime targets.

A startling absence of security and – according to many communities – a reluctance to meaningfully engage armed threats have rapidly turned much of northern Nigeria into a haven for kidnap gangs and a hell for thousands of families. Many of the victims are schoolchildren, with several mass kidnappings this year, mirroring and eclipsing the [kidnap of almost 300 Chibok schoolgirls](#) by Boko Haram in 2014.

For many in Nigeria, dismayed at what some have described as a “kidnap epidemic”, the security crisis is borne of a litany of government failings. The crisis threatens to derail attendance in schools in a region where high child illiteracy rates and child marriage have been prominent concerns.

In May, Danboye Bege’s 16-year-old daughter, Louise, was among [128 students abducted](#) as they were preparing to sit exams on 5 July at the Bethel Baptist School in Kaduna, northern Nigeria.

Last week, Louise and 27 other students were freed after ransom payments were given to kidnappers, locally known as “bandits”. Six students fled from the assailants while 87 – some as young as 11 years old – remain held captive.

“My daughter is getting herself back now, she is strong and in her full senses,” he said, after she was held for 22 days in a forest camp. But to get her back, he had lost everything, he said.

“I sold all my belongings. I sold our permanent house. A plot of land I had acquired, I had to sell for the release of my daughter,” Bege said. Many relatives of the kidnapped are still desperately trying to find ransom funds, mirroring the experiences of thousands this year alone who have been terrorised by armed groups.

Gangs of bandits, estimated to number more than 3,000 across the region, have plunged ordinary life into a permanent state of fear. Mass attacks in towns and rural areas by groups of marauding, heavily armed men have flourished, with the group of bandits operating from the haven of forests spanning across central and north-west Nigeria into Niger.

Many of the bandits are thought to be Fulanis, an ethnic group with a historic culture rooted in nomadic life and cattle-rearing spread across west [Africa](#). As grazing routes have become private land or have diminished entirely due to the effects of the climate crisis, conflicts with farmers have spiralled.

A rise in militancy by thousands of young and disaffected Fulanis has emerged as the most deadly security crisis in Nigeria, with conflicts and mass attacks claiming more lives in recent years than the jihadist insurgency in the north-east.

As the economy has suffered, and poorly funded local security forces proved incapable to respond, kidnap-for-ransom attacks have become a lucrative crime. The freedom with which kidnap gangs have been able to operate have caused widespread despair in Nigeria, with many accusing President Muhammadu Buhari's government of failing to address the situation.

As bandit gangs have flourished, a mix of conflicting approaches and operations by local and federal governments have failed, according to Murtala Abdullahi, a security and climate expert in Nigeria. "The security intervention in the north-west is a reflection of the broader problematic way politicians respond to security issues in the country," he said. "It's reactionary and heavily dependent on military force. We have also seen mixed approaches, dialogue [with the armed groups] and non-dialogue, in the absence of a strategic framework or strategy."

Arms amnesties, controversial "peace deals" and even direct payments have all been deployed by government officials to little effect. Repeated military operations against forest hideouts, including airstrikes, have also been launched. Last month, an air force jet was shot down in Zamfara state, in north-west Nigeria, the Nigerian air force said, with the pilot surviving the crash. The incident has raised concerns about the increasing capability of the

armed groups in the region, with some fearing they may have made alliances with jihadists.

Kaduna state government, like a growing number of local authorities, has refused to pay ransoms or negotiate with bandits. In April, the governor, Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai, said: “I mean it and I will say it again here. Even if my son is kidnapped, I will rather pray for him to make heaven instead, because I won’t pay any ransom.”

Yet for poorer, more exposed communities, facing threats to life and ransom payments, the government’s stance has sparked anger. According to Nigeria’s statistics agency, 40% of its adult population live on less than \$1 a day.

Ahmad Idris’s nephew, 25-year-old Hamza Nasiru, was among 23 students and staff kidnapped from the Greenfield University in Kaduna, on 20 April. Bandits started their demands at 800m naira (£1,400,000) for their release. “How many of the relations even earn 50,000 naira (£87) [a month]?” he said. “You can imagine the pain facing us. How can you find that money without major help?”

Beyond the frequency of attacks, what has caused greater distress is the freedom with which kidnappers have acted, not bothering to conceal their identities to victims, calling families from registered telephone lines, calling radio stations where children have been put on air to plea for their lives, and operating from forest camps known to security officials.

In the days after the Greenfield kidnapping, the bandits began contacting the families of the students and making themselves known to them.

“His name is Baleri, he’s the group leader,” Idris said. “He’s the one who used to call and say if we want the children alive, we had to pay. This group leader is still using the same number! And his number is with the security agents and everybody. At any time you call it, you will talk to them,” he said.

Increasingly emboldened, bandits have courted public personas, even appearing on the radio. In May, Baleri, the kidnap gang leader, and Hamza,

Idris's nephew, appeared on Voice of America Hausa radio station. A clip of the interview is being shared among the families of the abducted and in the community in Kaduna.

"The journalist asked Baleri on the whereabouts of the children and then, in that same interview, we were being made to hear from some of the children, and it was Hamza," Idris said.

"The journalist asked him how he was doing there in the bush [forest]. Hamza told the journalist that they killed five of the students in front of them." The bodies, together with that of a member of staff killed by the bandits, were carted to the school grounds.

On 29 May, students and staff were returned after a ransom payment of more than 100m naira, Idris said. Yet what remains a source of pain for the relatives of the kidnapped is that the assailants have not been pursued.

"Even after they were freed, did they go after them? Did they go to their camp in the bush? So what is the reason behind saying you do not give ransom when even after we put the money together to pay, you don't do anything?" Idris said.

Additional reporting by Alex Uangbaoje

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US says Afghans must defend their country as Taliban takes more ground

Comments distancing the US from the conflict come as militants capture more cities and violence escalates



Shops damaged from fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

Shops damaged from fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

[Akhtar Mohammad Makoii](#), [Luke Harding](#) and agencies

Mon 9 Aug 2021 22.56 EDT

The US has said it is up to Afghan security forces to defend the country after Taliban militants captured a sixth provincial capital, along with border towns and trade routes.

Fighting in Afghanistan's long-running conflict has escalated dramatically since May, when the US-led military coalition began the final stage of a withdrawal set to be completed before the end of the month.

"It's their country to defend now. It's their struggle," Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said at a news conference on Monday.

[The Guardian view on the Taliban's advance: we still have a responsibility to Afghans | Editorial](#)

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"These are their military forces, these are their provincial capitals, their people to defend, and it's really going to come down to the leadership that they're willing to exude here at this particular moment," Kirby said.

He acknowledged the fight on the ground was "clearly not going in the right direction".

While refusing to provide additional military support, the US said it would continue to push for a diplomatic resolution to the escalating conflict.

The US negotiator on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, "will press the Taliban to stop their military offensive" at talks in Doha this week, the state department said.

Khalilzad would help formulate an international response to the rapidly deteriorating situation, it said, as it described the casualties and alleged human rights atrocities as of "grave concern".

"A negotiated peace is the only path to ending the war."



Taliban fighters stand guard in Kunduz city, northern Afghanistan, as conflict escalates across the country. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

The Taliban have now overrun six provincial capitals in days. On Sunday the group claimed a huge symbolic victory when its [fighters seized Kunduz](#), a strategic city close to the border with Tajikistan and an important political and military hub. It has also claimed Sheberghan, the capital of the northern Jawzjan province, and neighbouring Taloqan.

On Monday armed fighters swept into the city of Aibak without meeting any resistance, while forces were advancing toward Pul-e Khomri, another provincial capital in the north.

“The city of Aibak, unfortunately, fell to the Taliban on Monday afternoon,” a local official confirmed to the Guardian by phone. “Taliban fighters, armed with heavy weapons, besieged the city for a week. It fell without any clashes.”

[Afghanistan could become terrorist base again, UK general warns](#)
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The official added: “Local security forces and officials retreated from one side and around 30 minutes later the Taliban entered the city from another

side. Kabul did not send help. Taliban now control the headquarters of the police, governor and intelligence. People are worried. Shops are closed. Many government employees and local people have fled in recent days.”

The Taliban posted video of their triumphant fighters standing in front of [Aibak's main administrative building](#), and [on a road on the outskirts](#). The city is a key route for the supply of goods to northern Afghanistan. Its capture leaves pro-government forces in the region increasingly cut off.

Another senior local official blamed a former senator and local strongman for the fall of the city after he switched sides on Sunday and joined the Taliban with 300 of his men. Switching sides has been a tactic for decades in war-torn [Afghanistan](#).

The Taliban were also pressing on the biggest city in the region, Mazar-i-Sharif. Its fall would deal a devastating and possibly terminal blow to the government in Kabul. Officials and residents contacted by phone said the Taliban was exaggerating. They confirmed clashes in surrounding districts.

“The enemy is trying to distort public opinion and create anxiety for the civilian population by their propaganda,” said a statement from the police force in Balkh province, where Mazar-i-Sharif is the capital. Atta Mohammad Noor, a northern militia commander, vowed to fight to the end, saying there would be “resistance until the last drop of my blood”.

“I prefer dying in dignity than dying in despair,” he tweeted.



Taliban fighters guard a checkpoint in northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

On Monday Unicef said it was “shocked” by the recent escalation in violence – 27 children have been killed and 136 wounded in three days.

“These are not numbers. Each one of these deaths and each case of physical suffering is a personal tragedy,” said Hervé Ludovic De Lys, Unicef’s Afghanistan representative.

Elsewhere in the country, the Taliban started looking for government employees in newly captured territories.

[Taliban capture sixth provincial capital in northern Afghanistan](#)
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“I refused to go to my office on Thursday and fled to a nearby village, to a relative’s home,” said Shahla, a woman who had been a local prosecutor for four years in the city of Zaranj. The Taliban took over Zaranj, in the southwest province of Nimroz, on Friday – the first provincial capital to be captured by the insurgents since the Biden administration announced it was pulling out US troops.

“Then I came to Herat with only my clothes on Saturday, leaving everything behind. It was a horrible journey. Taliban had checkpoints all over the road and checked our vehicle several times along the highway. They were asking questions only from men. I was wearing a burqa. It was hot like hell, but it was my only protection.”

The Taliban have started giving so-called “immunity cards” to soldiers and civil servants in the same city, asking anybody with connections to the government to come and register, local people told the Guardian. Employees are told to go to the local governor’s office and after some questions receive their cards.

“Taliban warned the people that if they cooperate with the government in the future, they will be killed right away, without any trial,” a resident said by phone. “Many did, but I cannot. They are not trustworthy. I guess they are looking for high-ranking officials.”

Shahla said she was sceptical about the plan. “I was scared to tell them that as a woman I worked for the government. I could not trust them. I feared that they would stone me to death for what I did over the past four years. I already received several threats from them.”

With Reuters and Associated Press

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Taliban capture sixth provincial capital in northern Afghanistan

Fighters overrun Aibak without meeting resistance, leaving pro-government forces in region cut off



Taliban fighters stand guard at a checkpoint in Kunduz a day after after seizing the strategic city in northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

Taliban fighters stand guard at a checkpoint in Kunduz a day after after seizing the strategic city in northern Afghanistan. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

[*Akhtar Mohammad Makoui*](#) in Herat and [*Luke Harding*](#)

Mon 9 Aug 2021 13.20 EDT

The Taliban captured another provincial capital on Monday and were pressing on the biggest city in the region, Mazar-i-Sharif, following [a stunning weekend offensive](#) in which the insurgents have overrun a series of urban centres across northern Afghanistan.

Armed fighters swept into the city of Aibak without meeting any resistance. The deputy chief of Samangan province confirmed that the local governor had withdrawn his soldiers in order to protect the civilian population. The [Taliban](#) were in “full control”, Sefatullah Samangani said.

The Taliban posted video of its triumphant fighters standing in front of [Aibak's main administrative building](#), and [on a road on the outskirts](#). The city is a key route for the supply of goods to northern Afghanistan. Its capture leaves pro-government forces in the region increasingly cut off.

د اسلامي امارت مجاهدينو د بلخ له طرفه هم د سمنځان مرکز ایک بنیار دخولی دروازه تر خپل کنترول لاندې راوسته او مجاهدين د پرمختګ په حال کې دي
pic.twitter.com/2Vs6xwQvAQ

— Zabihullah (@Zabehulah_M33) [August 9, 2021](#)

The Taliban have now overrun six provincial capitals in mere days. On Sunday the group claimed a huge symbolic victory when its [fighters seized Kunduz](#), a strategic city close to the border with Tajikistan and an important political and military hub. It has also claimed Sheberghan, the capital of the northern Jawzjan province, and neighbouring Taloqan. On Monday its forces were advancing toward Pul-e Khomri, another provincial capital in the north.

“The city of Aibak, unfortunately, fell to the Taliban on Monday afternoon,” a local official confirmed to the Guardian by phone. “Taliban fighters, armed with heavy weapons, besieged the city for a week. It fell without any clashes.”

The official added: “Local security forces and officials retreated from one side and around 30 minutes later the Taliban entered the city from another side. Kabul did not send help. Taliban now control the headquarters of the

police, governor and intelligence. People are worried. Shops are closed. Many government employees and local people have fled in recent days.”

Another senior local official blamed a former senator and local strongman for the fall of the city after he switched sides on Sunday and joined the Taliban with 300 of his men. Switching sides has been a tactic for decades in war-torn [Afghanistan](#).



Taliban fighters stand guard in Kunduz after capturing the strategic city in northern Afghanistan on Sunday. Photograph: Abdullah Sahil/AP

“Taliban could capture the city without fighting because Asif Azimi, a former mujahideen commander, joined the Taliban. This scared the security forces and they left,” the official said. “The local governor asked him some days ago to help defend the city. He agreed and entered but fled again after taking some weapons. On Sunday night he joined the Taliban.”

The group’s spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said its fighters had now entered Mazar-i-Sharif, the most populous city in the north. Its fall would deal a devastating and possibly terminal blow to the government in Kabul. Officials and residents contacted by phone said the Taliban were exaggerating. They confirmed clashes in surrounding districts.

“The enemy is trying to distort public opinion and create anxiety for the civilian population by their propaganda,” said a statement from the police force in Balkh province, where Mazar-i-Sharif is the capital. Atta Mohammad Noor, a northern militia commander, vowed to fight to the end, saying there would be “resistance until the last drop of my blood”. “I prefer dying in dignity than dying in despair,” he tweeted.

On Monday Unicef said it was “shocked” by the recent escalation in violence; 27 children have been killed and 136 wounded in three days. “These are not numbers. Each one of these deaths and each case of physical suffering is a personal tragedy,” said Hervé Ludovic De Lys, Unicef’s Afghanistan representative.

Elsewhere in the country, the Taliban started looking for government employees in newly captured territories.



Afghan families that fled from Kunduz and Takhar provinces wait to collect food in Kabul. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

“I refused to go to my office on Thursday and fled to a nearby village, to a relative’s home,” said Shahla, a woman who had been a local prosecutor for four years in the city of Zaranj. The Taliban took over Zaranj, in the southwest province of Nimroz, on Friday – the first provincial capital to be

captured by the insurgents since the Biden administration announced in May it was pulling out US troops.

“Then I came to Herat with only my clothes on Saturday, leaving everything behind. It was a horrible journey. Taliban had checkpoints all over the road and checked our vehicle several times along the highway. They were asking questions only from men. I was wearing a burqa. It was hot like hell, but it was my only protection.”

The Taliban have started giving so-called “immunity cards” to soldiers and civil servants in the same city, asking anybody with connections to the government to come and register, local people told the Guardian. Employees are told to go to the local governor’s office and after some questions receive their cards.

“Taliban warned the people that if they cooperate with the government in the future, they will be killed right away, without any trial. Many did, but I cannot. They are not trustworthy. I guess they are looking for high-ranking officials,” a resident said by phone.

Shahla said she was sceptical about the plan. “I was scared to tell them that as a woman I worked for the government. I could not trust them. I feared that they would stone me to death for what I did over the past four years. I already received several threats from them.”

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