

Impact of COVID-19 on advice sought from the Scottish Citizens Advice network

30.06.20



Introduction

This is a weekly report that tracks changes in the type of advice people are seeking from the Citizens Advice network in Scotland up to and including Sunday 21 June. It includes data from the 59 Citizens Advice bureaux and from our public advice site. Advice relating to social security, employment and debt continues to be the most sought-after and direct phone contact with local bureaux remains the most common contact method.

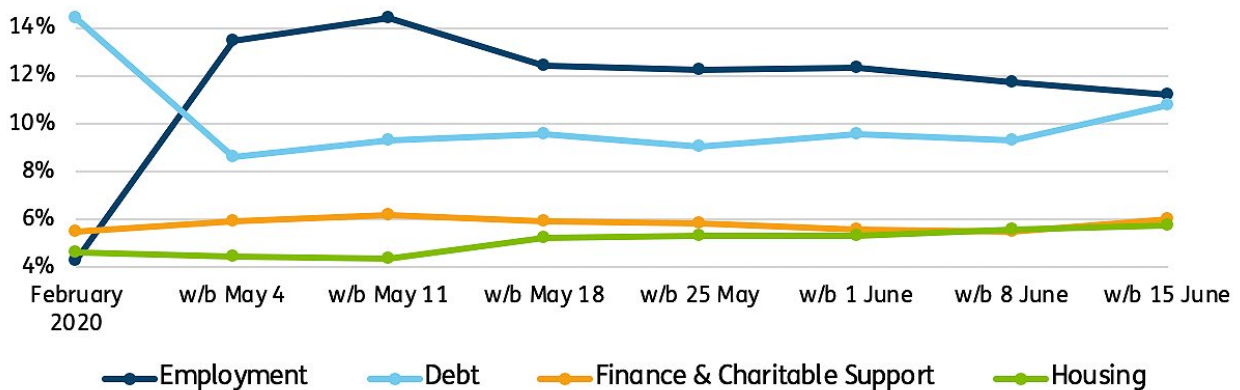
In this report we see that advice on topics such as debt and travel is now beginning to increase while the significant changes to advice on employment and social security evident during the initial part of lockdown are levelling off.

However, it is clear from both bureaux and our online advice site that redundancy as an advice topic is increasing. We can also see that clients new to bureaux since the pandemic began are seeking different kinds of advice as opposed to those who had used bureaux prior to March 2020.

Top five advice needs at Citizens Advice bureaux

Advice in relation to social security remains the most common, although there has been a small decrease in recent weeks from 46% of all advice provided by bureaux to 42%. It would appear that the early increase in need for employment advice is slowly declining, while the need for both debt and housing-related advice is increasing. In addition, as a proportion of all advice housing is currently (6%) above the pre-pandemic level (4%).

Chart 1: Top advice needs (excluding benefits)

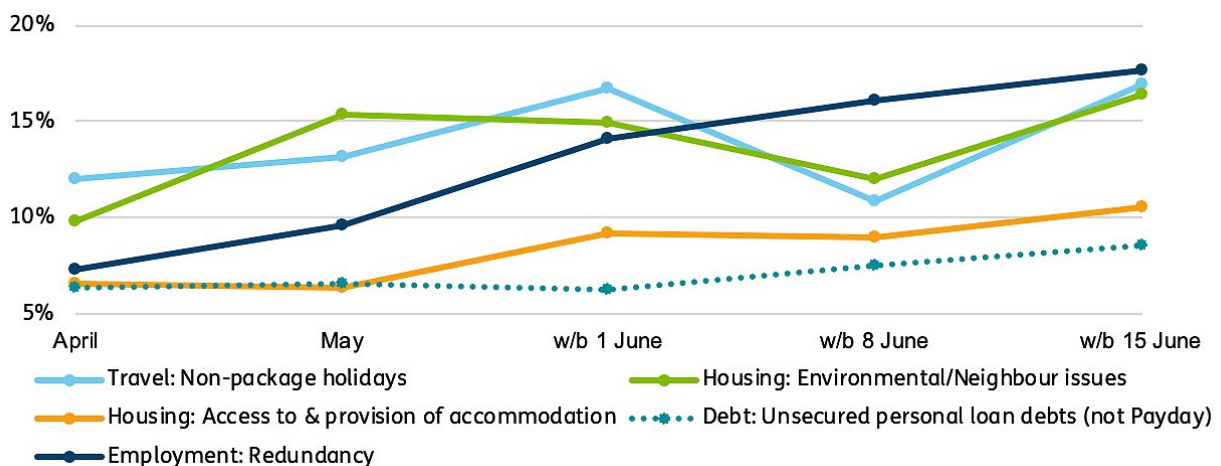


Notable increases in advice need

Some notable increases in specific types of advice have occurred, including advice related to redundancy, non-package holidays and access to/provision of accommodation.

During the first three weeks of June, 907 pieces of advice were given in relation to redundancy by local Citizens Advice bureaux, rising to 18% of all employment advice (chart below). In comparison, 543 pieces of redundancy advice were given in the whole month of April and 679 pieces in May.

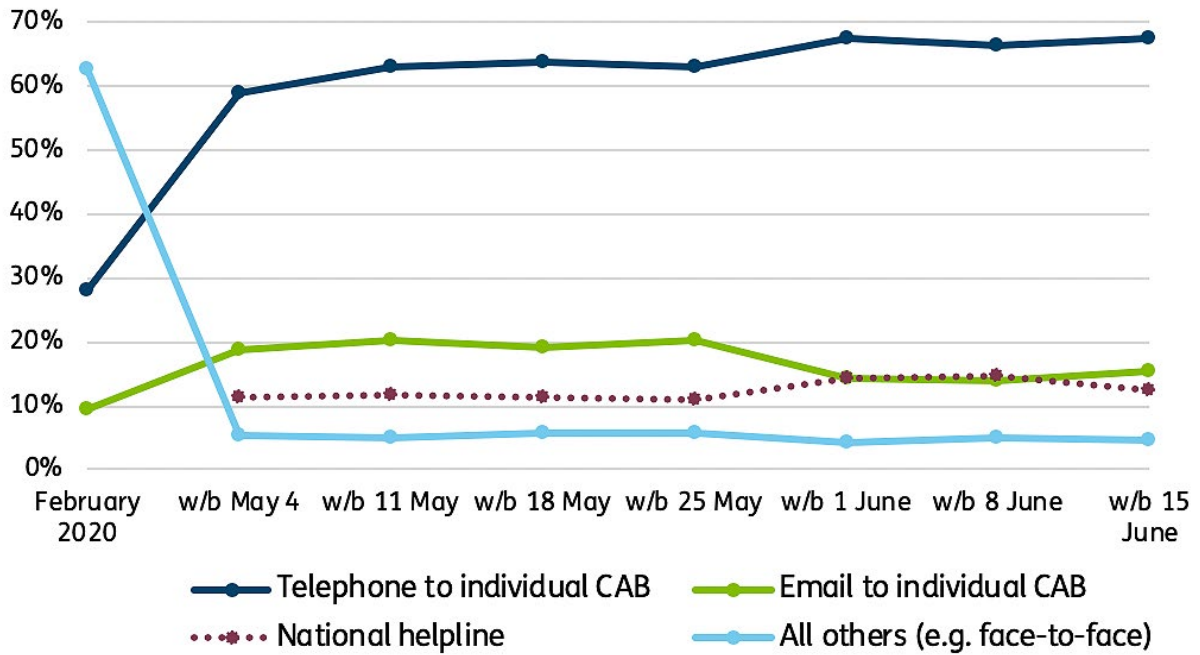
Chart 2: Notable increases in advice need April to June 2020



Contact method

Direct contact with local bureaux via telephone has increased in recent weeks; in contrast, direct contact via email has declined.

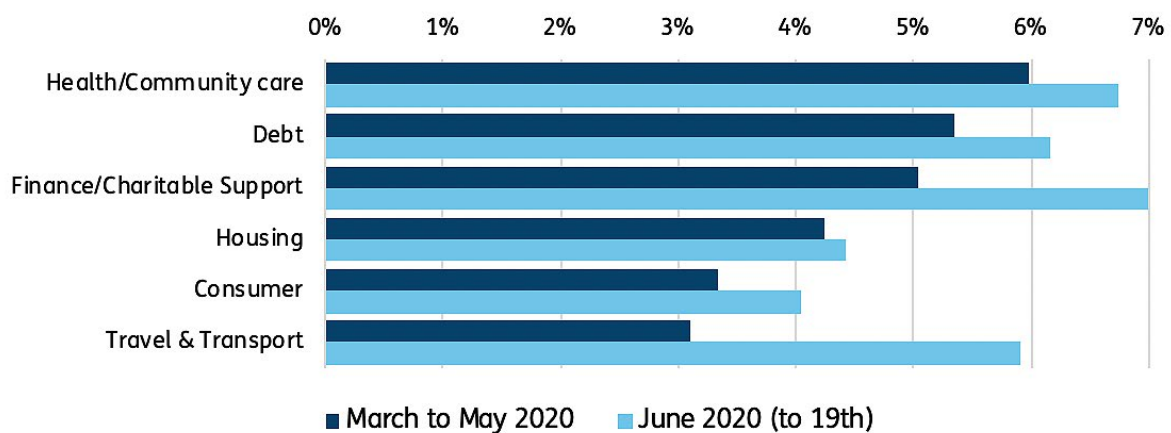
Chart 3: Methods of contact



Advice related to COVID-19 and its impact

Overall, the need for COVID-19-related advice seems to have decreased somewhat in recent weeks. However, as can be seen in the chart below, in some other advice areas it appears that the need for COVID-19-related support has increased during June. This is particularly the case in relation to travel/transport issues (for example holidays and refunds) and finance/charitable support.

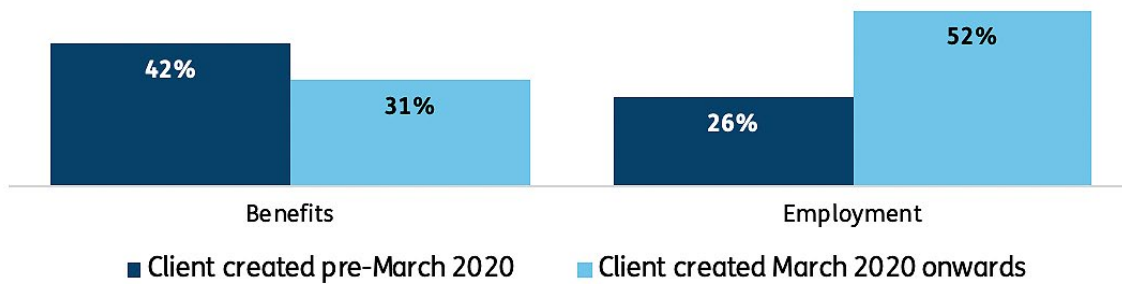
Chart 4: Percentage of client contacts related to coronavirus, by advice area - increases



Client demographics

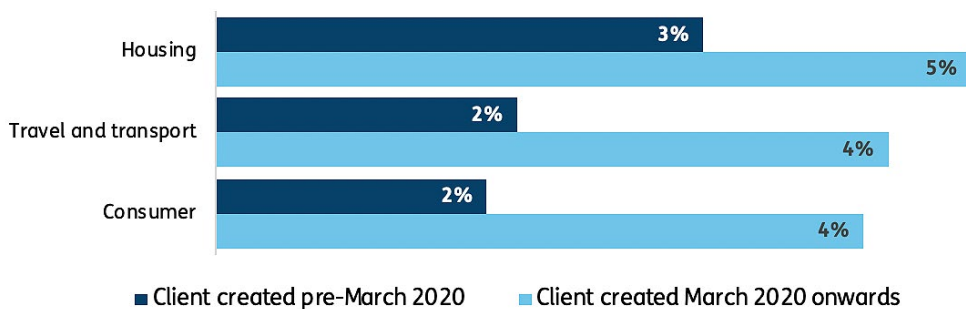
In terms of COVID-19-related advice needs, there are differences between ‘new’ clients (i.e. those who came to bureaux for the first time between March and 19 June 2020) and ‘repeat’ clients (i.e. those who had made use of a Citizens Advice bureau prior to March 2020). For ‘new’ clients, by far the most common type of advice sought was in relation to employment. In contrast, ‘repeat’ clients were most likely to seek COVID-19-driven advice in relation to social security.

Chart 5: Top 2 COVID-19 driven advice areas for ‘new’ and ‘repeat’ clients, by proportion of clients



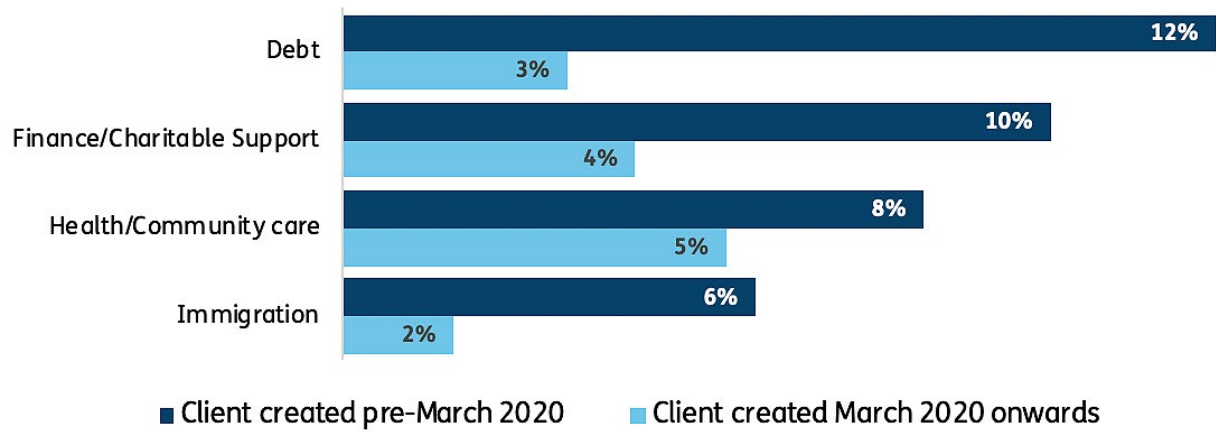
In terms of ‘new’ clients, advice driven by COVID-19 was more likely to be sought in relation to housing, travel and transport, and consumer issues.

Chart 6: Advice areas where ‘new’ clients outnumber ‘repeat’ clients, by proportion of clients (March to 19 June)



In contrast, 'repeat' clients appeared more likely to seek COVID-19 driven advice in relation to debt; finance/charitable support; health/community care; and immigration issues.

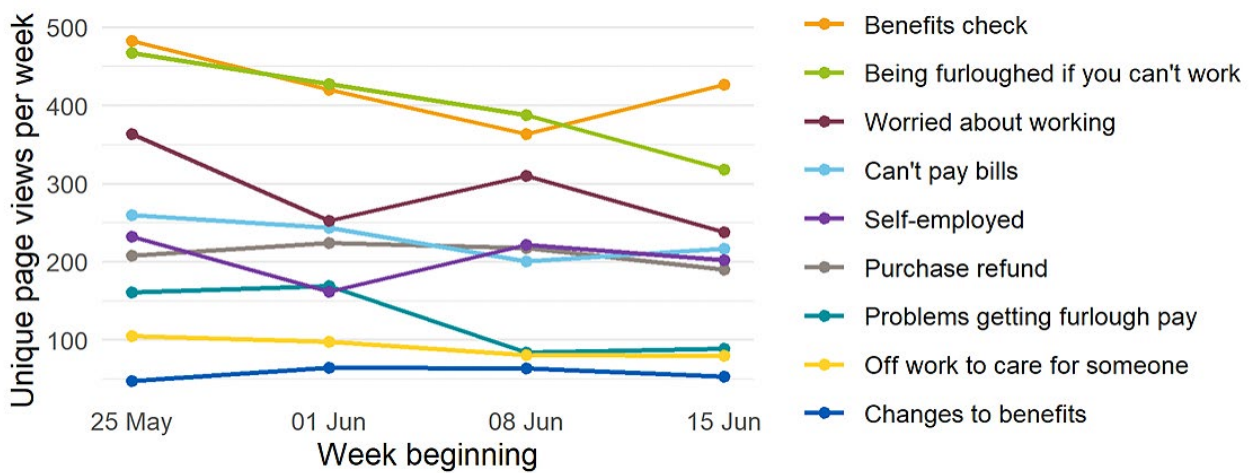
Chart 7: Advice areas where repeat clients outnumber new clients, by proportion of clients (March to 19 June)



Online coronavirus advice

On the public advice website, the coronavirus-specific advice pages together currently receive between 500 and 1000 page views a day. Most of these page views are for the main coronavirus page, [“Coronavirus: what it means for you”](#), which primarily serves to signpost users to other relevant pages. Of the other coronavirus-specific pages the most popular are [“Coronavirus: check what benefits you can get”](#) and [“Being furloughed if you can’t work”](#).

Chart 8: Weekly page views for coronavirus-specific pages (excluding the main coronavirus page)

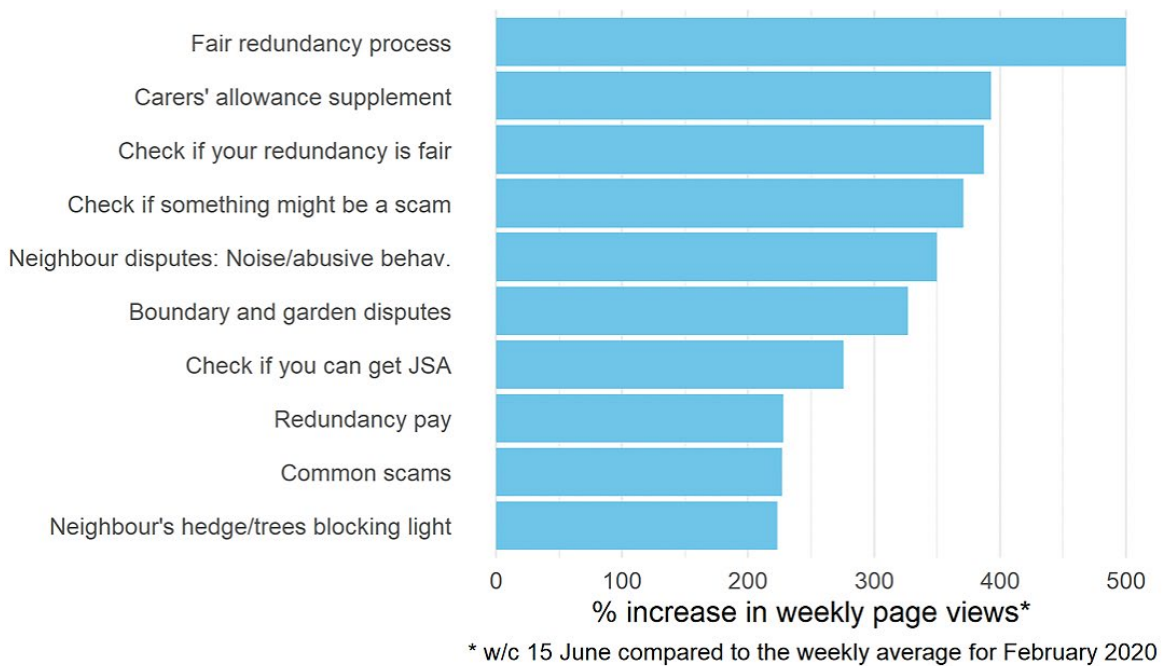


Notably popular pages

Certain pages are significantly more popular than they were before lockdown. Notably, these include pages on redundancy, which mirrors the rise in redundancy advice provided by Citizens Advice bureaux. In February, the [‘check if your redundancy is fair’](#) page received 46 views on average per week. In contrast it was viewed 224 times in the seven days from 15 June. Similarly, the page outlining the [‘fair redundancy process’](#) which must be followed by employers received on average 18 views a week in February but in the week beginning 15 June this had jumped to 108 views.

The page providing advice on the carers’ allowance supplement has been more popular than usual through most of the lockdown period.

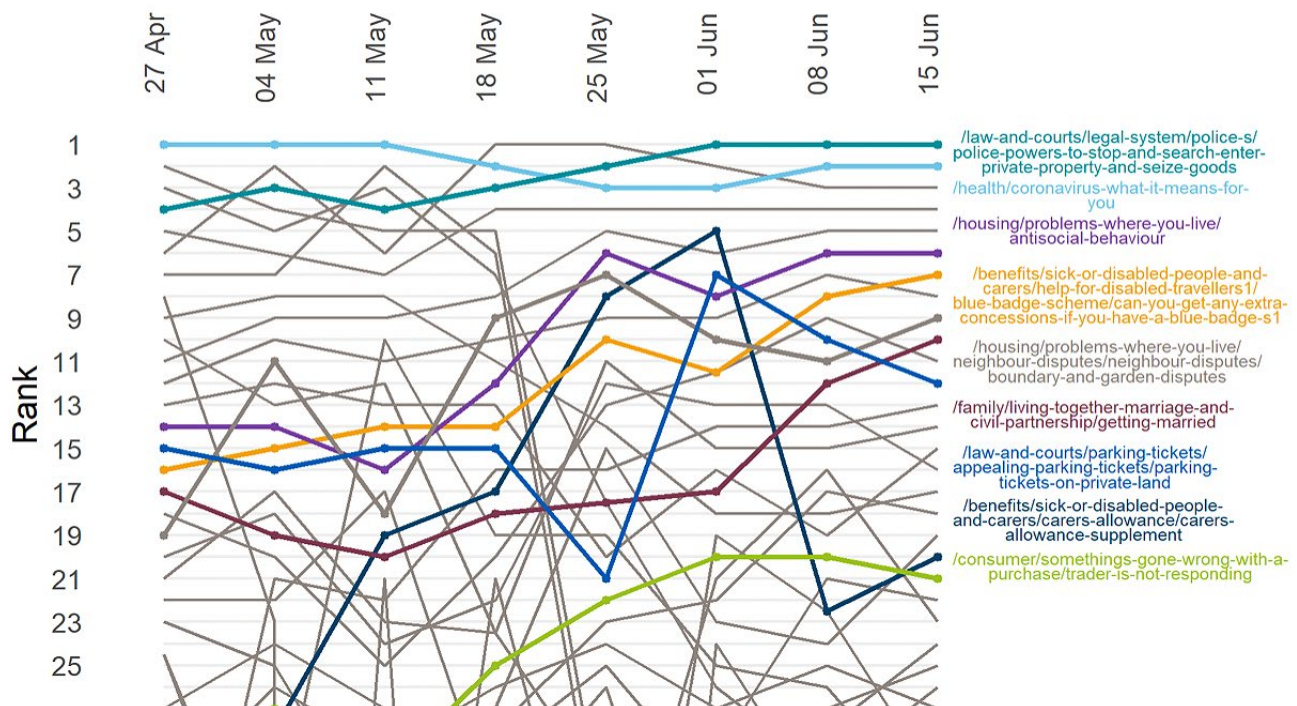
Chart 9: Pages that are notably more popular than usual



Most-viewed advice pages

With the exception of the main coronavirus advice page – [“Coronavirus: what it means for you”](#) – the other coronavirus specific pages no longer feature in the top 25 pages on the public advice website. The most-viewed page relates to police powers, and before the COVID-19 crisis was typically the top page, suggesting some level of return to normality. Similarly, other pages about blue badge holder concessions, getting married, and parking tickets – which are normally highly viewed – have risen higher in the page rankings over recent weeks. However other pages are not normally as popular as they currently are, such as those on the carers allowance supplement, antisocial behaviour, and traders not responding to customer complaints.

Chart 10: Top 25 pages on the public advice website



Concluding remarks

Although some decrease in the need for COVID-19-related advice is evident in recent weeks, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the advice landscape remains in a state of flux. The necessary shift to advice provision via telephone and email is also likely to be a contributing factor here, as we know from previous work that there is some connection between the type of advice sought and the method by which it is sought.