

PLUGGED IN

**Strengthening Energy Advice and Support for Gypsies,
Travellers, Roma and Nomadic Communities**

**MAKING ENERGY ADVICE
AND SUPPORT BETTER
FOR GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS,
ROMA AND NOMADIC COMMUNITIES**

A COMMUNITY CO-PRODUCED GUIDE

**A resource prepared by National Energy Action
July 2023**



Action for Warm Homes



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

Which?





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would first and foremost like to thank the hundreds of households who are Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (e.g., Boaters, Bargees) (GTRNC) for their incredibly generous involvement – to those who completed the survey, took part in interviews, completed diaries, and came to participate at the in-person at the workshops.

We are also very grateful to the many services and organisations who so generously found time to contribute to the research, particularly at a time when your services are so critically stretched and so vitally needed.

Without these valuable insights of lived and professional experience we would not have been able to complete the research.

Thanks also to Friends, Families, Travellers for expert partnership and valuable guidance in developing the research and support with completing the fieldwork.

Lastly, we would like to thank the Which? Fund for their support. The final project report and all related resources were kindly sponsored by The Which? Fund, funded by the Consumers' Association. It represents the research and views solely of the authors and of National Energy Action and does not represent the views or experiences of Which? or the Consumers' Association.

THIS RESOURCE

This Community Co-Produced Guide aims to provide guidance and support for organisations and services that want to deliver more effective support and better understand the energy-related issues and challenges experienced by households that identify as Gypsy, Traveller, Roma or belonging to a Nomadic Community (GTRNC).

It draws on the valuable views and insights from people identifying as GTRNC who contributed to two in-person co-productions workshops, as well evidence gathered as part of the wider research project 'Plugged In: Strengthening Energy Advice and Support for GTRNC'. The project has been led by National Energy Action, working in partnership with Friends, Families and Travellers, and is supported by the Which Fund.

This resource is set out over six sections that provide an overview of the project, GTRNCs, fuel poverty, and the key issues impacting these communities in relation to energy vulnerability and related advice and support. It outlines key barriers to accessing support and outlines five ways in which energy advice and support for GTRNCs can be strengthened. This includes:

- 1. Improving cultural sensitivity and awareness**
- 2. Improving communication**
- 3. Improving the delivery of support**
- 4. Improving partnership working**
- 5. Improving policy**



1. SUPPORTING GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS, ROMA AND OTHER PEOPLE LIVING AS PART OF NOMADIC COMMUNITIES (GTRNC)

Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (e.g., Boaters, Bargees, etc.) (GTRNC¹) are consumer groups that have been overlooked, under-served by policy, and under-researched. Yet evidence tells us these different communities experience manifold vulnerabilities and are at heightened risk of harm. This is also the case with fuel poverty – a situation in which a household cannot adequately afford or access sufficient energy for good health, comfort, and wellbeing.

GTRNCs are not a single homogenous group living and experiencing energy and related vulnerability in the same way, however there are some commonalities in their experiences. These include difficulties with access to energy via less common arrangements, little-to-no choice over supplier and fuel type, discrimination, limited consumer protections, disproportionately more expensive bills, and little choice over cleaner and/or cheaper sources of energy. GTRNC households are also exposed to increased risk through use of faulty and dangerous heating and cooking systems, exposure to poor air quality and increased CO risk. There is also a lack of understanding and date in terms of access to and take up of vital schemes among these communities, such as the Warm Home Discount (WHD), the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), and the Priority Services Register (PSR), for example.

This guide was developed in collaboration with community members during the height of the cost-of-living and energy price crises in 2022/2023 and so reflects on the situation before, during, and after the significant package of Government support was in place. Hundreds of thousands of households, including those living in park homes and on

¹ The term Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (GTRNC) is a broad term adopted in this project to encompass a wide range of demographic, ethnic, and community groups. It includes several different and distinctive ways in which people may identify, with the main commonality being a link, practically and/or culturally, to nomadic life.

boats, were refused or excluded from this essential support². This analysis includes some of the experiences and views of these households, and others, such as those living roadside and on sites.

At a time when the UK is experiencing cost-of-living and energy crises, and consumer service and protections are under scrutiny, incomes strained, and public health severely impacted, it is vital to examine how the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of consumers can be best included and supported.

This project has aimed to do this, drawing together data generated from stakeholder and householder interviews, an expert stakeholder call-for-evidence (CFE), community co-productions workshops, and household diaries. The evidence set out here considers the lived experience of energy vulnerability, as well as the experiences of those providing and receiving energy-related advice and support, with a focus on how effective this is and where the gaps and challenges are specifically for GTRNCs.

2. GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS, ROMA, AND NOMADIC COMMUNITIES

How many Gypsy and Traveller people are there in the UK?



²More information can be found at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-66124201>

HEALTH

Members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities expect to live between 10 and 25 years shorter than the wider population and to spend less years of their lives in good health.

HATE

44% of British adults openly express negative attitudes against Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities - more than for any other protected characteristic group. Police officers consider hate crime to be the most common issue Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers report to them, but less than 15% of hate incidents are reported to the police.

ACCOMMODATION

A chronic national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England means that over 3000 families have no lawful place to stop. An unfavourable planning system and the abject failure of local and national government to ensure sufficient sites are built means that around 10,000 people live on land without permission.

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The challenge is huge

Cold and damp homes take a heavy toll

Around 10k people die every year from the effects of a cold home

4x

Hospital admissions for COPD are 4 times more likely in winter months

£2bn

Cold homes cost the NHS more than £2bn every year in England and Wales

£

Every £ spent on making homes warmer brings £4 in health benefits

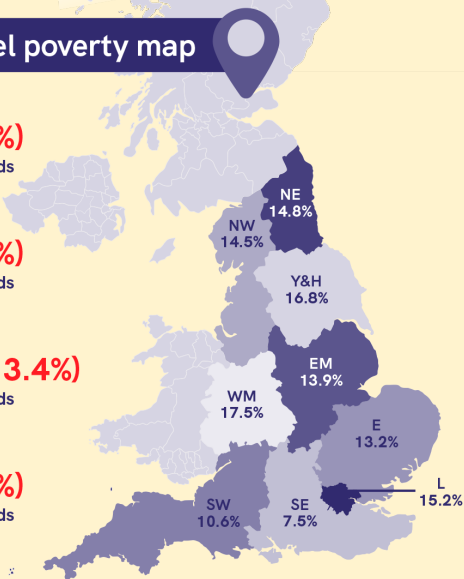
England's Fuel poverty map

160,000 (22%)
Fuel poverty households in Northern Ireland

619,000 (25%)
Fuel poverty households in Scotland

3,176,000 (13.4%)
Fuel poverty households in England

155,000 (12%)
Fuel poverty households in Wales



Over 4 million



households across the UK are in fuel poverty

Over 1 million households can be considered in severe fuel poverty

1.4 million UK households with at least 1 dependent child live in fuel poverty

Coping Strategies

Cold homes prevent people from thriving

Spaces become smaller and options become limited, resulting in tough choices having to be made:



Going to bed early to stay warm



Only heating one room or avoiding using central heating at all



Spending the day in heated spaces such as a library, café or even A&E



Cooking using alternative sources such as a BBQ or portable stove



Not inviting friends or family into the home



Using unsafe, unserviced heating appliances or inappropriate devices like ovens to stay warm



Cutting back on electricity and using candles instead of lights



Leaving curtains closed all day or putting newspaper over windows



Cutting back on buying essential personal items, food, eating only cold meals or reliance on food banks



Formal or informal borrowing from friends and family

3. WHAT IS FUEL POVERTY?

4. FUEL POVERTY AND GTRNCs

GTRNC households experienced many different types of energy-related problems:

- 43% have had an issue with an energy supplier,
- 49% have had an issue with a housing provider about energy/fuel,
- 25% have had issues with neighbours about energy/fuel,
- 25% have had issues with a site manager about energy/fuel,
- 40% have had issues with a broken gas or electricity meter,
- 10% have had issues with a broken top-up key/card for a PPM.

Our research examined the experiences of fuel poverty among GTRNCs and found that:

- More than 70% of GTRNC households told us that energy/fuel was unaffordable and that they were struggling, with 42% able to 'just about manage' energy/fuel costs, 23% finding costs 'quite difficult' and 9% finding costs 'very difficult'
- 80% of households were turning the heating off to save money, with 51% doing this 'all of the time' or 'some of the time'
- 63% of GTRNC householders were going without meals, with 36% doing this 'all of the time' or 'some of the time'
- More than half (61%) reported borrowing money to pay for energy/fuel in the last 12 months, with 29% reporting that they had needed to do this 'lots of times'
- More than two out of three respondents reported having one or more health conditions or were living with a disability. The most commonly reported (41%) being a respiratory/breathing condition. Nineteen per cent were living with depression and 17% with anxiety
- Forty-two per cent of households felt their home affected their health 'in a bad way', because their home was (for some a combination of) 'too expensive' (37%), 'too cold' (33%), 'too warm' (25%), 'too difficult to keep safe' (25%), and 'damp and mouldy' (25%)
- Sixty-three per cent of households have damp and mould in their homes and were using a range of tactics to try and deal with the issue, including: opening windows (64%), washing windows and surfaces (58%), and using a dehumidifier (40%), and painting and decorating

- Some households, in particular Boaters and those living roadside, felt at risk of harm in terms of being ‘targets’ for theft with items such as generators. This stopped some from purchasing such equipment which could improve levels of comfort and warmth at home.
- There was a strong sense of community, and this was by far the biggest indicator of whether or not a household was considered more or less vulnerable: those with strong ties with and close connections to neighbours and family and friends were regarded as less at risk and more supported and protected; those without, were regarded as among the most vulnerable and marginalised
- 43% of households had not received any money from government schemes to help with energy/fuel costs during the energy crisis.

5. KEY BARRIERS TO PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

There are several barriers to providing effective energy-related advice and support to GTRNCs. They include:

- **Resource in terms of staff and time due to high levels of demand for support:**

“... we need more resources to be able to support people. Because there’s not enough of us and there’s a lot of work to do. So yes, more resources need to come from one way or another ... And I think funding us lot is probably easier than societal change, it seems.”

- **Poor customer service as an energy consumer:**

- For households with energy supplier relationships, many are concerned with inconvenient, expensive, and lengthy wait times to call centres to then experience poor customer service. Many struggle to make contact with a person and feel as though they are in a loop. Records of calls and agreed actions discussed as a useful solution as these could be showed to a third party or relative or friend for support. It would also provide evidence of agreed actions.

- **Online support and digital exclusion:**

- For stakeholders providing support to GTRNCs, 92% felt that digital exclusion was one of the main barriers to providing effective support

- One in four households was either using the internet but were not confident in doing so (19%), not using the internet but would like to (6%), or not using the internet and had no wish to (2%)
 - Online methods, where people are able to access and use them, offer valuable ways to provide more in-depth support remotely. Two positive examples are Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. These platforms allow people to access help remotely and share pictures of letters and other documents to make advice and support available in a simpler and quicker way.
- **Language barriers:**
 - 42% of services working with GTRNCs reporting language barriers as impacting their capacity to provide effective support.
- **Health-related barriers:**
 - Health, particularly mental health, was described as a barrier to accessing support. The capacity to deal with complex problems while managing day-to-day health issues, often in combination with other barriers and markers of vulnerability, is resulting in people not being able to access or follow-up with support. Common health issues that GTRNC households told us need more consideration include depression, anxiety, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- **Literacy and numeracy barriers:**
 - 81% of services felt that literacy and numeracy issues were one of the main barriers to providing effective support.
 - The design of paperwork and documents (e.g., energy bills) is unnecessarily complex, and support with understanding paperwork is essential as well as the provision of Easy Read and 'audio' resources.
- **Trust, stigma, and experiences of discrimination:**
 - Households, particularly those living on sites, face discrimination in many parts of their everyday lives. This has a major impact on levels of trust and willingness to engage with services and support provision. Staff working for services to support GTRNCs have highlighted the importance of and need for more cultural awareness training across a wide range of sectors.

- **Lack of available support and/or schemes, notably those targeted at improving energy efficiency:**
 - There is a lack of available energy efficiency schemes available to GTRNCs not living in bricks and mortar. However, there are dedicated organisations working to support these community groups with accessing support for energy efficiency measures, as well as advocating for better inclusion of GTRNCs as beneficiaries of current and future schemes.

1. Improving cultural sensitivity and awareness

Training to improve cultural sensitivity and awareness of GTRNC exists and is impactful in supporting cross-sectoral organisations and services to be deliver more appropriate and effective advice and support. For example, organisations such as Friends, Families and Travellers provide in-person workshops and online training packages to aid better understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity, barriers with current service provision, and how to build more inclusive services.

What is needed?

- Services and organisations need support to understand differences in everyday life – whether this relates to different communities’ ways of living and working – particularly around heating, cooking, laundry, family life, and other daily practices
- Cultural awareness training should be sufficiently resourced and made more easily available to organisations that don’t routinely support GTRNCs.



2. Improving communication

In all communication with service users who identify as GTRNC, whether written or verbal, there needs to be careful consideration that this meets the needs of that person and is sensitive to different needs wherever possible.

What is needed?

- Plain English in all verbal and written communications.
- Support to create bespoke materials that better meet the needs of different communities is needed.
- Awareness that a lack of literacy and/or numeracy skills does not necessarily mean a lack of understanding. Some people will need support with both; some will only need support with reading letters or calculating budgets, for example, but will fully understand the situation. Sensitive and respectful dialogue is needed in these cases to check exactly what level of support is required.
- Providing wherever possible clear records of what has been discussed, and supporting people to request written records from organisations and bodies that you may deal with on behalf of someone who identifies as GTRNC (i.e., a letter from an energy supplier).
- A more informed approach to asking and checking communication preference (i.e., by phone, email, letter, or a combination).
- Test for the 'Cs' of good communication. Is it: CLEAR, CONCISE, CORRECT, CONSISTENT, COMPLETE, COURTEOUS?



3. Improving the delivery of support

While there are strains and limitations on the extent to which services can adapt or expand their existing provision, there are clear opportunities for strengthening advice and support. In terms of delivery, this mostly focuses on opportunities to reach people in the spaces in which they live out their everyday lives: in the home, the community, and online.

What is needed?

- More in-person support
- More in-community support
- Wherever possible, having single caseworkers, to minimise confusion, duplication, and repetition
- More online support via channels such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

4. Improving partnership working

Many services are already working in joined-up collaborative ways to ensure the support they provide is as effective as possible, but more can be done to support these efforts. Larger organisations, for example, can facilitate more networking and opportunities, through forums, workshops, etc., to bring together those working with common aims. This was particularly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and efforts are now being targeted towards rebuilding networks. Relating specifically to the energy crisis, for example, Travelling Ahead have held online quarterly forums to bring together experiences and insights on the challenges faced by GTRNCs in accessing support.

What is needed?

- Working more regularly and closely wherever possible with trusted organisations that have established relationships with GTRNCs in local areas
- Larger services and organisations (or national bodies with capacity) need to coordinate relevant forums and workshops to ensure that the complex policy and practice landscapes can be navigated, and up-to-date information is accessible.

5. Improving policy

There is a lack of schemes and grants that are targeted specifically towards homes that are not bricks and mortar. Households not living in this arrangement are extremely limited in terms of options available to improve the thermal efficiency of their home, and this is critically needed. Additionally, there has been serious issues with access to critical financial (i.e., Alternative Fuel Payment, fuel vouchers, etc.) and other support (such as food parcels and winter warmth packs). Where policy has been introduced it has failed to account for the needs of GTRNC energy consumers and households that live with less common or atypical arrangements (i.e., not having metered energy supply), and these gaps in policy have taken too long to be resolved, or not resolved at all.

What is needed?

- More energy efficiency schemes are needed for households that do not live in bricks and mortar
- More evidence is needed from organisations and services to highlight where certain communities are being excluded from policy and to support campaign activity in this area. This again highlights the need for effective partnership working between larger national organisations and smaller local services
- A recognition that in many instances it is hard-to-reach support, not hard-to-reach people. Working to challenge commonly held misperceptions around engagement
- Using different media channels (i.e., radio, TV) locally and nationally to raise awareness of energy crisis, fuel poverty and related schemes and support
- Improving complaints and redress procedures.



6. MAKING ENERGY ADVICE AND SUPPORT BETTER FOR GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS, ROMA, AND NOMADIC COMMUNITIES

MORE INFORMATION

This resource is part of the Plugged In: Strengthening Energy Advice and Support for Gypsies, Travellers, Roma and Nomadic Communities project. The project was led by National Energy Action working with Friends, Families, Travellers and supported by the Which? Fund.

You can find more information about the project and find related outputs on National Energy Action's website [insert weblink for electronic document].

The final project report is accompanied by several additional resources targeted specifically towards key audiences as follows:

- **An Executive Summary which provides a more concise overview of the project and key findings and recommendations. This is targeted towards those with a role shaping and influencing policy in this area.**
- **A Community Briefing which provides a concise summary of the key findings for those from non-specialist research or policy backgrounds.**
- **A Final Report that is targeted towards those working in research and policy providing an in-depth analysis of the findings.**
- **A set of composite Case Studies which detail stories of lived experience of energy vulnerability and related support, or a lack thereof.**



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www.nea.org.uk



Nationalenergy action



National-energy-action



0191 261 5677

National Energy Action, West One Forth Banks, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3PA