

PLUGGED IN

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

FINAL REPORT

A report by National Energy Action



Action for Warm Homes



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

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PLUGGED IN

STRENGTHENING ENERGY ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS, ROMA, AND NOMADIC COMMUNITIES

A report by National Energy Action

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FOREWORD

The cost-of-living crisis is the latest chapter in the chronic fuel poverty experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities living on sites, roadside camps, or the canals. The difference in energy arrangements and costs are disproportionately high in comparison to bricks and mortar accommodation. Whether it's being unable to choose electricity provider on a site, or paying extortionate prices for gas bottles, Gypsies and Travellers continue to experience the sharpest edges of inequality.

Our casework and advocacy have shown to us just how long these issues have plagued nomadic communities, and now this research with National Energy Action, and supported by the Which? Fund offers concrete proof that government action is essential.

From the moment energy support was offered, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people faced multiple rounds of exclusions. Despite some positive steps, Gypsies and Travellers living on roadside camps and itinerant Boaters continue to be denied energy support even though these communities face some of the highest energy costs and forms of fuel poverty.

We continue to campaign for support to be made available to everyone – no ifs or buts. Energy costs are still stratospheric, and our Sussex Outreach and National Helpline continue to signpost and provide support to an increasing number of Gypsy and Traveller people.

We hope this research helps paint a picture of the situation that ordinary Gypsy and Traveller families are facing in the context of a cost-of-living crisis that is impacting everyone. We're grateful to National Energy Action for partnering with us, and we're most thankful to the Romany Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma, and nomadic people who took part in the research.

Sarah Mann, Chief Executive Officer at Friends, Families and Travellers





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We first and foremost want 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 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 their services were so vitally needed.

Without these valuable insights of lived and professional experiences 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. This project was 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 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 **Co-Produced Community Guidance Document** which is targeted towards frontline services and organisations that are looking to or currently provide energy-related advice and support, setting out the key challenges to effective provision for GTRNCs at present and what changes are needed.
- 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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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (e.g., Boaters, Bargees, etc.) (GTRNC)¹ are a consumer group regarded as 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.

Whilst this research emphasises that GTRNCs are not a single homogenous group living and experiencing energy and related vulnerability in the same way, there are some commonalities. These can include difficulties with access to energy via less common arrangements with 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. Further, data on access to and take-up of vital schemes, such as the Warm Home Discount (WHD), the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), and the Priority Services Register (PSR), for example, is particularly limited.

This research was undertaken during the height of the cost-of-living and energy price crises in 2022-2023. Data was, therefore, gathered before, during, and after the significant package of government support was in place. As we know, hundreds of thousands of households, with two key groups being those living in park homes and on boats, were refused or excluded from this essential support. This analysis includes some of the experiences and reflections 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.

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.

CASE STUDY: NOMADIC LIFE OVERLOOKED BY POLICY

Celeste lives alone on a boat she purchased just over five years ago. She describes herself as a Boater but says that lifestyle is still very new to her and that her family don't really understand her choice of home and way of life. This is Celeste's first home that isn't bricks and mortar and prior to this she was living in unaffordable private rented houses and also spent time in between tenancies sofa surfing with friends. Celeste had friends who'd lived on boats for years and felt that their daily life was really appealing in terms of pace and connection to others and nature.

Celeste quickly found there are few if any schemes specifically designed to help Boaters improve the thermal efficiency of their home. She says that she frequently gets calls to her mobile with companies trying to sell solar panels or heat pumps and will often sarcastically play along knowing that as soon as she tells them she lives on a boat they will end the conversation. Celeste has done research online and spoken with her local authority but is stuck with what to do next, other than slowly save any money she can to make modest and less impactful changes to her home.

Celeste is self-employed working as a freelance artist and photographer. Her income fluctuates and she regularly uses a credit card to pay for essentials like food and fuel. She heats and powers the boat using a log burner, but often runs out of wood and struggles to keep warm enough. Winter is hard, especially the most recent one through the energy crisis and Celeste has had to burn books and some wooden furniture for heat on the coldest days. Things have been bad for the whole of the local boating community around Celeste, and even a service that provides coal and wood by boat has been as struggling and forced to reduce hours and supply.

Celeste has solar panels and battery storage, which she had to take out a loan to pay for but says that they aren't great. She has often run out of charge for her laptop and phone which means she can't do her job in the evenings. She would love to buy a generator but doesn't have the money for this at the moment and explained that having a generator on a boat puts you at risk of theft, which makes her really nervous living alone.

Celeste was diagnosed with ADHD last year and also lives with anxiety. Celeste needs to make her day-to-day life as simple as possible, breaking things down into manageable steps in order to manage her health and wellbeing. Managing life on the boat is in many ways more complex than in a house and this can make managing her health quite difficult.

Celeste does not have a mooring license and is classed as a continuous cruiser. This means she has to move her boat every two weeks. Because of this status, Celeste was not eligible for the Government's support scheme. She has made numerous attempts to try and access the alternative scheme for those who use coal, wood, and gas bottles, but has been asked for proof of purchase of fuels and other paperwork she can't access. Celeste is confident at using the internet and used to volunteer for a frontline service that helped local residents with form-filling; she feels that if she can't navigate the complexity of policy like this, then it must be impossible for those who may have additional needs or challenges, like language barriers, digital exclusion, or not being able to read and write.

KEY FINDINGS: THE EXPERIENCE OF ENERGY VULNERABILITY

Types of energy-related problems experienced by surveyed GTRNCs:

- 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.

Energy vulnerability

Energy vulnerability was common among GTRNCs that participated in this research, with a large majority (70%) struggling to afford the energy they needed to stay warm and well at home. Extreme coping strategies, such as rationing heat (81%) were commonplace and brought about a complex trade-off between heating the home and other essentials, such as eating warm and healthy meals.

Paying for energy

Unsurprisingly, given that the last year has seen a doubling in energy prices, paying for energy is incredibly difficult for GTRNC households and many are finding it hard or are unable to heat their homes. More than half (61%) had borrowed money to pay for energy or fuel in the last 12 months, with nearly one in three needing to do this frequently.

Of particular concern are GTRNC households paying for energy via a pre-payment meter (PPM), where instances of self-disconnection are common. Also concerning were experiences of forced PPM installations and refusals by energy suppliers to switch to credit meters.

Paying for energy is often more complex for GTRNC households where it is common for energy to be supplied via a broker, a role typically held by the local authority or the site owner/manager. Notably, key issues include a lack of transparency over how energy costs are calculated under such arrangements and the exclusion of households from support such as the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS).

Access to affordable alternative fuels, such as gas bottles and wood, are also a major challenge for GTRNCs.

Health

Around three quarters (74%) of surveyed households reported living with one or more health conditions or a disability. The most common included respiratory/breathing conditions and mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. This adds to the established evidence on the links between such conditions and cold homes. Less well-understood or examined are more specific health needs relating to, for example, children with complex or additional needs.

Nomadic life was also described as a very physical life and where health affected the ability to undertake everyday tasks, such as chopping wood, households faced increased vulnerability and dependency on family members and neighbours.

Security and dwelling condition

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.

A staggering sixty-three per cent reported damp/mould in their homes, a figure far higher than average of 3.8% of all dwelling according to the English Housing Survey data. What causes damp/mould and who is responsible for remedying the issue is contested, with there being disagreement on the extent to which household behaviours, housing quality and ventilation, and energy costs and access to support are at play.

Social ties and community connection

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.

KEY FINDINGS: ENERGY-RELATED ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Getting support

Almost half (43%) of the households surveyed have not received any Government support through the energy crisis (i.e., Energy Bills Support Scheme or Alternative Fuel Payment).

However, more than two out of three households (70%) had received some form of energy-related support, typically from a local organisation or charity, and this included winter warmth packs, fuel vouchers, energy saving advice, and access to grants and energy efficiency measures.

Key barriers to providing effective support.

Several barriers to providing effective support were identified, including:

- **Energy supplier relationship and contact.** The relationship with energy suppliers and the capacity to contact and communicate clearly with the customer contact centres is a major barrier. Wait times to get through to a call centre are too long, often too costly, and very stressful. Contact with a person and not an automated service is perceived as essential, as is access to case notes.
- **Online support and digital exclusion.** The provision of support online has both positive and negative factors. For services, digital exclusion is a key challenge to providing effective support and reaching the most vulnerable people. Online support did present opportunities, however, for example the use of Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp has been very successful for some services, particularly during the pandemic.
- **Language barriers.** Language barriers were identified as a key issue with 42% of CFE respondents reporting this impacted their capacity to provide effective support.
- **Literacy and numeracy.** Levels of literacy and numeracy are also regarded as a significant barrier among GTRNC populations. The design of paperwork and documents, for example with energy bills, is unnecessarily complex, and regarded as intimidating for those unable to read or write.
- **Trust and discrimination.** Trust, stigma, and the experiences of discrimination are major concerns and barriers. Poor past experiences of support and discrimination with suppliers, housing providers, health professionals, and others, has led to high levels of mistrust. To address this issue, there is a need for more cultural awareness training and focused efforts to support and remedy where discrimination has occurred.
- **Lack of schemes.** There is a distinct lack of energy efficiency schemes available to GTRNCs not living in bricks and mortar. Several stakeholders and householders highlighted how such grants and schemes were almost non-existent or extremely difficult to access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section offers a number of recommendations based on the findings of this research and testimony of key stakeholders and GTRNC households themselves.

1. Reduced fuel poverty risk and greater access to energy-related advice and support

- Government should undertake an urgent review of the energy efficiency schemes available to households who do not live in bricks and mortar. A review and gap-analysis of current provision of relevant schemes and interventions specifically for GTRNCs is needed. Where schemes and services exist, a programme of awareness raising and targeting should be implanted.
- Policy mechanisms and interventions, especially those that are described as ‘universal’ (e.g., EBSS) or to meet a gap in provision (e.g., Alternative Fuel Payment), must be more fully scrutinised by Ofgem prior to implementation to ensure they are fit-for-purpose for all consumers/recipients, including marginalised and/or vulnerable communities, such as GTRNC.
- Targeted and bespoke training (for energy and cultural awareness) is needed to equip non-specialist services and organisations in providing appropriate and effective support to GTRNCs around energy-related issues. This could include fire safety teams, schools, housing providers, etc.

2. Improved consumer protections and communication

- Government must work with the energy industry and Ofgem to identify where discrimination is being experienced by GTRNCs specifically in their experiences as energy consumers. Targeted action and support are required.
- Ofgem should work with the energy industry to introduce minimum standards for customer service to reduce call waiting times in the energy industry.
- Ofgem should work with the energy industry to establish minimum standards and formats for inclusive and accessible communication with consumers from all communities. This should consider literacy, numeracy, and language barriers.

3. Greater visibility and inclusivity

- A cross-utility review is needed to explore where GTRNC have been excluded from utility-related policy and plan of action against recommendations is needed.
- Government should urgently review which GTRNC households have not yet received any energy crisis related support and ensure there is a mechanism in place for household to access this support as soon as possible.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (e.g. Boaters, Bargees, etc.) (GTRNC) are a consumer group regarded as under-researched, overlooked and under-served by policy. Yet evidence tells us these different communities experience manifold vulnerabilities and 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, and as such face multiple risks and harms.

Evidence on the experiences of energy vulnerability and fuel poverty, as well as the experiences of related advice and support, among GTRNCs is limited. This research seeks to go some way to closing this evidence gap, foregrounding the lived and professional experiences of GTRNCs and support organisations of seeking, receiving, and providing energy-related advice and support, and in doing so providing valuable insight to research, policy, and practice.

Whilst this research emphasises that GTRNCs are not a single homogenous group living and experiencing energy and related vulnerability in the same ways, there are some commonalities. These are also found in the experiences of other marginalised groups, and so it is hoped that this research will be of relevance not just to those working with GTRNCs, but to services and organisations working with other marginalised and at times disproportionately more vulnerable communities and households.

We know that across the range of GTRNCs, commonalities in experiences include difficulties with access to energy via less common arrangements with little-to-no choice over supplier and fuel type, leading to discrimination, limited consumer protections, disproportionately more expensive bills, and less 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 risk of carbon monoxide exposure. Further, data on access to and take-up of vital schemes, such as the Warm Home Discount (WHD), the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), and the Priority Services Register (PSR), for example, are particularly limited.

It is important to note that this research was undertaken during the height of the cost-of-living and energy price crises in 2022-2023. Data was, therefore, gathered before, during, and after the significant package of government support was in place. As we know, hundreds of thousands of households, with two key groups being those living in park homes and on boats, missed out on this essential support². This analysis includes some of their experiences and reflections, and those of other communities, such as those living roadside and on sites.

At a time when the UK is experiencing a prolonged energy crisis alongside a wider cost-of-living crisis, 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.

² BBC (2023, July 9) Energy bill support: More than 700,000 households miss out. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-66124201>

This research, undertaken between April 2022 and July 2023, aims to do this. It employed a mixed-methods multi-stage research approach which included: 1) policy and practice stakeholder engagement via an expert call-for-evidence (CFE), in-depth interviews, and a roundtable event; 2) a detailed and extensive evidence review to understand existing evidence of utility and service experience among GTRNC, provision and design and social and economic circumstances that compound or increase the risk of energy vulnerability; 3) a GTRNC householder survey, in-depth interviews, in-situ diary methods and co-production workshops. 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. It is guided by a number of research questions that seek to better understand:

- How is fuel poverty and access to related support and domestic energy services experienced by GTRNCs?
- What factors make fuel poverty and energy-related support effective and how does this relate to energy/wider consumer vulnerabilities
- What gaps in support and services exist and how can they be adjusted to better support these consumer groups?
- How have the recent crises (i.e., Covid-19, the cost-of-living and energy price crisis) impacted the daily lives of GTRNCs and the related advice and support available?

This resource

This is the final full project report and details the in-depth analysis of the research. It is targeted towards those working on research and policy across the two areas of focus - fuel poverty and the lives of GTRNC - which are brought together with a focus on how best to deliver effective energy-related advice and support. The work detailed in this report draws on evidence and data gathered through an evidence review, a stakeholder Call for Evidence, a householder survey, in-depth interviews, diaries, in-person workshops with Gypsy and Traveller communities and an Expert Stakeholder Roundtable Event.

The final report is set out over several sections, as follows:

- Section One introduces the research and draws on a desk-based evidence review to set out up-to-date policy and practice contexts
- Section Two outlines the research approach taken, and the methods used
- Section Three explores the experiences of energy vulnerability and fuel poverty among GTRNCs. It examines challenges that households face, many of which have been exacerbated by the energy crisis, in terms of staying warm and well, paying for energy and other household essentials, debt, energy supplier and housing provider relationships, discrimination, and a wide range of coping tactics that are employed
- Section Four moves towards a focus on related advice and support, beginning with an exploration of existing provision in terms of types of problems encountered and the practical delivery of support. It then examines in more detail the barriers to providing effective energy-related advice and support for GTRNCs and sets out suggestions for improving this support and the impact of the crisis. A specific focus on the lack of access to government schemes among these communities is discussed

- Section Five summarises the key findings and sets out a series of recommendations. Key audiences are identified against each recommendation, including government, the energy regulator Ofgem, the energy industry, including suppliers and other civil society actors.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH

Completed between April 2022 and July 2023, a mixed-methods multi-stage research approach was taken. Data was gathered via the following methods:

- A delivery partner focus group with Friends, Families and Travellers to explore policy, terminology, and refine the research aims and questions
- An online expert stakeholder Call for Evidence (CFE). A total of 52 online responses were collected between October and November 2022 and respondents represented a wide range of services and sectors including people who were academics, frontline advisors and support workers, health professionals, housing providers and support workers, policy makers, researchers, among others
- Ten in-depth telephone interviews with a sub-sample of the CFE respondents completed in December 2022
- Two in-person community co-production workshops with GTRNC members in Brighton in April 2023
- A householder survey that received 290 responses from GTRNC households in April/May 2023. To ensure the resource was as accessible as possible, several options for completing the survey were made available. This included the option to complete online, over the telephone, paper-based by post and in-person with FFT employees working with communities on sites and other locations. The householder questionnaire was shared by NEA, FFT and many of the services and organisations that contributed to the CFE. Interestingly, 290 complete responses were online
- Six in-depth household interviews and more than thirty-five in-situ diary entries from four GTRNC households were completed in April-May 2023
- An Expert Stakeholder Roundtable Event in May 2023 together feedback on the research from expert and key stakeholders from policy and practice. This feedback was then used to refine this final report and associated recommendations.

All stakeholder and householder participants have been anonymised in this report and all related research outputs.

JASON'S STORY: NOMADIC LIFE IS A PHYSICAL LIFE

Roughly seven years ago, Jason and his two teenage sons moved onto a local authority owned site and now live in a static caravan. The family find it incredibly difficult to heat and keep the home dry, warm, and free from damp and mould. Their home does not have any insulation and was not in good condition when sold. The caravans are not spaces designed and built for all year-round living but are more like second holiday homes.

The family uses a log burner to keep warm and Jason feels incredibly lucky to have a relative who is able, due to his job, to source wood for the family for cheap or even free on occasions. They cannot afford to buy ready chopped and seasoned fire wood, or gas bottles as frequently as others on the site do. The wood that Jason has access to needs cutting and storing which is an incredibly physical task. Jason finds this and other elements of his life as like having a part-time job on top of his full-time job working as a health and social care worker. There are constant demands in terms of heating, cleaning, and repairing the home, with all elements being very physical in nature.

Last year, Jason hurt himself falling down steps as he was trying to take laundry between the caravan and the day room. He was left with a broken leg and slipped disc in his back. Unable to work for three months, Jason only received statutory sick pay. This saw a huge impact on Jason's mental health, too. The bills stacked up and he found himself more in debt and owing friends and family money for essentials.

Jason relied heavily on his sons during this time, and this made him incredibly anxious and stressed. They had to help with the majority of domestic jobs, like cooking and cleaning, but also with cutting wood and building and maintaining fires, otherwise there was no source of heat. When the children were not at home, Jason used blankets, hot water bottles and extra clothing to try and keep as warm as possible while recovering. He would frequently go without food, not just to save money spent on groceries, but also to save on fuel for cooking.

Jason needed help with laundry, bathing and going to the toilet - all of which needed to be done across different units or blocks and so meant going in and out of the main part of the home repeatedly throughout the day and night. Help with personal care added particular stress on his relationship with his teenage sons. He felt embarrassed and a burden and like a bad parent for not being able to provide for or support the children. To reduce the journeys to and from the shower and toilet block, he used buckets in the main caravan.

Jason's neighbours did provide some much needed help during this time - with food in particular. Batch cooked meals were brought round, and Jason found this to be lifesaving. However, this also made him feel incredibly guilty, as he knew how much everyone was struggling with the price of food and fuel. But that's just what the community is like on sites.

This experience has made Jason realise just how vulnerable he'll be when he's older, likely without much or enough money, and without his sons at home or nearby to help with daily life when he is not as physically able or strong.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF ENERGY VULNERABILITY

This section is the first of three sections to detail the findings. It draws together data generated from stakeholder and householder interviews, an expert stakeholder call-for-evidence (CFE), community co-production workshops, householder diaries and householder surveys. 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.

The stakeholders

Throughout the report the respondents to the Call for Evidence (CFE) are referred to as the 'stakeholders' and represent the views and professional experiences of those whose work and expertise are linked in some way to the design, delivery or evaluation of advice and support, whether that is specifically in relation to energy, the needs of GTRNCs, or both.

Of the 52 stakeholder respondents to the CFE, half (50%) worked for a charity, three for a health and social care provider, three for a housing provider, three for an advice service, two for a school/education provider, and one for a faith-based organisation. Other organisations or sectors included the media, academia, local authorities, and a public health team.

The householders

As discussed, GTRNC is a broad term 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. To better understand and contextualise the findings in this section, then, it is worth briefly outlining the demographics of the sample of 290 households who responded to the survey. From this sample, a sub-sample of six households completed in-depth telephone interviews and four completed week-long diaries to provide insights to daily life in-situ.

Figure 1 below shows the mix of housing type across the sample and that a majority (74%) were currently (although many transitioned between housing types) living in some form of bricks and mortar, 8% lived in a mobile home, 5% were in a static caravan, and 11% were living on a boat.

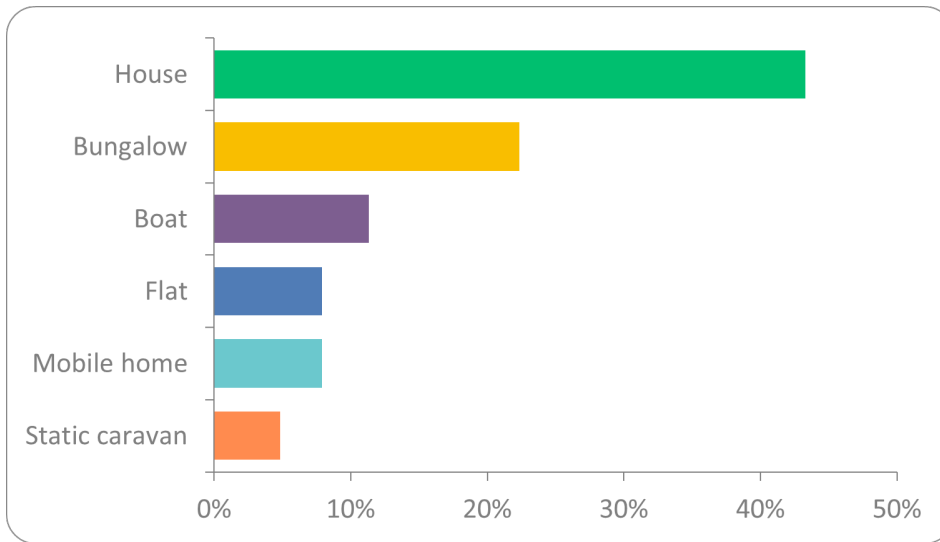


Figure 1: Housing type (n = 288)

Household size varied from one person to 11, with an average household comprising of four people. Forty-four per cent owned the home they lived in and/or the land it was on outright, 16% were paying a mortgage, 4% owned the pitch they lived on, 7% rented a pitch, 13% rented their home from a private landlord, 9% rented from a social landlord, and 7% reported 'other' arrangements with most owning and living in their own boat.

Figure 2 below shows the age range of respondents, with the majority (71%) aged between 25-44 years old. The majority of responses were received online, and younger people are typically associated with greater digital inclusion. This may partly explain a higher proportion of responses from this age group. However, less than half of the survey sample answered this question. As such, this may not be a true representation of the whole sample.

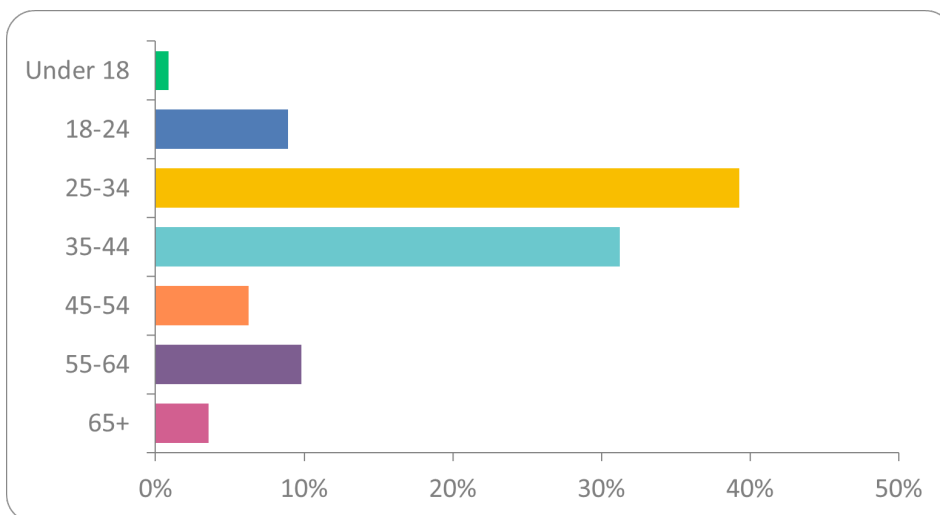


Figure 2: Respondent age (n = 112)

In terms of how the surveyed GTRNC householders identified, half of those who answered this question described themselves as English Romany/Gypsy (50%), 17% identified as Boaters, 10% as New Travellers, and the remaining sample identified as belonging to a number of different ethnic and nomadic communities (see Figure 3).

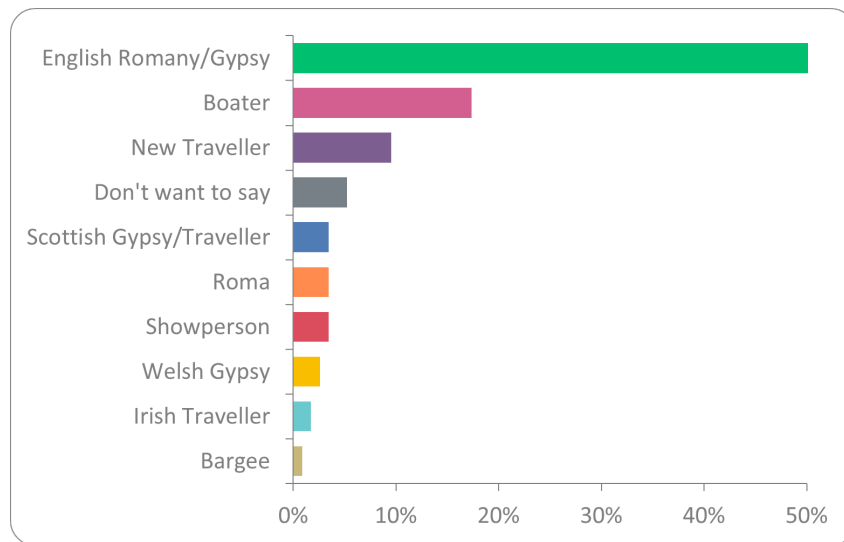


Figure 3: Ethnic and/or community identities (n = 115)

In terms of employment status (n = 112), the majority of respondents were employed: 21% were self-employed, 46% were employed full-time, and 13% were employed part-time. Less than 3% were looking for work and 12% were not looking and/or could not work.

Household income was fairly evenly distributed across the sample who provided an answer to this question (n = 222) from those earning less than £12,000 per annum to those earning over £30,000 per annum. While only marginally more than any other income bracket, the most common income bracket (20% of respondents) was 'about £230 - £308 per week (or about £12,001 - £16,010 per year)'.

Two thirds of all survey respondents (67%, or 194 in total) reported receiving one or more benefits (see Figure 4). For those who provided an answer to this question, the most common benefits reported were Universal Credit (26%) and Personal Independence Payment (23%).

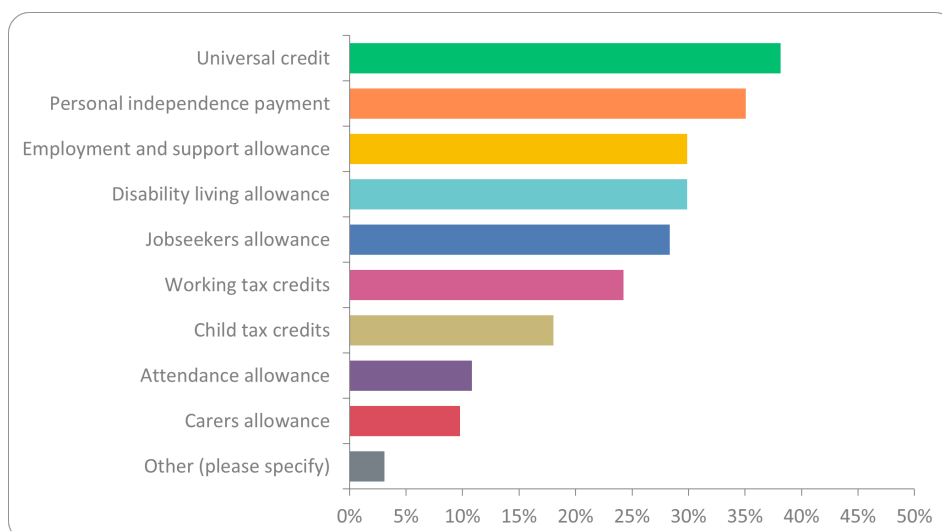


Figure 4: Benefit receipt (n = 194) sample.

Overall, the sample is characterised by working-age households on lower-than-average incomes and high welfare receipt. Families tended to be larger than average and residing in permanent dwellings that they owned (outright or with a mortgage).

Keeping warm or cool at home

The three most common ways that GTRNC households surveyed heat their homes (n = 261), and their main source of heating were (often in combination) gas boilers (48%), wood fires (46%), and coal fires (35%). Twenty per cent of respondents stated that they use a heat pump and 15% use gas (LPG) bottles. Other respondents told us that they also use electric heaters and diesel generators and diesel-powered systems to heat and power their homes.

More than two fifths (43%) were unable to keep their homes comfortably warm in winter or when it is cold outside, with 36% reporting it was difficult while a further 7% said it was not possible (n = 261). There were a number of reasons why it was difficult or impossible, with the cost of energy/fuel (35%) and broken heating systems (48%) being the most common reasons (see Figure 5).

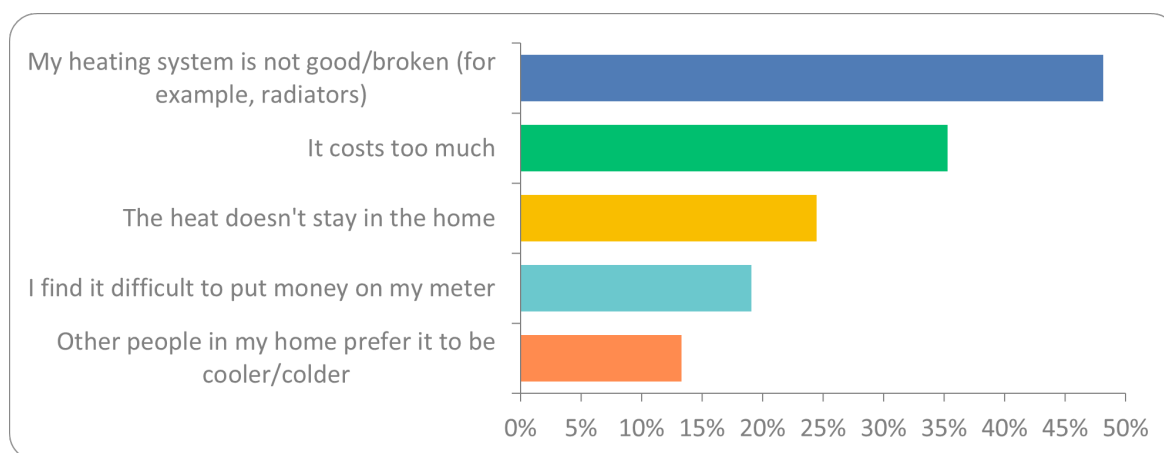


Figure 5: Barriers to affordable warmth (n = 241).

Coping strategies associated with fuel poverty and energy vulnerability are well understood and evidenced³. In this research householders shared many examples of struggling to keep warm at home and the challenges and concerns around heating in general. In doing so, they articulated the coping strategies and tactics that they and their family employed to keep warm or ration their energy use:

... hot water bottles, extra layers, sat wrapped up in blankets on the sofa, extra blankets in bed, socks in bed, good slippers, all those kinds of things.

Another, a Boater, explained how a blanket was used to reduce the overall space required to heat:

It's like my mum is constantly worrying about the fact that we live in a floating metal tube on the water and when it's iced in. And it's like, "But actually, you've got a five bedroomed house to heat, mum. I've got 45ft." And what we do in the winter, is we put a blanket up half way down, so we've only got about 30ft to keep warm, rather than the whole bit. So, the bit at the back, which is where the batteries are and where the loo is, is quite cold.

³ National Energy Action (2023) Fuel Poverty Monitor 2021-2022. Available at: https://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/3830_NEA_Fuel-Poverty-Monitor-Report-2022_V2-1.pdf

Others shared examples of having additional electrical sources of heating because of how expensive gas was, for instance:

I have gas, and an electric cooker. But even then, I can't afford the gas, because the gas is ridiculous. I have to have blow heaters because I can't afford one or the other. So, if I don't have electric on, that's my freezer gone, so I've had to buy blow heaters to put in my kids' rooms, because I can't afford to.

Keeping healthy and well at home

Research shows that GTRNC communities often face poorer health outcomes across the life-course than other groups. This issue is contributed to by a range of factors, including a lack of awareness of the cultural and wellbeing needs of these communities among service providers, lack of representation in mainstream datasets which underpin policy and practice, lack of trust in healthcare services within these communities due to discrimination, and broader health and social inequalities such as housing and digital exclusion.

Overall, the majority of respondents were positive about their health and told us that their physical (81%) and mental health (87%) were 'ok', 'good' or 'very good' (see Figure 6). Six per cent told us that their physical health was 'very bad' and 13% reported it to be 'bad'. Mental health was a slightly more positive picture with only 5% and 7% respectively reporting their mental health as 'very bad' or 'bad'.

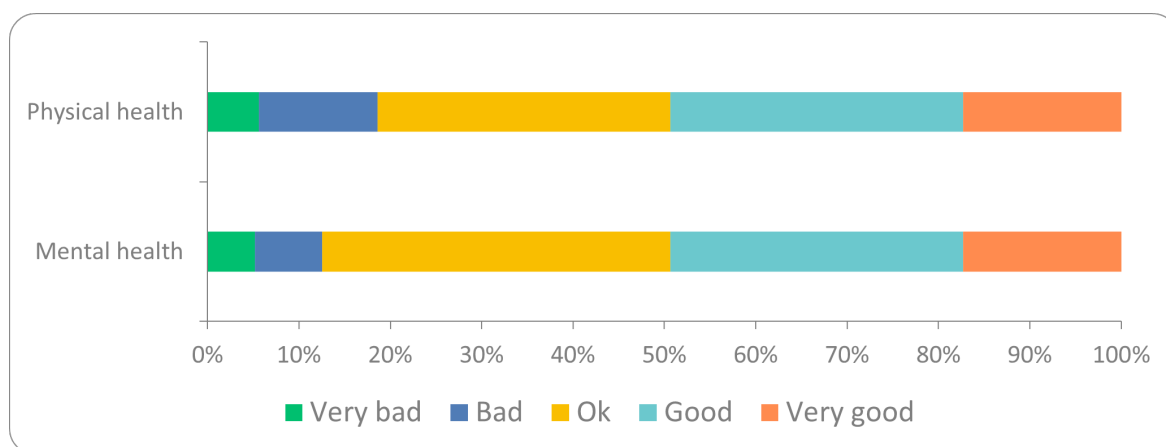


Figure 6: Overall physical and mental health (n = 232)

A tentative interpretation of this may be needed as self-reported health may not be accurately reported due to the role that stigma and shame play, which can lead to people reporting that a situation is more positive than it is, particularly when asked about mental health. This is particularly true for Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller communities in the UK, where stigma from both within and outside of these communities around mental health has been identified as a barrier to help-seeking⁴.

4 Thompson, R. M., Stone, B. V., & Tyson, P. J. (2021). Mental health support needs within Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities: a qualitative study. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 26(2). <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/MHSI-09-2021-0066/full/html?skipTracking=true>

Despite a generally positive picture for self-reported health, almost three quarters of our sample (74%) told us that they have one or more health conditions or are living with a disability. The most commonly reported condition (41%) was a respiratory/breathing condition. This is of particular importance in the context of this research whereby such conditions are closely linked to fuel poverty, poor indoor air quality, and the presence of damp and mould (as discussed later). Nineteen per cent were living with depression and 17% with anxiety. Figure 7 below shows the range of health conditions reported. However, it is worth noting that not all survey respondents chose to answer this question, and therefore it may in fact underrepresent the prevalence of health conditions among the sample.

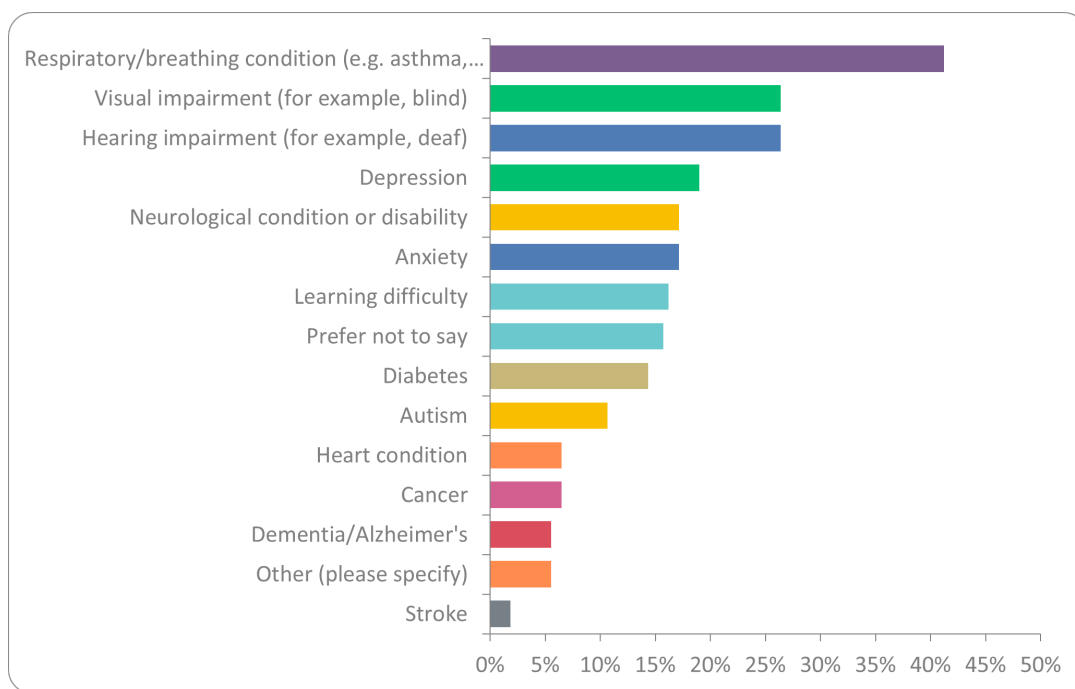


Figure 7: Health conditions present (n = 216)

The interviewees and workshop attendees shared valuable insights into their daily experiences of managing a wide range of health conditions and needs, and how this was impacted by energy vulnerability. Managing respiratory conditions like COPD and asthma, mobility issues, complex needs associated with autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), are among these examples.

Particularly important to highlight are issues relating to the day-to-day experiences of parents supporting a child with complex needs. Energy needs relating to health conditions in terms of the use of medical equipment, such as wheelchairs or dialysis machines, has received increased attention during the energy crisis. However, householders highlighted that there are many energy uses associated with managing health that are less well understood or overlooked. For example, parenting a child with complex needs, such as autism or ADHD, often required set routines and practices that were energy-hungry:

It's part of their routine, yeah. She's got kids with additional needs and that's what she's saying. She's not even like - most parents at the school would be like, "Oh, we just-" other parents that aren't from these communities will be like, "Oh, I'll just bath my kids once a week." But quite often it's part of the settling routine that her kids have got additional needs, so she needs to have that routine. And also, culturally.

Echoing such experiences, another householder, a parent raising three children on a council-run site, told us:

Especially when I have a little boy who's autistic and he likes to - he's got certain things. He has to have a certain routine. He has to have his bath at a certain time. He has to go to bed at a certain time. He has to get up at a certain time, and he likes to watch his half an hour telly, and it's just - if I look at the meter and it's beeping, I'm like, do you know what I mean?

The challenge in communicating such energy needs as essential, and how this is arguably overlooked in current policy and practice, was shared by one of the workshop attendees:

But even insulin in the fridge is maybe more - energy suppliers would go, "Oh, yeah, okay, of course." They're not going to [cut off energy supply], but it's more easily recognised. Having a child with autism that needs to watch telly ...

For another interviewee, a Boater who was a young adult with ADHD, managing health and wellbeing day-to-day required the simplification of tasks into fewer steps; this made managing energy use and supply particularly difficult:

That's just not really that feasible. Also, I have ADHD as well, so I find it quite difficult to manage extra steps. I'm trying to simplify my life as much as I can so it's easy for me to get things done. I don't want to have to add in extra steps like trying to gather up all of my kit, try to go to a café. It's a bit frustrating.

Interviewees also shared details of how impactful unexpected health issues relating to mobility were in relation to how physical nomadic life was, and how such unexpected issues revealed a sense of impending vulnerability. For example, as one householder explained to us:

... normally we're all quite fit and well. I have actually just come back from six weeks off work from an injury. I've been injured from lifting a heavy patient and had to have six weeks off. It was before the warm weather kicked in and for the first time... I couldn't chop wood; the wood burner was still on at that point. It's now summer so I'm not going to have the fire on for ages. For the first time I realised just how much lifting and carrying there is. The wood is delivered, it's not chopped firewood, it's long lengths of basically trees. I chainsaw it, I carry it, I chop it, I stack it. It's like a life's work. It's a little part time job, yes. Just having that six weeks where I couldn't lift anything really did make me think, "Oh my God, what is going to happen when I am old?" I won't be able to afford to buy ready chopped seasoned firewood. It's affordable because I buy these massive logs, tree trunks. It was quite an eye-opener to think gosh, the boys probably won't be here by then.

Another told us:

This is where the issues with how the site has been designed make it quite difficult, because there's no provision here for hooking up any running water or toilet inside, which is okay most of the time. So, I come in and out with a jug of water for my water and my cooking. I do my washing up outside, but I have to carry things in and out. Obviously, I have to go outside to the block to use the toilet. Now, when I can't walk, that's all pretty much impossible, so I'm really reliant on help. My son was having to ... We got a little camping toilet, and my son was having to help me get onto that next to the bed, people were having to bring me in water, obviously, and bringing wood to light the fire.

GTRNC survey respondents were also asked about their general wellbeing in terms of feelings of optimism, stress, confidence, happiness, and loneliness (see Figure 8). The data show a mix of positive and negative experiences of wellbeing across the sample.

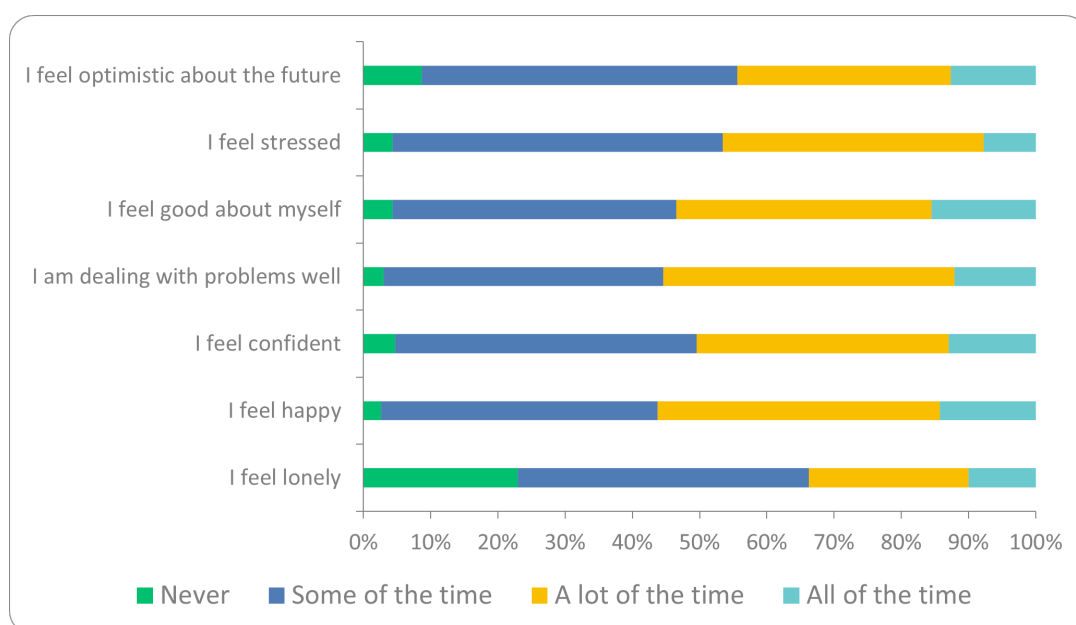


Figure 8: Markers of wellbeing (n = 232)

Notable among the wellbeing indicators was the comparably higher proportion of respondents that said they never felt lonely, almost a quarter (23%) compared to 10% that said they always felt lonely. This perhaps reflects a sense of togetherness and community that was also emphasised throughout the interviews, with people sharing numerous examples of where their immediate communities were supportive in day-to-day life.

Respondents were also asked about whether they felt their home affected their health and if this was in a positive or negative way (n = 229): two fifths (42%) told us their home affected their health 'in a bad way' while a third (33%) stated that the home had positive impacts on health. For those that reported a negative impact, the main reasons reported were that the home was (for some a combination of being) 'too expensive' (37%), 'too cold' (33%), 'too warm' (25%), 'too difficult to keep safe' (25%), and 'damp and mouldy' (25%). Negative factors also linked to the practical ways in which nomadic life impacted on health, for example:

Having to go in and out to a cold block to use the toilet, I have no running water so have to carry water in, it's hard when my back is bad. Cold and damp make me feel worried and ill.

There were also concerns about how this could change in the future:

Currently I manage well, I am fit and healthy and in my forties. But I can foresee a time when it will become difficult for me to manage. I buy cheap firewood, which is delivered green in long trunks. I process and store the wood myself. One day I won't be able to manage this, I can't afford to buy seasoned, chopped, delivered logs, so I'm unsure what will happen. This is an outdoor, physical lifestyle ...

Asked about the reasons why the home had a positive impact on health, respondents who identified as 'Boaters' shared several examples highlighting the importance of the connection to others and nature, for example:

Living on a boat enables me to be part of a vibrant and caring community, live a life of freedom & adventure, live much closer to nature and green & blue spaces, and live in a way that better aligns with my environmental ethos.

As another respondent told us:

It improves my health because I spend plenty of time out of doors, working locks, steering the boat and so on. Also, it's a soothing pace of life.

Dwelling condition

Survey respondents were asked about their views on the quality and condition of their home (n = 258). In a positive light, more than half (54%) were 'happy' (40%) or 'very happy' (14%) with several reporting that this was because their home was small or 'cosy' enough to keep warm, easy enough to repair, and well-insulated or in a good location near to friends and family.

However, nearly one in five (19%) told us they were 'unhappy' (15%) or 'very unhappy' (4%) with the condition of their home. For these respondents, repairs and cost of upkeep were also noted as reasons, as well as a lack of amenities (i.e., running water) and the presence of damp and mould. This is perhaps somewhat concerning given the prevalence of breathing-related health conditions among the sample (see Figure 7 above) and the known association between damp and mould and breathing difficulties or exacerbation of pre-existing conditions. Squeezed incomes and increased costs were also linked to levels of dissatisfaction about the home and described as a barrier to making improvements.

Regarding damp and mould, 63% told us that this was an issue in their homes (n = 260). This figure is staggeringly higher than data from the English Housing Survey (EHS)⁵, which identified that only 3.8% of dwellings surveyed had damp and/or mould, with the highest proportion of damp and mould found in the most deprived decile areas (7.2%) compared to only 1.7% in the least deprived 10%. Important to note, the national data gathering for the EHS uses random postcode samples and so therefore potentially excludes many nomadic households, particularly those without a fixed address. The EHS data also highlights that certain groups are disproportionately experiencing damp and mould in their homes, including those on low-incomes, lone parent households, and those from Black ethnic backgrounds.

Households also reported a range of behaviours to deal with damp and mould (see Figure 9), with the most common being (a combination of) opening windows (64%), washing windows and surfaces (58%), and using a dehumidifier (40%).

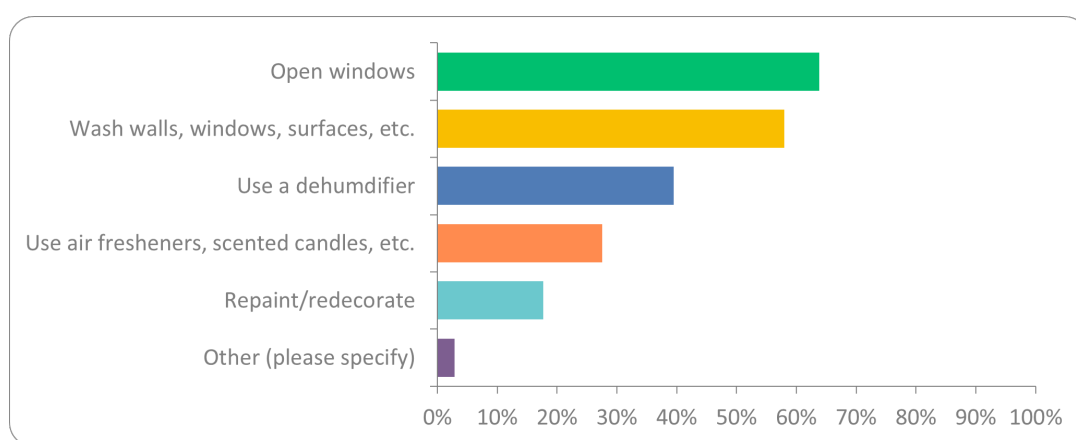


Figure 9: Ways of dealing with damp and mould (n = 243)

For many, damp was regarded as a ‘normal’ expected part of life where energy vulnerability means there is limited or little heating. As one householder described:

There’s always damp when you live without any kind of regular heating. So, you know, if I was to lift the mattress bed, for example, there will be sort of bits of damp and mould underneath that. But we know that, so we lift it every now and again, we make sure that there’s lots of airflow, that kind of stuff, you know, so that things do dry out. There is mould on the windows. The windows are only single-glazed, obviously. Double-glazing gets quite expensive.

The implications of damp and mould on householder health were also highlighted by interviewees, however, there were examples where support had been promised but not delivered, causing considerable concern. For example, one interviewee, who had moved from living on a site to live in bricks and mortar, told us:

The boiler’s been fine. But the flat is covered in mould and damp, and obviously my son, the youngest one, he’s asthmatic, and he’s even on pills now, for the asthma. And we’ve had mould and damp in that flat... well, the year I moved in, I noticed it, and it’s there winter and summer. I’ve had to buy so much bedding, so much clothes, because it’s even been in his cot mattress. And I’ve got hold of the council, and they keep saying a surveyor’s coming out, but he doesn’t turn up.

⁵ UK Government (2022) [English Housing Survey data on dwelling condition and safety, Table DA5102: damp and mould – areas.](#)

The causes of damp and mould, and who is considered responsible for the issue, was a contested issue between housing providers and tenants. Not heating the home sufficiently and drying clothes indoors/laundry practices were highlighted as particular household behaviours that were suggested causes of damp and mould:

...you have to think about things like the local authority if it's a council house or a housing association property if you've got - let's go back to mould again and then you contact the repairs team and say, "Look, this is happening." They'll say, "Are you drying clothes indoors?" "No." "Oh, okay. Well, you've got to keep your property at 21° constantly." I can't afford to do that because of the cost-of-living crisis. "Well, leave a window open then."

Stakeholders shared serious concerns regarding damp and mould in the blocks on sites they routinely visited and highlighted that not enough was being done by site manager and owners – both private and social – to protect the health of residents. As one told us:

I mean I've been into some of the utility blocks on [the site] and I'm absolutely gobsmacked about the black mould that's in there and the tiles falling off the walls because it's so damp the plaster won't stay on. That sort of thing has an impact on health. Obviously, some people that we work with are very vulnerable anyway. You just can't imagine the longer-term impact, or how you can measure that, of what conditions they're living in.

Keeping safe and secure at home

For many households, the strain of trying to afford energy, for heating, in winter especially, had driven them to less safe heating practices. Stakeholders shared serious concerns of the rise in these sorts of practices that they were witnessing:

I've got one person that can't afford a Calor Gas bottle so uses those little gas cylinders in a little heater. I mean, it's dangerous. I have offered - we have looked at perhaps there could be a way to get his gas, is there some funding to get his gas circuit? Everything is a bit broken, where he is, is there a way to get it fixed? But he simply cannot afford to get it fixed, so he is living in a dangerous situation, really dangerous.

Households also talked about safety and security. In the interviewees and in diary entries, people discussed their concerns and issues relating to feelings of security and safety that were linked to energy use and their nomadic way of life. This related to the risk of safety or security of possessions on boats or roadside, where access for theft of generators or other personal items was easier. One interviewee described herself as feeling like a 'target' and that having a generator, while improving how comfortable and warm she might be at home, would increase her risk of being targeted for theft:

I guess I use diesel to pump up my batteries as well. I would like to buy a generator, but I can't afford that. Also, there's a lot of crime. I've mentioned that in my diary as well there's been quite a bit of crime on this little bit this week. I would really like to get a generator, but you get singled out if you've got a generator and you're much more likely to get broken into. I'm kind of a bit nervous about getting that.

Concerns around ‘safety’ were also used by those in positions of authority as a rationale for decision making on matters relating to housing needs and site provision. For example, on one site, the local authority had concerns of fire safety with log stores, suggesting a communal store for all households. Demonstrating a positive example of site managers working with community members, it was agreed that a communal store would not work, as a householder explained:

Recently, the council have said, “We’ve got a problem with you all having logs piled on the front of your pitches or the back of your pitches, it’s a fire hazard. We’re going to provide you all with wood stores.” They initially suggested they would have a big area for communal wood stores at the front of the site. That was their first plan. It lasted about 10 seconds before everyone just said, “What?” It just wouldn’t work. Some people here have got four burners because they’ve got a static, a truck, two caravans. It would be political. They decided instead that each pitch would be given a little metal shed thing on a concrete pad. They were doing that towards the end of last year.

Paying for energy and other household bills

Since October 2021, the energy crisis has seen energy prices more than double. This combined with rising food costs and inflation has put households, particularly the most vulnerable, at greater financial strain than ever before. Energy price rises have resulted in an estimated 2.1 million more households in fuel poverty, with the figure now estimated to be a total of 6.6 million or nearly one in four UK households.

As noted, the fieldwork for this research was undertaken during the height of the energy price crisis in 2022-2023. Data was gathered both before, during, and after the significant package of government support was announced or in place. As data has since revealed, more than 700,000 households, including many living in park homes and on boats, were refused or missed out on this essential support⁶. This analysis includes some of the experiences and reflections of these types of households.

Among GTRNC households surveyed, there was a mix of methods for paying for energy/fuel (see Figure 10). The most common methods were to purchase solid fuels such as coal or wood (45%), pay through a prepayment meter (PPM) (43%), or pay by direct debit (31%).

6 BBC (2023, July 9) Energy bill support: More than 700,000 households miss out. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-66124201>

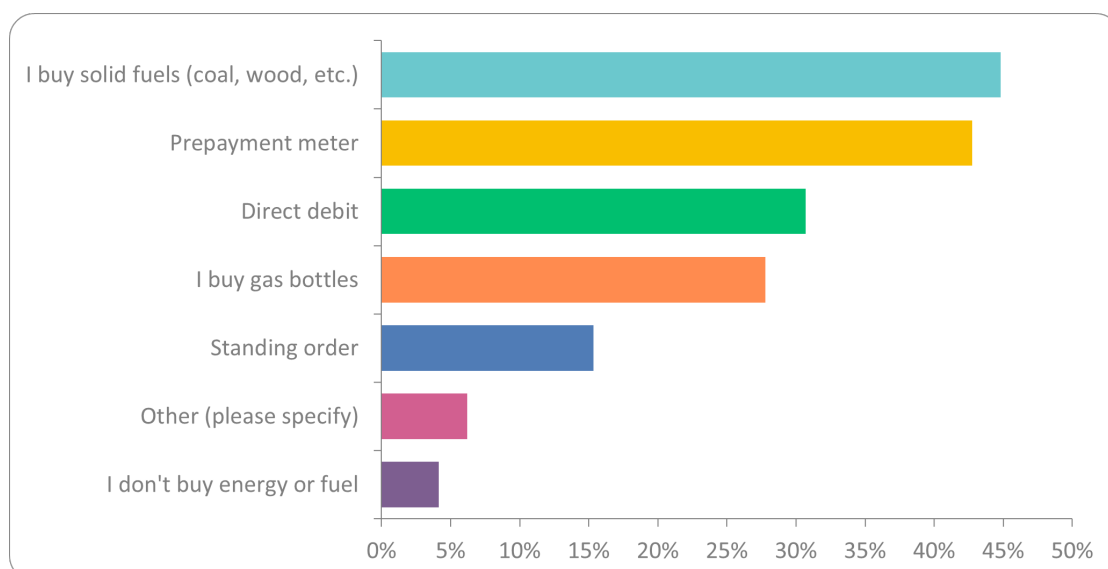


Figure 10: Methods of paying for energy (n = 241).

The evidence consistently highlights that some of the most vulnerable households pay their energy costs using a PPM⁷, which until recently was also a disproportionately more expensive method of payment per unit of energy⁸. In the interviews with households and stakeholders, and workshops with GTRNCs, issues with having and topping up a PPM were discussed extensively and generally viewed as problematic. For example, for those topping up at a shop, often the distance and travel options available were prohibitively challenging. As one interviewee told us:

So, if that one's shut, the one poxy shop, if it's shut, I have to come all the way down [main town] just to put money on the key to go home again. And it's poxy... With me I don't drive, and I've got four children. One is autistic and doesn't like buses, doesn't like trains. I have to say to my mum, "Have my little boy, the baby," and I have to take the other three with me to go and get it, to go and get electric... Well, it costs me, what, about £10 to get down there and then £20 back from the electric - oh, the gas, oh, to go all the way back on myself.

PPMs were, however, viewed by some of the householders as the preferred method of payment for energy. This was mainly due to perceived level of control over use and cost it offers, and therefore capacity to minimise vulnerability in terms of 'going without' energy:

The best [thing] about the key meter, you won't run out because you can see what you are using.

However, self-disconnection is a serious concern, not just for GTRNC households. Research has highlighted that the most vulnerable households on PPMs are finding themselves regularly in a situation in which they cannot top up their meter, and so are classified as having self-disconnected from their supply.

7 The hardest hit: Impact of the energy crisis: UK FUEL POVERTY MONITOR 2021-2022, NEA (2023). https://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/3830_NEA_Fuel-Poverty-Monitor-Report-2022_V2-1.pdf

8 Energy Crisis Explainer, NEA (2023). <https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/>

Some householders were actively trying to switch from paying by PPM, however, and the lack of choice in terms of energy tariffs available to PPM customers was highlighted as problematic:

The electricity here is on a key meter. I have tried to get it changed to a normal meter I can pay by direct debit, so I've got more choices. EDF have been an absolute nightmare to talk to. I keep records of every time I top up the key meter. I totted up all of my totals over the last few years. It's been £500, £600, then £700, then £800. I'm now up to £900 for this last calendar year.

Households also shared examples of where a PPM had been installed by energy suppliers as a means of dealing with energy debt. As one householder explained, an energy debt had resulted in a forced installation of a PPM, and, worryingly, this had also reportedly involved the installer entering their home without permission and while they were not there:

They racked it up for £1,500 because I refused to pay it, and then that's when they put me on the key. They didn't even tell me they were going to put me on the key. They literally - I was at my mum's and then my neighbour said, "There's [energy supplier] at your house." I said, "What do you mean?" They actually changed- because my electric meter's outside. They changed it, went into my house and put the key with the letter on the bottom of my stair and walked - I said, "How did they get in my house?"

The most common method of topping up a PPM was at a shop using a key or card (46%), however 19% and 23% of respondents respectively, relied on travelling to the council offices or having to contact someone at the council offices for help with topping up (see Figure 11).

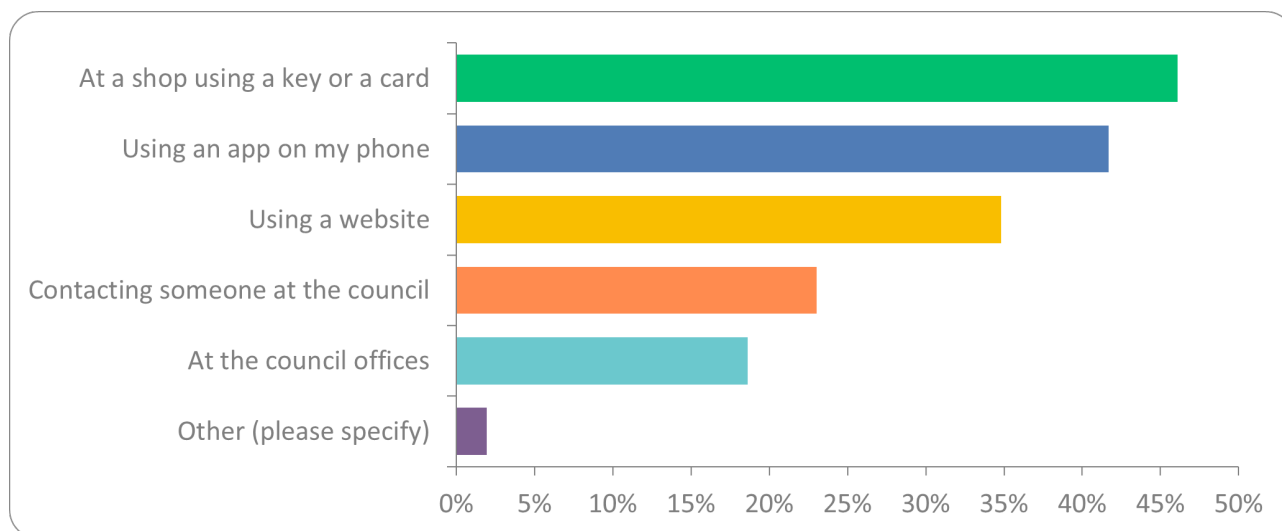


Figure 11: Methods of topping up PPM (n = 204)

Several stakeholder participants shared concerns specifically relating to households having to travel to or contact the local authority to top up their PPM. For many households, remote top-up was not an option, and on occasions, top-up was even not possible outside of local authority working hours. As an adviser for a frontline service in England told us:

If it runs out at 4:00. Their offices aren't that close to the site. So if one person runs out, then it would take them over their working hours to go, because their office is quite far away from the site. But you would need to request... As with many things, there are height barriers. I know this doesn't come under energy, but there are height barriers on traveller sites. And if you want to go out with your trailer on a weekend, you have to ask before midday on a Friday. Otherwise, you don't get access out. And it's the same with electric. And one person, an example is they asked - one of the team was on site, and they said, "I need some electric, can I buy it?" and they said, "Can it wait until tomorrow?" and they were like, "No, I need my electric now." And they didn't give it to them until the next - they didn't come back until the next day!

One potential option to avoid such issues could involve the installation of smart meters. Smart meters for PPM customers offer numerous benefits, particularly to those who are low-income or vulnerable where the benefit has been estimated at as much as £1,000 per household over the lifetime of the meter⁹. Reassuringly, the majority (75%) of survey respondents – which includes both PPM and non-PPM customers - reported having a smart meter already installed (n = 222). For some, this had been arranged by the household themselves (39%) or was in the home when they moved in (36%). Six per cent had been offered one but did not want one. Importantly, 11% had not been offered one and 7% of GTRNC households did not know what a smart meter was. This demonstrates that while there has been some significant progress on installing smart meters among these community and ethnic groups, there is still one in five households yet to be offered one or learn what a smart meter is.

Several respondents indicated that they paid for energy in 'other' ways, with the main alternative being to pay a landlord or housing provider directly as a broker. This was particularly problematic and raises concerns in terms of fairness and transparency with energy supply and cost. As one householder explained to us:

... our landlord is an electricity broker, so he buys the electricity for the whole site and then sells it individually to each person. So basically, we think we all get slightly different rates because it's different plot size but he can put they say up to 10% on for service charges. But there's no way of us understanding, yeah, it's like he's a good landlord in theory but actually we don't know what 10% is and actually to be honest I wouldn't be able to work out what 10% was anyway... He buys like £10,000 worth of electricity on the electricity market, and then he sells it to us, but the rates fluctuate massively, and they fluctuate for individual people that live there. ...there's no way of knowing because I've got a dryer. Someone else hasn't. I've got a static and this, so it's like for us there's no way of knowing. So when we talk about comparing, it's like mine might be like £400 and theirs is like £80 and I'm like there's just no way of understanding it. And it's really disempowering and also, it's putting people in debt.

Unsurprisingly given the energy crisis, 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' (see Figure 12).

⁹ Maximising the smart meter rollout for prepayment customers (NEA, 2021): <https://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Smart-Prepay-Executive-Summary.pdf>

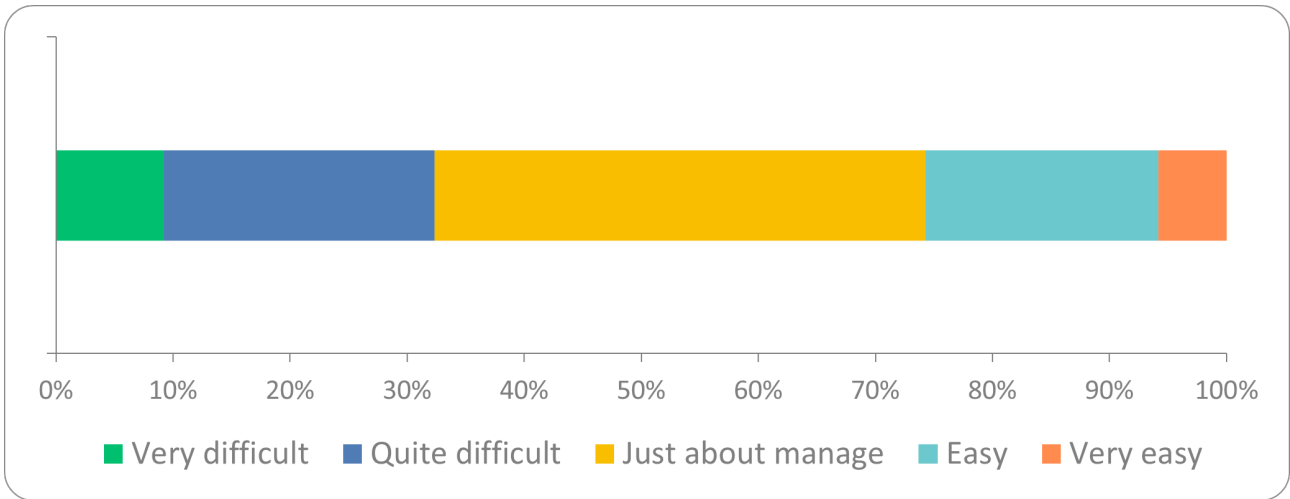


Figure 12: Extent to which energy/fuel is affordable (n = 241)

One of the common examples of how energy affordability was impacting GTRNCs was the rapid rise in the cost of gas bottles (liquefied petroleum gas – LPG). As one stakeholder shared:

Calor Gas, the Calor Gas bottles, have gone up from £40 to £130. So, people have been asking if there is any money for that. So obviously people are keying into a lot of support systems, money from the government, and I'm sure you're already aware that on-site Gypsies and Travellers don't have access to that funding.

With strained incomes and rapidly rising living costs the spectre of debt has become a concern. Households had found themselves needing to borrow money to pay for energy bills/costs and/or buy solid fuel (see Figure 13). 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'. A further 18% of respondents told us that while they had not yet borrowed money, they felt they might need to soon. Forty-two per cent of respondents told us they were currently in debt with their energy/fuel accounts.

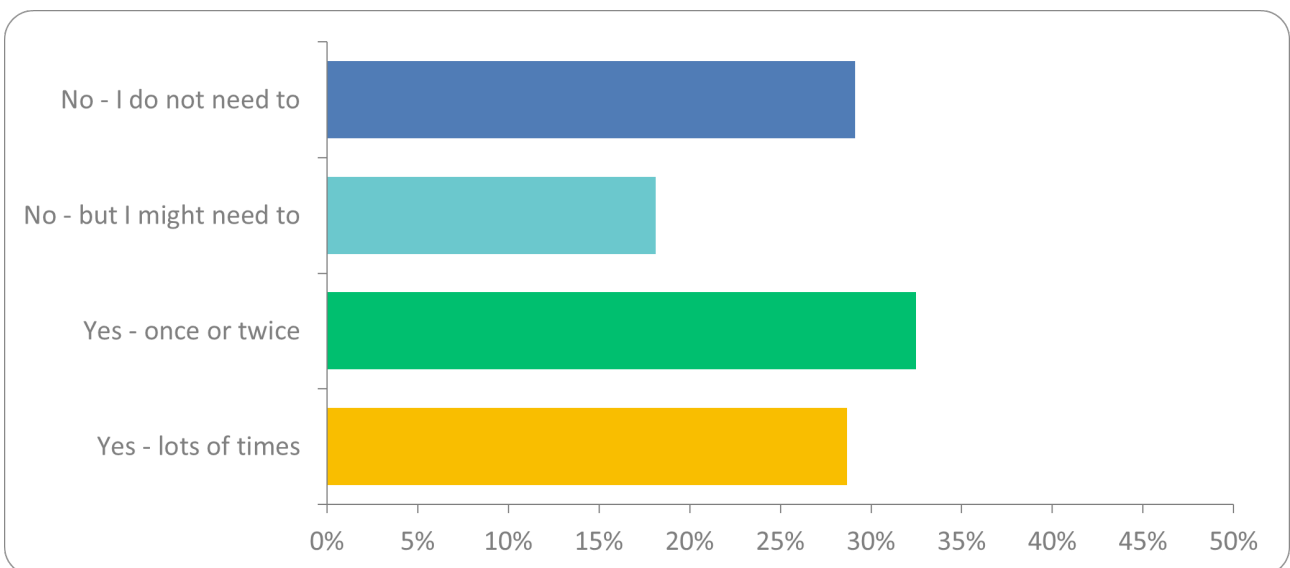


Figure 13: Borrowing money to pay for/buy energy/fuel in the last 12 months (n = 237)

The most common source for borrowing money to pay for energy was ‘family’ (52%). And, as one interviewee told us:

And I’m ringing up my brothers, “I don’t get paid for another three more days. Can you sort me out?” I shouldn’t be ringing up my brothers.

Other sources included friends (38%), overdrafts (38%) and bank loans (24%). Worryingly given such high interest rates and poor levels of regulation, nearly one in five (18%) reported having to use short-term or pay day loans to pay energy bills.

Respondents were not hopeful of the situation surrounding energy affordability improving in the next 12 months: 54% felt that it would get ‘much harder’ or ‘harder’ to pay energy costs and 28% felt that things would stay the same. This perhaps points to the vital and urgent need for intervention from policy and practice agencies to address a potentially worsening situation in regard to debt accumulation.

Prevalence of debt is high among GTRNC households, and they were not only struggling with energy costs; survey respondents reported debts with a range of household bills as Figure 14 below shows. Two of the most common debts were housing debts: 32% had mortgage arrears and 27% had rent arrears. Other debts included credit cards (28%), loans (26%), water arrears (24%) and council tax (24%) that were all held by roughly one in four respondents.

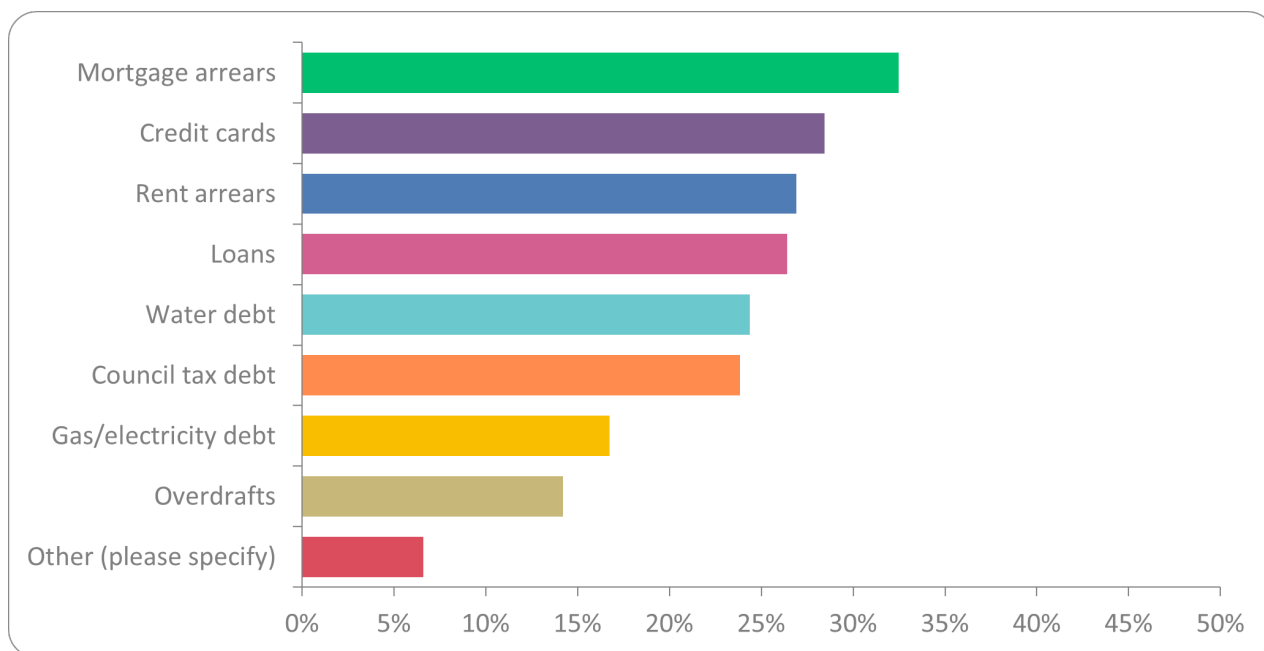


Figure 14: Types of debt (n = 197)

Coping with energy vulnerability

Call for Evidence (CFE) stakeholder respondents were asked about the extent to which different tactics were being used by GTRNC households (see Figure 15) to cope with the experience of energy vulnerability. Almost all stakeholders were aware of ‘coping’ behaviours such as going without energy and food and borrowing money or items from family and friends. These were

among the most common coping tactics, those that were being observed ‘a lot’. Additional common strategies included going without new clothing and other essentials, as well as employing unsafe heating practices (as discussed in the section on ‘safety and security’).

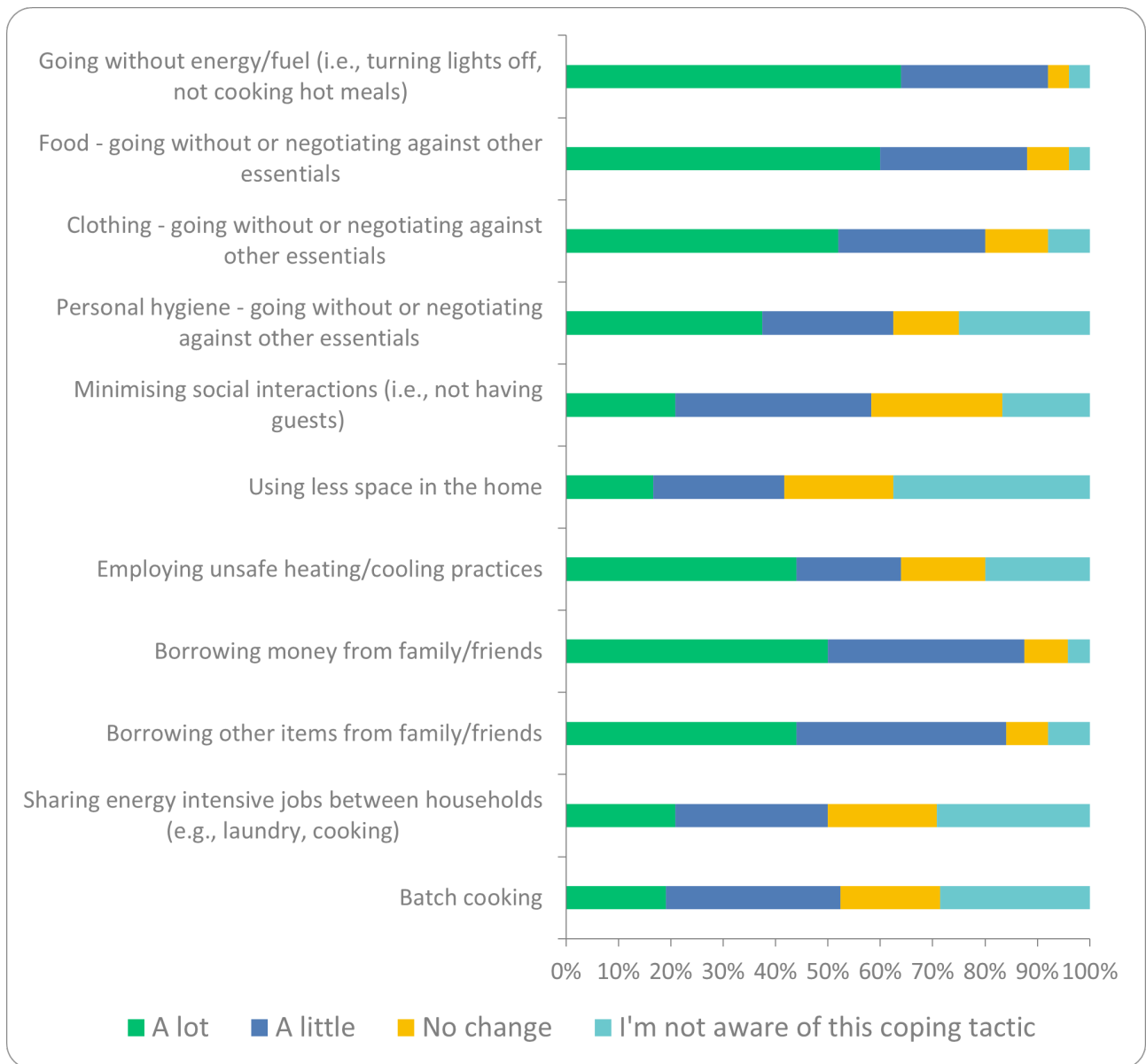


Figure 15: Observed coping tactics among CFE respondents in the last 3 years (n = 25)

As well as stakeholder observations on coping strategies associated with an inability to achieve affordable warmth, householders were asked about changes to their behaviour and daily activities deployed as a way of better coping or attempting to cope with unaffordable energy. Figure 16 (below) sets out the responses, but it is worth highlighting some of the most striking data here:

- 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 respondents were going without meals, with 36% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’,
- 83% were using coats, blankets, and extra clothes to stay warm, with 59% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’.

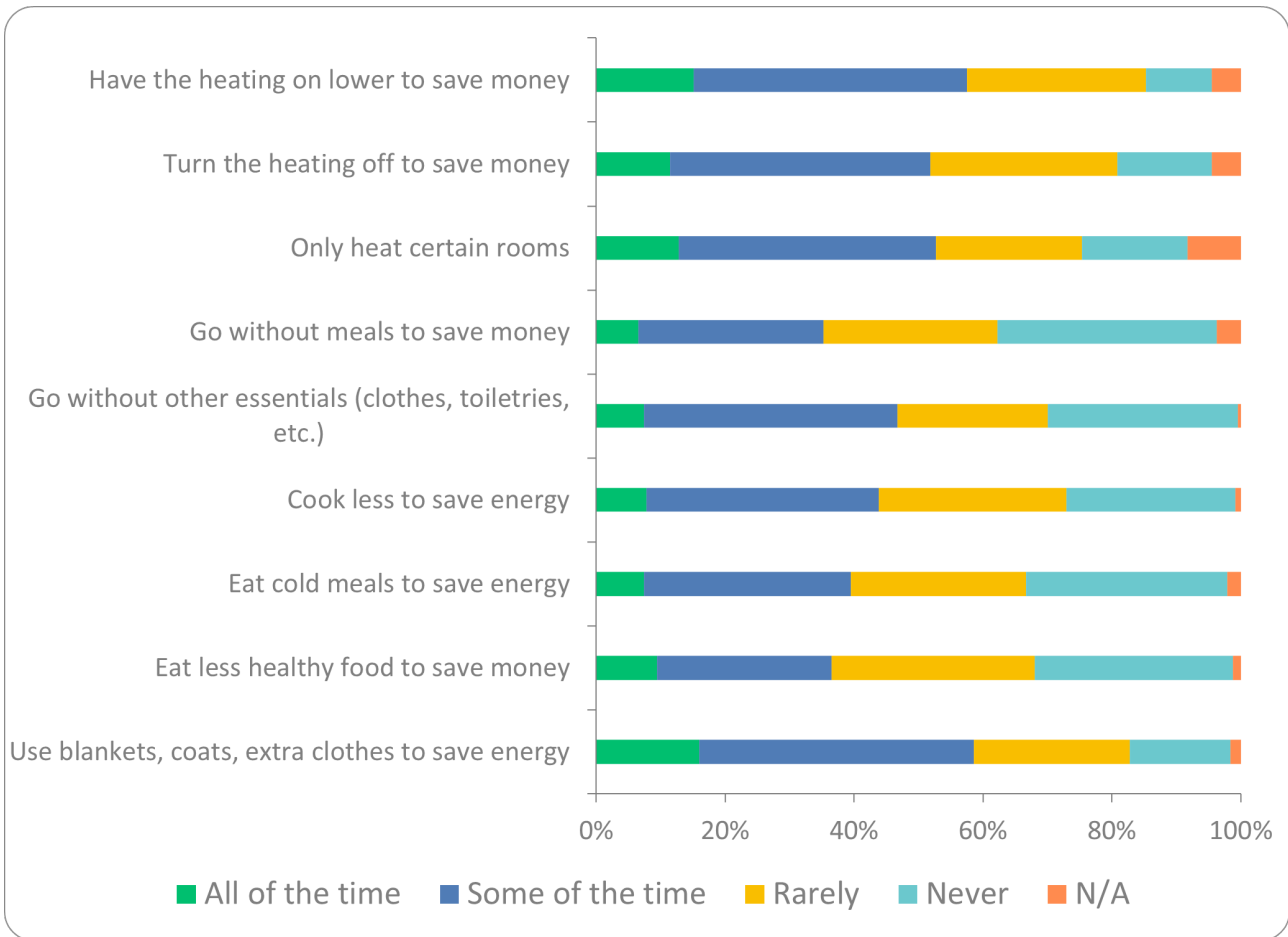


Figure 16: Household behaviour changes resulting from energy unaffordability (n = 245)

The following sections will focus on a number of discrete areas of ‘coping’ that were prominent within the research findings. These relate to buying, cooking, and eating food; doing laundry, cleaning the home and personal hygiene; and social relations and a sense of community.

Buying food, cooking, and eating

The ‘heat or eat’ dilemma was evident in many of the accounts shared. Householders and stakeholders working to support GTRNCs spoke extensively about the manifold challenges associated with food and how this was closely linked to the challenges associated with energy and the cost-of-living.

Data from the CFE and the householder survey shows that:

- 88% of CFE respondents reported that they had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users going without food to balance against other essentials (Figure 16 above),
- 63% of GTRNC householders were going without meals, with 36% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’,
- 73% of GTRNC households were cooking less to save energy, with 44% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’,
- 66% of GTRNC households were eating cold meals to save energy, with 39% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’,

- 68% of GTRNC households were eating less healthy food to save money, with 36% doing this ‘all of the time’ or ‘some of the time’.

Householders shared many ways in which their routines and behaviours around food had been changed to cut costs and cope with increasingly strained incomes. This included not cooking as often or having as many hot cooked meals:

But I wouldn't like to cook breakfast or lunch as much as I used to. Before it would be I would cook lunch and cook breakfast.

Eating and cooking was an element of energy use that fluctuated in terms of whether it presented additional strains or relief. In summer, interviewees, particularly those who identified as Gypsies, told us that it was extremely common to cook outside using barbeques and that this was done for as long and as often as possible. Eating and cooking outside was also described as a communal activity where family members or neighbours would all chip in to bring costs down. As one explained:

We all chip in there. It'll help us out. So, if we're doing food outside, one'll buy the vegetables. One'll buy the meat. We'll all chip in and bring stuff and save money.

The quality and nutritional value of food had also changed in attempts to cope with constrained budgets. For example:

Yes, I definitely am not eating... I used to have an organic veg box delivered. I'm an environmental scientist and I know a bit about, you know... I'm really into nutrition, as well, so I try to eat healthily and I would love to eat all organic, I've always tried to have at least part of my veg organic but I just can't afford that anymore. I can't afford that anymore; I can't afford a veg box. I'm definitely not eating as much veg as I used to, fresh.

This was also impacting families:

Not this winter just gone, last winter, I used to go to the shop, get the kids what they needed, actually get some decent food. Because my kids won't eat pizzas, and things like that. You know? Like, frozen food, my kids don't like.

Householders also talked about sustainable and proactive behaviours related to food that enabled them to cut their energy use and food costs. For example, workshops attendees talked at length about air fryers:

I use my air fryer a lot more now say than the electric oven.

One also discussed the benefits of batch cooking:

... it's about batch cooking, so when I cook something, I don't cook for that day alone. I freeze as well. So, I'm doing that all the time.

As well as collecting and therefore not paying for wood for heating and cooking, interviewees shared several examples of foraging for wild, free food sources:

I'm lucky, I've got quite a lot of wild space around me, so I've been eating an awful lot of nettle and lentil soup. All the nettles are out.

The connection with food and hosting presented a particularly troubling dilemma for households, especially those with big families.

But then it costs to socialise. My mum - you wouldn't go to my mum's, even if she'd had one tea bag and she'd never met you before, if she's invited you round, and you're supposed to go there she would give you her last bit of food. So, when people come round, if there's five or ten people that come round, like if my brother comes and he's with all his mates, they all have to have tea and they have to have a sandwich. If he says he's hungry I can't leave his mate there and he's, "Oh, can you do this?" So, it costs you.

What is clear from the accounts shared is that there are numerous ways in which GTRNCs are deploying strategies around energy and food that are well-established ("*...we know how to survive if that makes sense?*"), sustainable, and communal in nature. There is a sense of community through food and coming together to ensure that the others are not going without. This signals that those living in isolated situations without strong social connections and support networks are likely among the most vulnerable.

Laundry, cleaning the home and personal care

As with food and cooking and eating, doing laundry, cleaning the home, and personal hygiene were also discussed at length in relation to these being energy-hungry practices and something that had to be heavily and consistently negotiated in the context of managing constrained budgets.

From the CFE with stakeholders (see Figure 15 above), we found that:

- 80% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users going without or negotiating clothing purchases against other essentials,
- 63% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users going without or negotiating energy or items for personal hygiene against other essentials,
- 50% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users sharing energy-intensive jobs, like laundry, among households.

From the householder survey (see Figure 16 above), we found that:

- 69% of GTRNC households were going without 'other' essentials such as toiletries, with 46% doing this 'all of the time' or 'some of the time'.

The relationship between doing laundry and health was an issue raised by interviewees. In particular, managing damp and mould was described as creating additional laundry, but in a time where laundry had become so expensive, this had resulted in clothing and bedding needing to be thrown away instead. As one householder told us:

... you've got little ones, like my mum's got COPD. My niece who I have most of the time, she's got asthma, so you can't have any type of mould or damp or stuff because it just sets everyone off. So, you feel like normally you're always washing stuff, and it's the bane of my life - of everyone's life. But you just can't do it. So, I have to throw away so much stuff just because you can't afford to wash it. It's like you bought it and then you have to wash it and then it gets damp because you can't constantly heat everything.

Another householder described the restrictions that had been placed on washing, especially with their children's clothes, due to the cost of laundry:

I only do washing if the kids have got nothing, because I feel like, if I put it on the wash... how do I explain it? I used to do washing twice a day. Like, I used to make sure my kids' clothes were done. D'you know what I mean? Now I just make sure the kids' school clothes are done, and their pyjamas, because I can't afford it, I can't do it.

Interviewees also shared the experiences of bathing and showering and how the practices around this when living a nomadic life increased vulnerability, especially in terms of health. As one interviewee, a mum of three living in a local authority-owned site, told us:

... you're running them to a freezing cold shower block and then you're like quick wash and then you're running them back into a cold trailer. The reality is your kids are going to get ill because kids get ill anyway.

Several participants explained that despite having modern or new arrangements for bathing and showering, for example having new shower blocks on a site, that running these in a comfortable way was so expensive through the energy crisis that they had reverted back to old methods, such as bathing children in buckets. As one householder told us:

It's like an old-school meter. You put a quid in to put the heating on. So, if the kids have a shower, I will put a quid in, for instance... I would do it for them and my mum, but the reality is I know that I'm not getting a hot shower. It's warm but the room's not hot. It's just the water. So, stuff like that that's just a little bit harder, so now I'm just back in the trailer, washing them all in buckets. It's fine. It's how I grew up; I would rather just put the kids in the bucket because it's just easier to keep the water on the thing. It's warm because you can put it in front of the fire, and you can control the thing because otherwise they will get sick ...

Another householder added that this was not solely a strategy being employed by households living on sites or other arrangements with separate shower blocks, but was also evidenced among households living in bricks and mortar:

...it's also not just sites. My sister's in a house in London. She's the same. She's still washing her kids in buckets. She's like I'd rather not run a whole bath, like yeah, it's fine sometimes but not every day because it costs her. She was like it cost her about £4 a time to run a bath.

Social relations – the power of community

Throughout the research, there was a strong sense of community, and this was by far the biggest indicator of whether 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. Stakeholders, in particular, emphasised how people from various GTRNCs who were living alone were among their most vulnerable clients in terms of the impacts of (fuel) poverty:

Old people living on their own, right? I mean, it's probably the same for in houses as well, but there are people that are living on their own and they don't go out and they don't - maybe they go and do a shop once a week, but they have no contact with other people.

As such, experiences of energy vulnerability were moderated by strong social ties, but maintaining these relationships was also threatened by such circumstances. For example, from the CFE (see Figure 15), we found that:

- 59% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users minimising social interactions because of energy and other household costs,
- 88% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users borrowing money from family and friends,
- 84% had seen increases in the numbers of their clients and service users borrowing household items (like appliances for cooking) from family and friends.

Householders provided further insights into this in sharing the ways in which they were reducing social contact to minimise costs associated with having visitors. For one householder, this had resulted in restricting visitors to family members only:

I've only had family really; I haven't had friends round for ages.

This not only impacted how comfortable people felt when hosting guests, but also resulted in feeling uncomfortable visiting others due to an awareness of what cost their visit may incur:

I think people are a bit more mindful about going to other people. They'll bring stuff now. So, yeah, not just about having people in your own home but thinking about visiting.

Parents we spoke to referred to the costs of not only their own social interactions, but also those of their children, and how in the previous year – due to the energy price and cost-of-living crises – this had been restricted substantially:

It's everything and children, right across the board, are missing out on so many social interactions with their friends because it costs so much now.

In terms of energy, there were numerous examples of how strong social ties with family and friends were regarded as extremely beneficial in terms of paying for energy:

I have to rely on my brother sometimes. Now and again, I'll ring him up and be like, "Oh, can you just chuck me a £20?"

This was also the case for several interviews and workshop participants with regards to accessing energy. This was particularly the case for sourcing wood for heating, as one householder explained to us:

He's got a little wood burner. I've got a big wood burner. I buy my wood in bulk because my ex is a forester, and he works in a wood yard up the road. Every year and a half or every two years I buy a massive, massive tractor load of wood. I'm lucky in that I've got a corner plot, so I've got a big garden. There are loads of space to put this massive pile of wood. That's my wood supply. My son who's got his own caravan, his dad lives two doors down and he's the forester. He chops his dad's wood in return for his own firewood, so he sorts himself out.

However, while supporting one another and sharing resources and access to the resource was common, the energy crisis was described as having restricted some supportive behaviours:

In terms of energy and logs, probably no. In terms of tools and, "Has anyone got an onion? Can someone drive me to 'so and so'?" Yes, that happens all the time. That happens all the time.

Sustainable living

As noted, nomadic life was described as a very physical way of life, whether in terms of collecting wood, mooring a boat, or showering and cooking between buildings, and one that comes with a unique set of daily challenges. In the research, GTRNCs described themselves as being fairly resilient in terms of the energy-related challenges of nomadic life and linked this to well-established sustainable ways of living.

For example, householders shared many examples of living sustainably, surviving on few resources, and of do-it-yourself approaches to getting by in terms of keeping warm and well at home. Many had years of experience with low carbon technologies like solar panels and batteries.

A lot of our caravans have solar panels, so we charge everything.

Solar is the long-term plan to make it as off-grid as possible. I've made it with solar in mind

one day when I've saved up enough money. My whole roof is sloping south-facing on the right angle with the idea that I'm going to have solar one day. I'm just assuming I can't really access any warm homes grants or anything like that. I've insulated it as much as I possibly can with as much insulation as I could possibly afford.

Others had experience of building their own homes with keen interest in how to make these homes as thermally efficient as possible, reducing energy demand where they could. As one Boater told us:

I've tried to make it into a house, so I've learned how to do some DIY. I've basically just built it myself. It's basic enough, but it's quite comfortable.

One householder who'd moved onto a council-owned site from living with their two sons in a series of different vehicles, decided to self-build a timber framed home to the same size specifications of a static caravan – with the main reason being that they wanted to find a way to keep warm:

When I got given the pitch, I didn't want to get a static because they're so difficult to heat and because they're so damp. I spoke to the site manager and said, "Instead of that, can I do this?" She said, "Yes, you can."

Yes, just knowing. I've never lived in one. Before this we had a double decker bus and before that we had a removals lorry. Vehicles generally are quite hard to heat, but statics in particular, they're just so flimsy and so cold. Generally, the kind of statics that we can afford aren't these modern super double-glazed things. They're being got rid of off of holiday parks for a reason. The flimsy walls and I thought if I can avoid that I would.

I did look at buying one and potentially insulate. I almost bought one actually thinking it might be cheaper to buy a static and completely insulate the whole of the inside and wooden clad the whole of the outside. The more I looked and the more people I spoke to, the more it looked very complicated and like it was going to be more expensive to do it that way. More likely to have leaks and more likely to have condensation between the walls. I think it's actually been cheaper to just build something from scratch.

What came from these examples was a sense that householders living nomadic lives feel they deserve more respect in this regard and how this should result in more meaningful engagement and consultation based on their levels of expertise and insight. Interviewees told us how they were extremely well-experienced and well-informed on matters relating to more sustainable ways of living. Therefore, this should correlate with a more respectful dialogue between such communities and those working on the energy transition and energy efficiency.

You know, places like I live, for example, you know, there should be more and more and more of these, kind of, low-impact dwellings and there should be help available to make them more efficient, you know? I mean, if someone chooses to live in a caravan and have got less of a carbon footprint or less of a footprint on the land, encourage that but help them make it better insulated, give the grants. Find ways of identifying and targeting people like us and help us make it a bit easier, I suppose, yes.

Summary

The evidence in this section shows that for GTRNCs, predominantly those not living in bricks and mortar, energy vulnerability and fuel poverty manifest in much the same way. Such communities, which as recognised are incredibly diverse in nature, struggle to keep warm and well at home because of rising and extremely high energy and fuel costs, combined with poor housing and heating system conditions. What this section has highlighted is that, among GTRNCs, these experiences are in many ways more severe or come with additional complex challenges that are unique to the experience of nomadic life or identifying as GTRNC. Health and wellbeing are affected, and perceptions of safety and security impacted, too. Everyday behaviours and practices, such as cooking, eating, and washing, are impeded by more complex and challenging arrangements, as well as disproportionate price rises for energy sources (for example, gas bottles). Nonetheless, strong social ties and community connectedness offer some protection against the worst of the impacts.



CATHERINE'S STORY: NOMADIC LIFE AS A HIGHLY SUSTAINABLE LIFE

Catherine lives with four children and her partner on a local authority-owned site. They are English Gypsies and live on one of 12 plots, having moved in around five years ago. The other plots are occupied mostly by family members, and they love their current living arrangement. When they moved onto the plot, they made the decision to build their own small, timber-framed home because they wanted to live somewhere that was more energy efficient and comfortable than previous homes, which had typically been static caravans.

Catherine has decades of experience of living off-grid as her family have lived on other sites and roadside for many years before moving onto the current site. Over the years, they've nearly always had solar panels and are currently saving up to add solar PV to their self-built home – something they're desperate to have now but can't afford. There were conversations with the council at the time the site was built but they were told that solar panels were too expensive to add and so these never appeared.

In building the current home, Catherine and her partner have done nearly all of the work themselves, despite not being professional builders or tradespeople. They've spent many hours over the last few years researching the best techniques and materials for building the most sustainable and energy efficient home. This has included how best to insulate and ventilate the home, what heating system to install, and how to save and reuse water. For some parts of the work, Catherine has had contact with local organisations who put on DIY workshops – with some of these online during the pandemic - for repair and renovation projects. She's found these incredibly valuable, and they've given her the confidence to try something new herself.

There are lots of ways in which Catherine, her family and her neighbours are living sustainable lives. This seems like second nature to them and just how they've always lived. Low impact, low demand, low waste, and low cost wherever possible. A simple, slower, more minimalist way of living – all things that make their way of life so appealing. In terms of the things they do, in winter, for example, the family wear lots of layers to keep warm and to reduce the amount of laundry they need to do, they mostly follow a vegetarian diet, and they're very conscious of plastic use and waste. On the site, the family are able to grow their own food, and this is a part of living at a fixed address that Catherine is particularly happy about. Cooking frequently happens communally across the site as this reduces cost, waste, and energy use. Catherine described this as the norm, particularly during the summer months, where families and households across the whole site will chip in to make meals for everyone.

With Catherine's experience of building and repairing the home and living with a fairly low energy demand for many years, she feels upset that there aren't more schemes to help support this way of living, or more opportunities to learn from the expertise of different nomadic communities. For example, when the site was being developed, Catherine remembers a lot of consultations with the local authority – with tea and coffee and sandwiches – where many hours were spent discussing needs and hopes, including things like allotments, compost toilets, solar panels, and so on. However, almost all of these points were overlooked in the final design of the site, and families like Catherine's have since spent years either doing it for themselves or campaigning for change.

4. EFFECTIVE ENERGY ADVICE AND SUPPORT

This research aims to develop a better understanding of the ways in which energy-related advice and support can be strengthened for GTRNCs. This section focuses on of the ways in which energy-related advice and support can be strengthened for GTRNCs. First, it considers the ways in which current provision is experienced and then explores the gaps and barriers to effective advice and support. Lastly it shares insights for ways that support could be improved.

The findings in this section, which draw in part on the community co-production workshops, have shaped the accompanying resource from this research – a guidance document on how to better support GTRNCs with energy-related issues. The resource - *Making Energy Advice and Support Better for Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and Nomadic Communities: A Community Co-Produced Guide* – can be found on the project website.

DELIVERING SUPPORT

Types of Problems Encountered

A wide range of issues or problems were found to be experienced by a significant proportion of GTRNC households (n = 187). Indeed, almost 1 in 2 (49%) had experienced an energy-related issue with their housing provider, while around two fifths respectively had experienced an issue with their energy supplier (43%) and/or experienced a problem with broken energy infrastructure (meter). The full range of issues identified are listed below:

- 49% have had an issue with a housing provider about energy/fuel,
- 43% have had an issue with an energy supplier,
- 40% have had issues with a broken gas or electricity meter,
- 25% have had issues with neighbours about energy/fuel,
- 25% have had issues with a site manager about energy/fuel,

10% have had issues with a broken top-up key/card for a PPM. In response to these and various other day-to-day challenges, CFE stakeholder respondents were asked about the types of problems they provide support with, energy-related and otherwise. These aligned with many of the issues highlighted in the day-to-day experiences of fuel poverty and energy vulnerability shared by GTRNC households, and included billing errors and disputes, energy affordability, supplier issues, self-disconnection, inability to keep warm or well, energy debts, and accessing grants and schemes.

CFE respondents were also asked whether they felt these issues had got worse for GTRNC households in the last three years, based on their experiences of providing support. Figure 17 shows that across all issues, there had been very little positive change, though some was noted by respondents in relation to self-disconnection (for PPM customers), energy saving, and grants for financial support and access to energy efficiency measures. Energy affordability, energy debts, and the ability to keep warm and well at home were all regarded as having got ‘a lot worse’ by the majority of respondents.

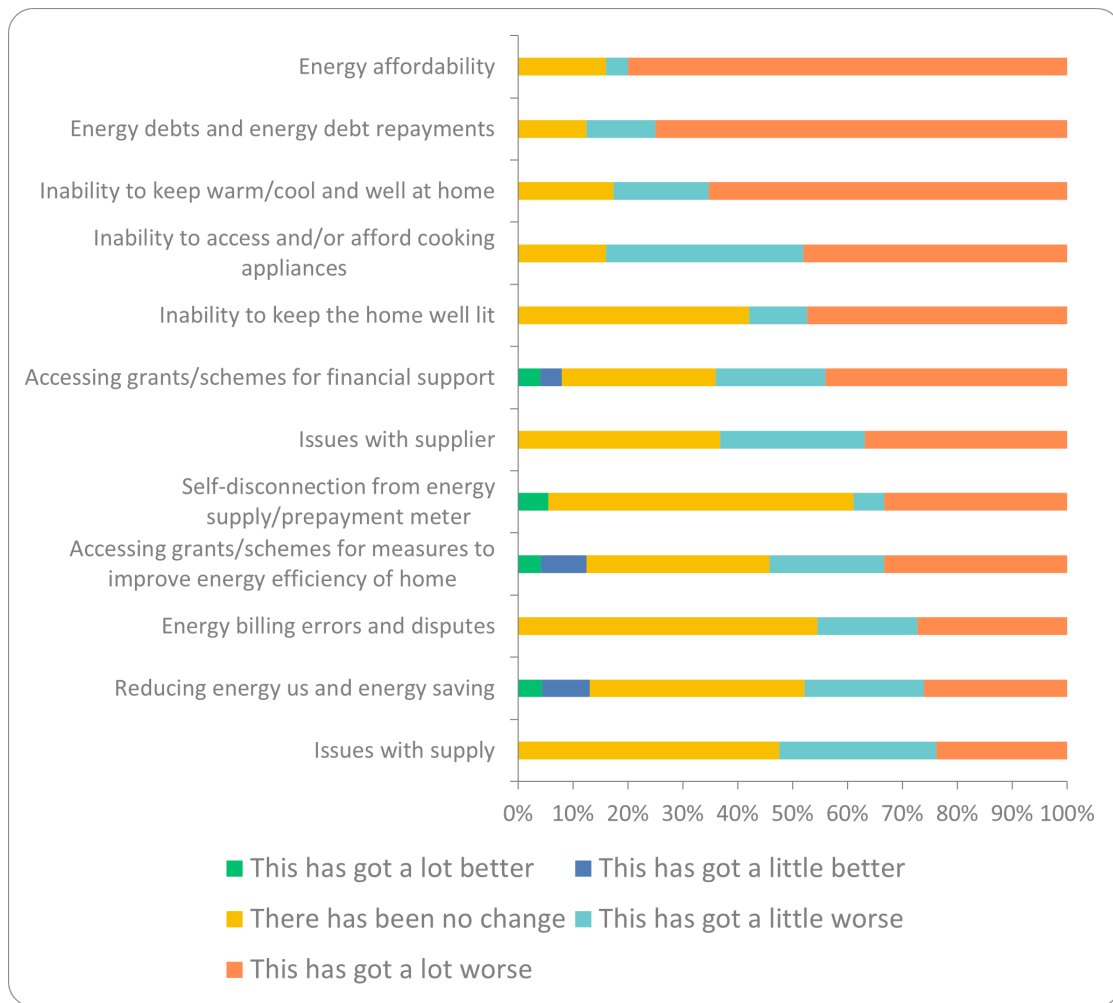


Figure 17: Stakeholder reported prevalence of energy-related issues and change over 3 years (n = 27).

Sources of support

GTRNC households are more likely to seek support for keeping warm and well at home from ‘family, friends, and neighbours’ (44%) or a ‘local organisation/charity’ (43%) (see Figure 18). Other common sources of support for keeping warm and well at home were the ‘council/local authority’ (34%) and the ‘landlord’ (27%). Notably, schools and health professionals were not as commonly reported sources of support for keeping warm and well at home.

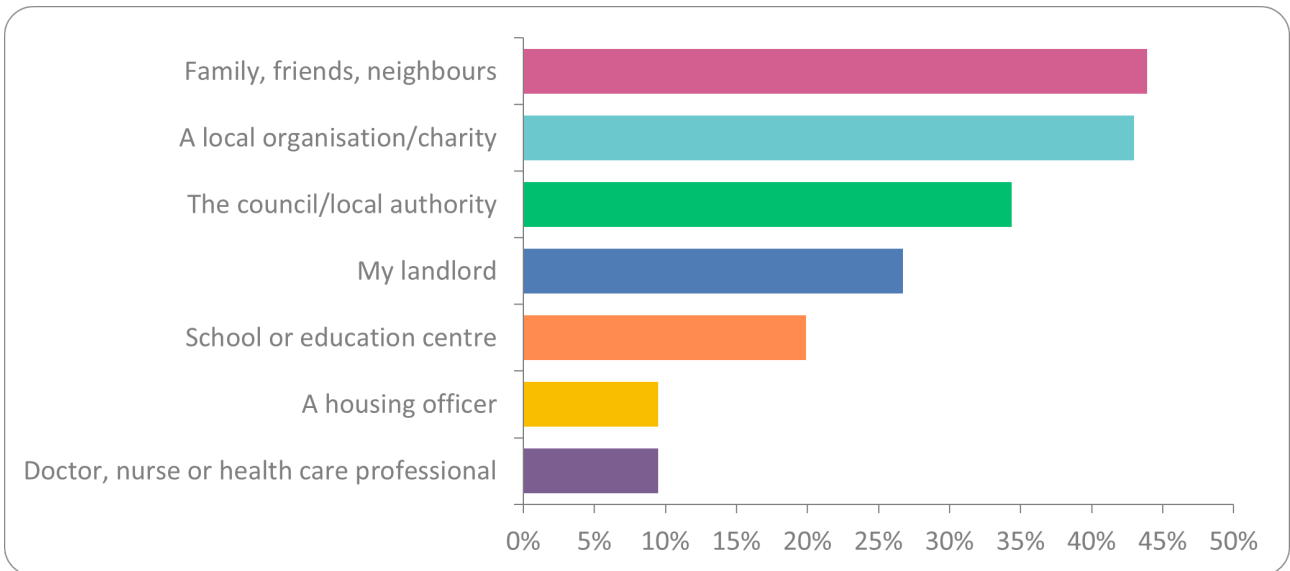


Figure 18: Sources of support (n = 211)

Forms of support

More than 70% of GTRNC households surveyed had received at least one form of energy or cost-of-living related support, such as food parcels and warmth packs (see Figure 19). Encouragingly in the context of the energy crisis, half (50%) of these respondents had received a winter warmth pack while nearly two fifths (38%) had help with access to grants. Over a quarter of those who had received some support had received fuel vouchers (29%), energy saving advice (28%), and access to energy efficiency measures (28%). Just 17% reported that they had received food parcel support.

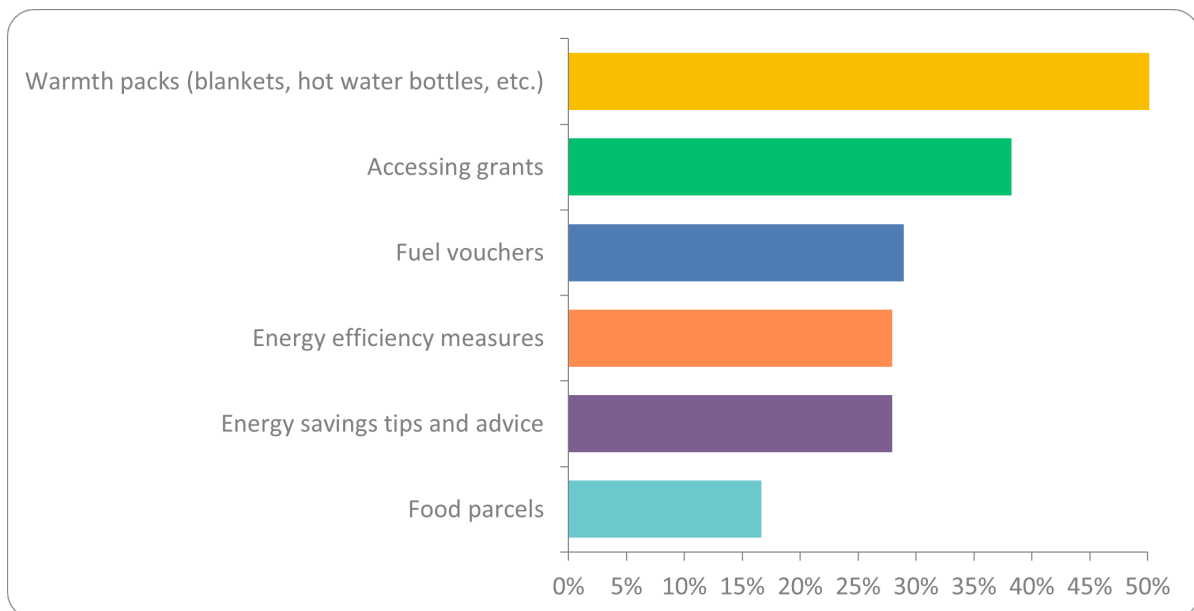


Figure 19: Forms of energy-related support received by GTRNC households (n = 204)

It was noted in testimony from interviews and workshops that these forms of support were predominantly, if not exclusively, accessed via local organisations and charities. Stakeholders also talked extensively about these forms of support as the main ways by which they were helping GTRNCs with energy-related issues. Providing such support came with significant challenges, however. For example, winter warmth crisis packs were limited, and the scale of demand worried some stakeholders who shared that the services they worked for and with had refrained from publicly promoting the crisis packs because of worry over running out too soon before the peak of winter of 2022-2023.

Access to support was also discussed at length with GTRNCs who felt that they were frequently and unfairly excluded or made to meet more stringent requirements than households living in bricks and mortar and/or not belonging to a group that identifies as GTRNC. As one stakeholder, referring to fuel voucher applications, told us:

Anyone who is living roadside or on site has to go through a lot more hoops than anyone who is living in bricks and mortar. We did not get one successful voucher for anyone living roadside or, they were going through bank statements. Who's that payment to? Who's that payment to? And they weren't doing it for - and [another local service] flagged it up as well. They were like, "We don't know what's going on."

Identifying vulnerability - the Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register (the PSR) is a service in place to help “...energy companies, including energy suppliers, electricity and gas networks like us to look after customers who have extra communication, access or safety needs”¹⁰, for example, with accessing meters, additional support during power outages, priority support when calling a network operator, and the provision of accessible information. PSR registration and awareness are two key elements of work across the energy and wider utility industry to ensure that the most vulnerable consumers are being supported. Figure 20 below shows the level of awareness and engagement with the PSR among the GTRNC households surveyed:

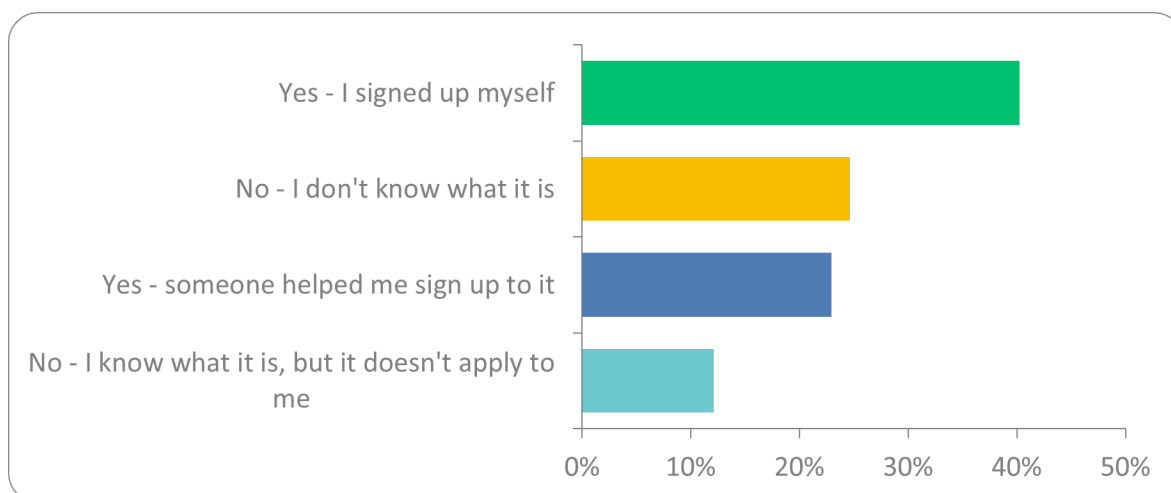


Figure 20: PSR awareness and engagement among household survey sample (n = 231).

10 Details on the PSR can be found: <https://www.thepsr.co.uk/>

Interestingly, more than 75% were aware of the PSR which is a good indication that information relating to support is reaching GTRNCs. Within this, 40% has signed up to the PSR themselves, 23% had been helped to sign up, and 12% knew about it but thought that it didn't apply to their circumstances. One in four (25%), however, was not aware of the PSR highlighting that further efforts are needed to ensure that all energy consumers are aware of extra help.

Ways of delivering support

As Figure 21 below shows, CFE stakeholder respondents provide support for GTRNC households across a wide range of places and in various formats. The most common being in the client's home (92%), telephone support through calls and text messages (88%), face-to-face provision in the community (77%) and at the organisation (73%). Notably, web chat services were least common (12%) but more than half used social media (62%) and email (58%), while nearly one in three (31%) used online webinars and training to reach their GTRNC client groups.

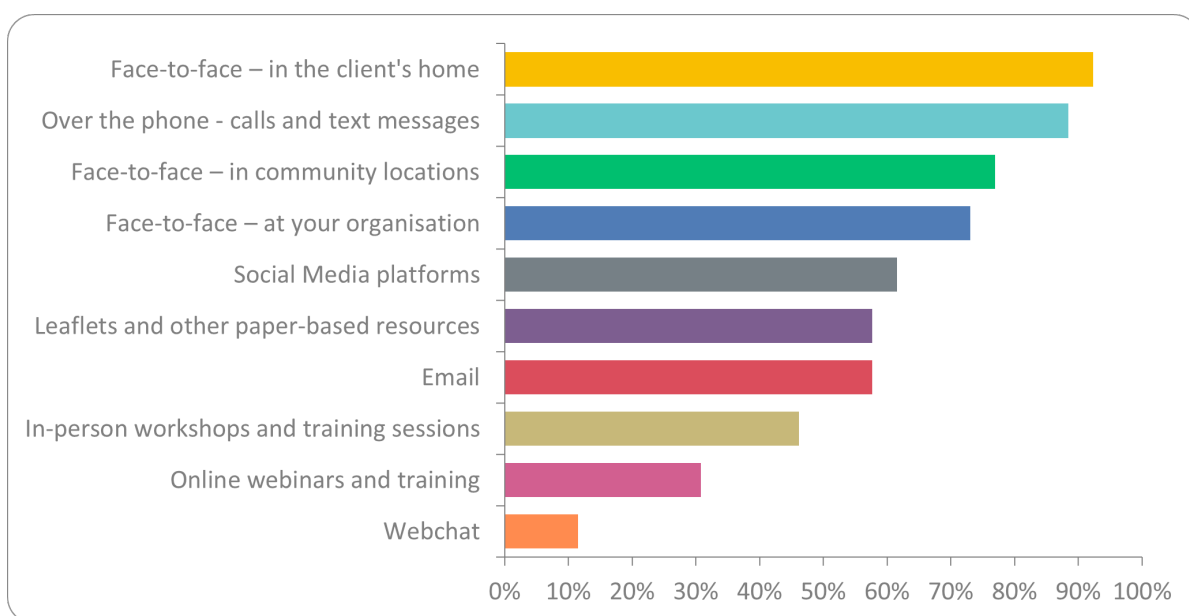


Figure 21: Method of delivering support by stakeholders (n = 26).

The procedural ways in which CFE respondents provided advice and support also varied, including a mixture of one-off support, one-way information provision (for example, through leaflets), signposting onto other services, and in-depth and multiple appointments with case workers. This demonstrates that the services working with GTRNC are striving to reach people in as many ways as possible and provide flexibility in delivery that can meet different needs, be that simple one-off information sharing through to in-home, in-depth regular appointments to solve complex problems.

The scale of support provided by organisations varied considerably, with some supporting less than 20 clients at any given time while others supported hundreds of thousands of clients from a wide range of demographic groups and communities, not just GTRNCs, each year. A significant proportion (44%) of CFE stakeholders indicated that their workforce for delivering support included volunteers. One stakeholder noted how, because of the cost-of-living crisis and a need

for many to pursue employment, the volunteer workforce had decreased in size and that this was creating additional strains in terms of frontline services meeting demand.

Aspects of service delivery that stakeholders thought were done well included low and no cost services (96%) and cultural awareness and sensitivity (96%). Other common features that were identified related to the local presence and knowledge of the teams, as well as varied networks for referrals and training and ability to provide tailored advice for those with different needs. Though fewer agencies identified an ability to provide services to people with no or limited English language skills. Figure 22 below details the key elements of support provision that CFE respondents felt they did well in the service they provided.



Figure 22: Key elements that services/organisations do well as a provider of advice and support (n = 25).

Generally, stakeholder respondents deemed their services and organisations to be delivering effective advice and support for GTRNCs in a wide variety of ways, be it in relation to training other frontline workers, presence in the community, being free, trusted, and accessible. One element of support that could be improved or expanded however, was provision for those with limited or no English.

Barriers to providing effective support

This section examines some of the key barriers that exist to providing the most effective energy-related support to GTRNC, covering:

- Resource in terms of staff and time due to high levels of demand for support,
- Poor customer service as an energy consumer,
- Online support and digital exclusion,
- Language barriers,
- Literacy and numeracy barriers,
- Trust, stigma, and experiences of discrimination,
- Lack of available support and/or schemes, notably those targeted at improving energy efficiency.

Potential barriers were explored at both service/organisational level and the service user/client level and Figures 23 and 24 below detail the CFE respondents' views on these. At a service/organisational level, the main barriers relate to resource, specifically not having enough staff or volunteers or enough time to support people because of high and rising demand. As one stakeholder told us:

...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.

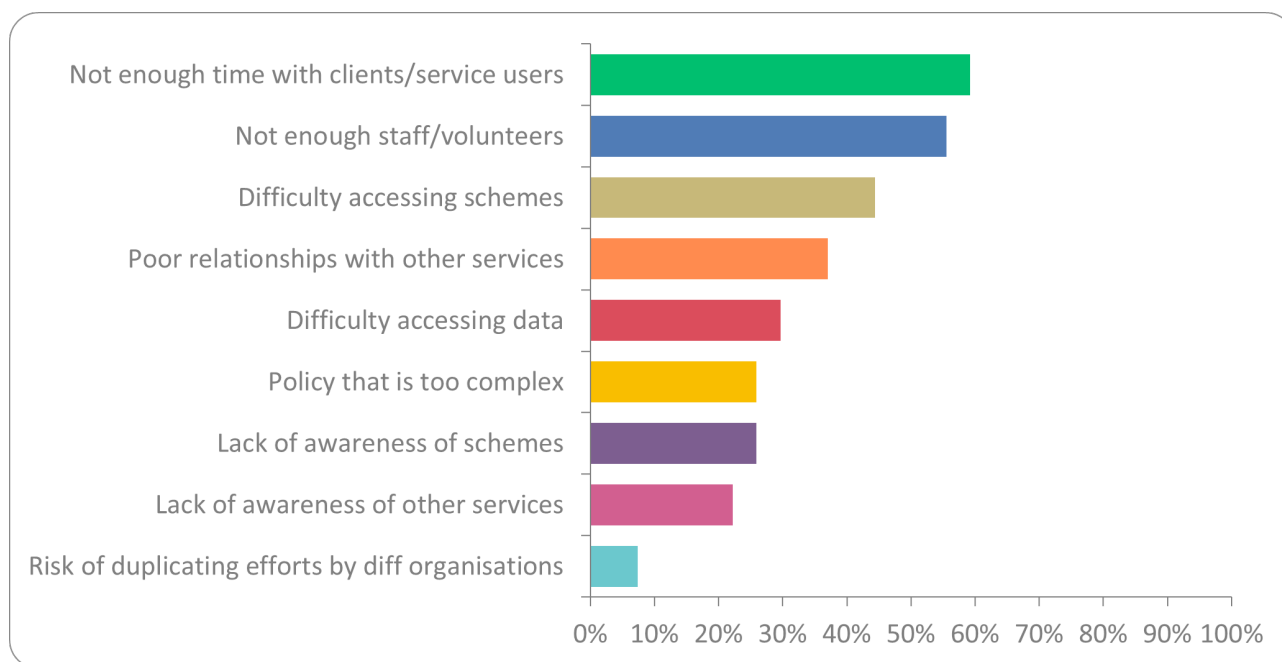


Figure 23: Service/organisational level barriers to providing advice and support (n = 27)

At the client level, the most significant barriers identified by CFE respondents (see Figure 24) were digital exclusion (92%) and literacy and numeracy barriers (81%). Also highlighted was the importance of trust and awareness of schemes and services (62%). This supports much of the evidence on which actors are best placed to provide and promote such support, with locally delivered, well-established and specialist services on a given issue or with experience of working with specific groups considered most effective and appropriate. This also supports the views of

the GTRNC households surveyed, 44% of whom reported that ‘local organisations/charities’ were their preferred source of support for help keeping warm and well at home.

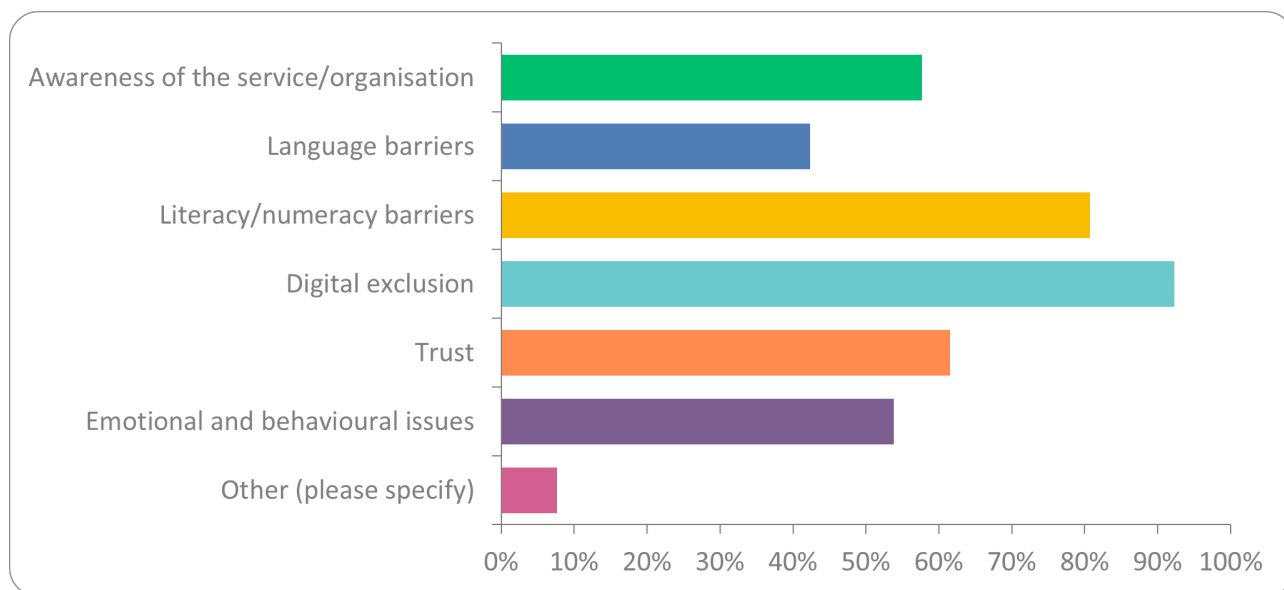


Figure 24: Service user/client level barriers to providing advice and support. (n = 26)

Customer service and contact

One of the main barriers identified by GTRNC households that had an existing relationship with an energy supplier was the ability to contact and communicate with customer contact centres. Wait times to get through to a call centre were far too long for many, and often stressful due to the impact on daily life (for example while caring for small children, some with complex needs) and charges to mobile phones. Interviewees described the stress and complexity of having to wait to get through, then repeat their circumstances time and time again, being passed between multiple call handlers, and at times, feeling discriminated against. One described this as feeling like ending up in a cycle:

It's the supplier. She's gone through the whole customer services thing and every time she rings customer services, she ends up in a loop that takes you back to, "Go to the website and fill out this form. Try this form." I've tried that form. Just awful customer service.

Another highlighted the cost and time spent trying to get through to energy suppliers:

And then it's like I've got to sit and wait 25 minutes to get through to someone. Then he couldn't hear me properly and just put the phone down and then I had to ring them back up again after waiting 25 minutes and another 25 minutes, and it's just all like phone bills, isn't it, and everything on the mobile phone.

There were also major concerns around the struggle to make contact with a person and not an automated service - a feature that workshop attendees described as essential for all vulnerable households, not just those from GTRNCs.

... you just talk to a computer the whole time. They send you round in circles. They will not let you speak to a person. You give up!

However, there were concerns regarding commitments or action that might be agreed upon during a phone call, but then not recorded anywhere. This absence of a record to evidence and document what had been said was viewed by workshop attendees as particularly problematic:

... because I would rather someone had a phone call and an actual conversation, but then you've got no proof. So, what you realise is that when it comes to things like this where it's already stacked against you and they basically want to screw you over that you actually need a trail of proof or paper trail to say, "I've sent you this. This is what was agreed." When you have a conversation with someone, you have a verbal agreement and you think, "Okay, they've said they're going to do my smart meter. They've said they're going to do this. They've come out," but then reality when you ring again you speak to someone completely different and they say, "Well I'm not sure why they've said that. Have you got an e-mail? Did they send you an e-mail?" And you're going, "Well, no, they just told me they would."

Workshop attendees referred to other services, such as with health services, where conversations between client and service provider are logged, so actions and next steps can be reviewed by both parties at a later date. This presents a potential area for further exploration in the context of the energy supplier-householder relationship, particularly where having written records of communication could reduce vulnerability.

Online support and digital exclusion

The provision of support online was discussed at length in the interviews with stakeholders and householders – with mixed views. Stakeholders, most of whom were working for services and schemes to directly support GTRNC households, described digital exclusion as a key challenge they face in providing effective support and reaching the most vulnerable people.

Given that 94% of responses to the GTRNC household survey were done online, the sample is clearly one that has access to the internet and able to use it to some extent and potentially comfortable with accessing support and information online.

While 74% of surveyed households (n = 235) told us that they were confident using the internet it is important to recognise that this does not always translate into confidence in undertaking a wide range of online activities, transactional services for example or complex interactions. Among those surveyed, one in four were 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 households were able to access and use them, offered valuable ways to provide more in-depth support remotely. Two examples in particular are worth noting: Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. These were described in terms of providing support in the places where people are living out their daily online lives, but also provided a way to share pictures of letters and other documents to make advice and support in a simpler and quicker way. While this will not work for everyone, it highlights the potential of online methods in terms of delivering the most effective energy-related advice and support. As a stakeholder explained:

What we've started to find, which is really helpful, is that people use Facebook Messenger quite a lot to get in touch with us. That's also a really good, quick, way where people can... If people need to have some help or support with their benefits or an application for a DAF [Discretionary Assistance Fund], they can take a photograph of their letter or their sick note or their letter of refusal or whatever. Then they put it on Facebook Messenger, which is really nice and simple to do. Young family members do that for older people. Then we've immediately got that letter that we need, so people don't have to make an appointment, they don't have to come out, they don't have to get to our offices and hope someone is there and do that journey. We can just access that letter, or that form, immediately and then do what we need to do with it.

As another stakeholder highlighted, the potential to deliver support in this way was largely reliant on internet access that was now cheaper, more accessible, and more reliable – a change that has come about as a result of shifts from ‘pay as you go’ type phone arrangements to more affordable and accessible contracts, or better access to Wi-Fi in public spaces:

I think people have moved, now. They have these larger data bundles on their phones, so they are able to use those or connect to Wi-Fi in different places, I guess. Again, it's really, really, beneficial for those who are on the internet and able to use it. Obviously, we know some of those exclusions that are there for people who don't.

Language barriers

As well as digital exclusion, language barriers were identified as a key issue, with 42% of CFE respondents (n = 26) reporting that this impacted their capacity to provide effective support. This was also noted as a key barrier by workshops attendees, as one told us:

And then what about Eastern European Roma or Roma from other places in the world that come here and then English isn't their first language, so that means they can not only speak English as a first language but actually they probably can't write in English as a first language or write at all. So, it's like you're not even - it's not just traveller people. It's like that with a lot of the population.

Health

Health, particularly mental health, was also noted as a barrier to delivering effective support. The capacity to deal with complex problems while also managing day-to-day health issues, often in combination with other challenges and markers of vulnerability, was highlighted. As one householder told us:

We had exactly this conversation. If she wasn't a tenacious, articulate, able to use the internet woman, the amount of time and effort she's put into being on the phone, sending emails and writing complaints. We both said, "What if you had mental illness? What if you didn't have access to the internet? What if you weren't as tenacious, you were depressed?" You'd be absolutely screwed over.

Notably, several of the interviewees and workshop participants – householders and stakeholders - discussed day-to-day life following a diagnosis of autism or ADHD and the ways in which support, of all kinds but including that which is energy-related, is not yet tailored in a way that works for people:

That's such a large number of the population now have got ADHD, have got dyslexia. It's such a large number. It's like we're not just talking about catering for us, are we? We're talking about catering for a huge number of the population, so it's like they have to do it.

Householders also described barriers accessing health services, such as GPs and other health services, and while not perhaps directly energy-related, there are a number of energy-related schemes and services that are delivered via health professionals¹¹. This could mean that not only the impact of cold and poor-quality housing and health could be overlooked, but the potential to access support schemes might be missed too:

Yes, there's definitely an element to that. Luckily, I know a lot of people in the community, so I was very aware of the GP, because I had to change GP, that they had to take me on even though I didn't have an address. When they challenged me about that when I went in, I was like, "No, I know my rights. You have to." I had to have that confrontation, but I knew what to say. I felt ready for that situation. They took me on and that was fine.

Literacy and numeracy

Stakeholder and householder interviewees also talked extensively about levels of literacy and numeracy being significant barriers among GTRNC populations:

My mum can't read. She can't write. She's alright with money. If she's got money in her hand, she knows what she's got and what she's spending. But when they ring her up, they ring her up and they go, "Your pay smart meter has got to be a certain amount of units and all this.

¹¹ Some examples of health-focused schemes, including those that utilise health actors in delivery, can be found here: <https://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Catalogue-of-Health-Related-Fuel-Poverty-Schemes-2019-1.pdf>

This also highlighted challenges that stopped family and friends from being able to provide support. This was described as a particular issue for older households who traditionally may have been less likely to attend or finish school and where permission to speak or act on behalf of a relative were being ignored or not correctly recorded on service providers' systems and records. As another workshop attendee told us:

... my mum's the same. She goes, "What are you on about?" She goes, "I put £20 on. That lasts a couple of days." She doesn't understand. Where I went to school and all college and that, I understand what they're on about. But mother will just give me the phone. So, when they say, "Oh, we can't speak to you," and I'm like, "No, you've got permission from my mum to speak to me. My mum does not understand this. She never went to school." And they're really rude. They're like, "Well, we can't speak to you," and put the phone down. And I'm just like, "We're going nowhere."

The design of paperwork and documents, for example with energy bills, was referred to as unnecessarily complex by many households, and noted by one as particularly intimidating for those unable to read or write or who have limited abilities:

I'm quite educated. I'm not the most brainy of people but I'm educated and I'm dyslexic. So, when I see a big old bunch of words on a poster or on a leaflet, I'm thinking, "I don't want to read that." So, imagine how intimidating that would be for somebody with very little or no literacy skills at all.

Stakeholders and interviewees outlined that, where resources are being designed, they must be accessible, with access to Easy Read and 'audio' resources being an example shared:

It needs to be Easy Read. I don't know about you but if I've been in meetings or whatever and they've given you some sort of breakdown of a certain amount of policy and whatever, that you've been looking at. Then, they'll all say, "Oh by the way, there's a link at the bottom for an Easy Read version." Everything should come with an Easy Read or an audio version, in my opinion.

Know-how relating to energy – or 'energy literacy' – was also an area described as needing further consideration to design and deliver more effective energy advice and support.

So maybe there's something there about some sort of educational material for organisations, that we can then pass onto our clients, about... You know, we can be educated on how to look into what tariffs there are and work out if there's any cheaper way for them to run things at certain times of day. Maybe there's something there, I don't know.

Trust, stigma, and discrimination

As highlighted in Figure 24 above, trust is a huge concern and presents a major barrier in terms of delivering effective support. Indeed, it was cited by 62% of stakeholders as a barrier to delivering effective advice and support to clients/households. Stakeholders and householders shared numerous examples of mistrust, much of which was rooted in poor experiences with energy suppliers and housing providers, as well as other actors and bodies. As one stakeholder told us:

... a lot of people, historically, have a huge distrust or mistrust of services, there might be a reluctance for people to... I definitely have found this. There's a reluctance for people to reach out for help sometimes.

One of the drivers of this, noted by another stakeholder, were concerns that asking for help would lead to involvement of other bodies, such as social services, and how past experiences had led to fear of this action being taken:

I think people are worried that if they get in touch with an organisation and say, "I can't afford to heat my home, my kids are cold." then that will trigger some kind of negative response from services, and they'll be put on some sort of register or... You know what I mean, that kind of thing.

Discrimination played a critical role, with many examples shared of how certain organisations or bodies could not be trusted based on experiences of discrimination in the past. This even extended to householders' relationships with health professionals and schools, for example, as one householder told us, a relative's child's school had raised concerns over the family's capacity to wash and clean clothes and therefore raised concerns over the child's welfare:

My brother had it. At my nephew's school, one of the teachers said to him, "Oh, I've noticed your son's been wearing the same socks for a week." And he was like, "No. We've got him a seven pack of socks that he's worn all week, like the same pair but a different pair." ...that doesn't indicate bad parent. That indicates family who might need some help.

This experience highlights the need to ensure that where support is accessed assurances are given that it will not unnecessarily trigger further action that could be rooted in instances of discrimination. The level of fear of action was described as stopping families who found themselves in vulnerable circumstances from reaching out. This requires dedicated cultural awareness training and focused efforts to support and remedy where discrimination has occurred, much like that delivered by several of the organisations involved in this research.

Households, particularly those living on sites, shared examples of various ways in which they had experienced discrimination playing out in their everyday lives, including energy suppliers refusing supply, children not being invited to social events, postal workers not delivering post, among others. Stakeholders working for services to support GTRNCs also told of similar experiences among their client groups and highlighted the importance of and need for more cultural awareness training across a wide range of sectors.

Lack of energy efficiency schemes for GTRNC households

Energy efficiency and fuel poverty programmes are often not designed with the homes or needs of GTRNC households in mind. This presents a barrier to uptake of schemes to improve the quality or thermal comfort of homes (particularly for those not in bricks and mortar) and is a further barrier to providing support. Several stakeholders and householders highlighted how such grants and schemes were almost non-existent or extremely difficult to access. For stakeholders, this was inhibiting services' capacity to provide effective support to those experiencing energy vulnerability, while for householders, this was restricting their capacity to independently improve their thermal comfort and minimise risk of fuel poverty. As one householder, a Boater, told us:

There's no government scheme to say we can double-glaze your home for you. Or a government scheme to say, actually we'll get you solar panels, and that kind of stuff. There's no government scheme to give me anything, to be fair. And I choose to live off-grid, it is my choice, but it would be nice to be kind of appreciated.

For those living on sites, typically in static caravans, the quality and energy efficiency of the home was often particularly poor. One stakeholder discussed at length the option to improve the efficiency of the dwelling using 'winter packs' which involved insulation and other measures to wrap the home and help prevent heat loss. However, it was highly unlikely for households to have purchased the home with this, or even higher standards in place, and subsequently almost impossible to fund or find grants to fund this work afterwards.

Other ways of improving support

While the previous section has explored key barriers to providing effective energy-related and other support for GTRNCs, the research also considered other ways in which support might be improved.

As shown in Figure 25, the majority of CFE respondents felt that opportunities to deliver effective support could be achieved in a range of ways, including: increased financial support (92%); more in-person support (84%); more staffing resource, including volunteers (84%); and stronger networks of advice services (60%). This further highlights the strain on services in meeting demand.

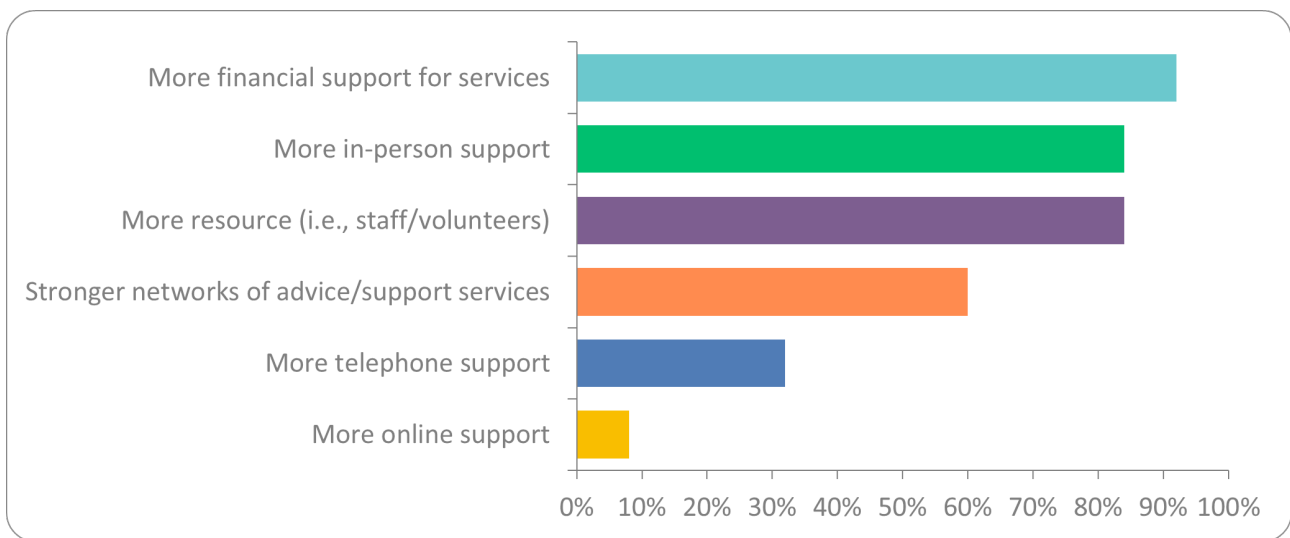


Figure 25: Key opportunities for providing the most effective support (n = 25)

Going beyond activity that involves direct contact with clients and households, stakeholders highlighted the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships across networks of services and organisations. This was seen as a particularly important opportunity in the future by one CFE respondent who noted that Covid-19 had significantly impacted the capacity to do this:

Most important is more resources that go towards outreach/relationship building so that people have ‘bridges’ to consistently access services that can support them - without the ‘link’ this is really difficult to achieve - we saw this fall right back in Covid with lack of public services (and third sector) doing on the ground/outreach and it has not recovered.

An interesting and important point raised by another stakeholder was that improving services was also about changing perspectives that are commonly held around vulnerable or marginalised groups being regarded as ‘hard-to-reach’, suggesting instead that it is services, not people that are ‘hard-to-reach’:

I’ve been doing what I’m doing for almost ten years but in different ways. The tiny changes that there are, I just feel like, “Have I been banging my head on a brick wall for ten years?” People are still asking the same questions. “How can we reach this hard-to-reach community?” There’s no such thing as a hard-to-reach community. It’s a hard-to-reach service.... Everybody is experiencing the same, the same hardships, the same troubles. As I said, it’s not a hard-to-reach community. It’s services that are hard-to-reach for that community. It’s the out of sight, out of mind.

This points towards a need to review and take care in the language adopted around targeting support and how to do so most effectively, especially when dealing with vulnerable and/or historically marginalised groups, such as those that identify as GTRNCs.

Others talked about a desperate need for services, organisations and bodies that do not routinely or effectively support GTRNCs to take steps to better understand the lives and needs of such communities, for example in learning through cultural awareness and/or energy-specific training.

As one stakeholder explained:

I think there are so many things, and the main thing is that people haven't taken the time to learn about gypsies and travellers... Gypsies and travellers, they haven't taken the time. So, there's a lot of policy that is set up that is anti-gypsy and traveller. I could have a fire in my back garden, why can't other people? Somebody living in a council house could have a fire in their back garden, why can't people living on traveller sites?

Across the research there was also a sense that in order to improve support and build strong relationships with GTRNCs there is a balance to strike between enabling 'self-managing' and 'supporting'. The common view was that nomadic life offered a great sense of independence and freedom and those that chose this life highlighted the many ways in which they had adopted a self-sufficient way of living, particularly in terms of energy supply and need for support. When the balance was struck well, for example by housing providers, people felt lucky, secure, well, and happy in their living arrangements:

We build our own community and live our own lives independently and differently. This is a really interesting place to be in that regard because we want to be self-managing and want to have our own community. At the same time, we're each paying rent and Council Tax. We're each bound by a tenancy agreement and rules. It's very different. I struggle to get my head around it sometimes and I think people here struggle to... It's got safety and security in that we're not going to be evicted every few months. It's got all the mod cons of electricity, showers, and everything. I feel really lucky to be here and I love being here.

The impact of crises

The last three years have seen UK households face a time of unparalleled unpredictability and destabilising change. The Covid-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020, saw households spending more time in the home than ever before, using more energy and living exposed to poor in-door conditions for more time. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, UK households have been impacted by both a cost-of-living and energy price crisis. Food, fuel, housing, and other essential costs have rocketed leaving millions more living in poverty. NEA estimates, for example, that the doubling of energy bills since October 2021 has resulted in two million more households living in fuel poverty, with the total now at 6.6 million¹².

It is important, therefore, to consider the experiences of living through and providing support during these recent and ongoing crises, to better understand how they have impacted the daily lives of GTRNCs and the related advice and support available. CFE respondents were asked about some of the most common types of challenges GTRNC face in their daily lives, and how the experience of these may have worsened or improved in the last three years. Three years enables us to consider the contexts of Covid-19, the cost-of-living and the energy price crises.

12 <https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/>

Figure 26 below shows that across a wide range of common issues, such as housing quality, health, income, and discrimination, there has been little improvement, but significant worsening. Highlighting some of the most critical areas, more than 70% of CFE respondents stated that ‘keeping warm/cool and well at home’, ‘mental health issues’, ‘income related issues’, and ‘issues with household bills’ had worsened a little or a lot.

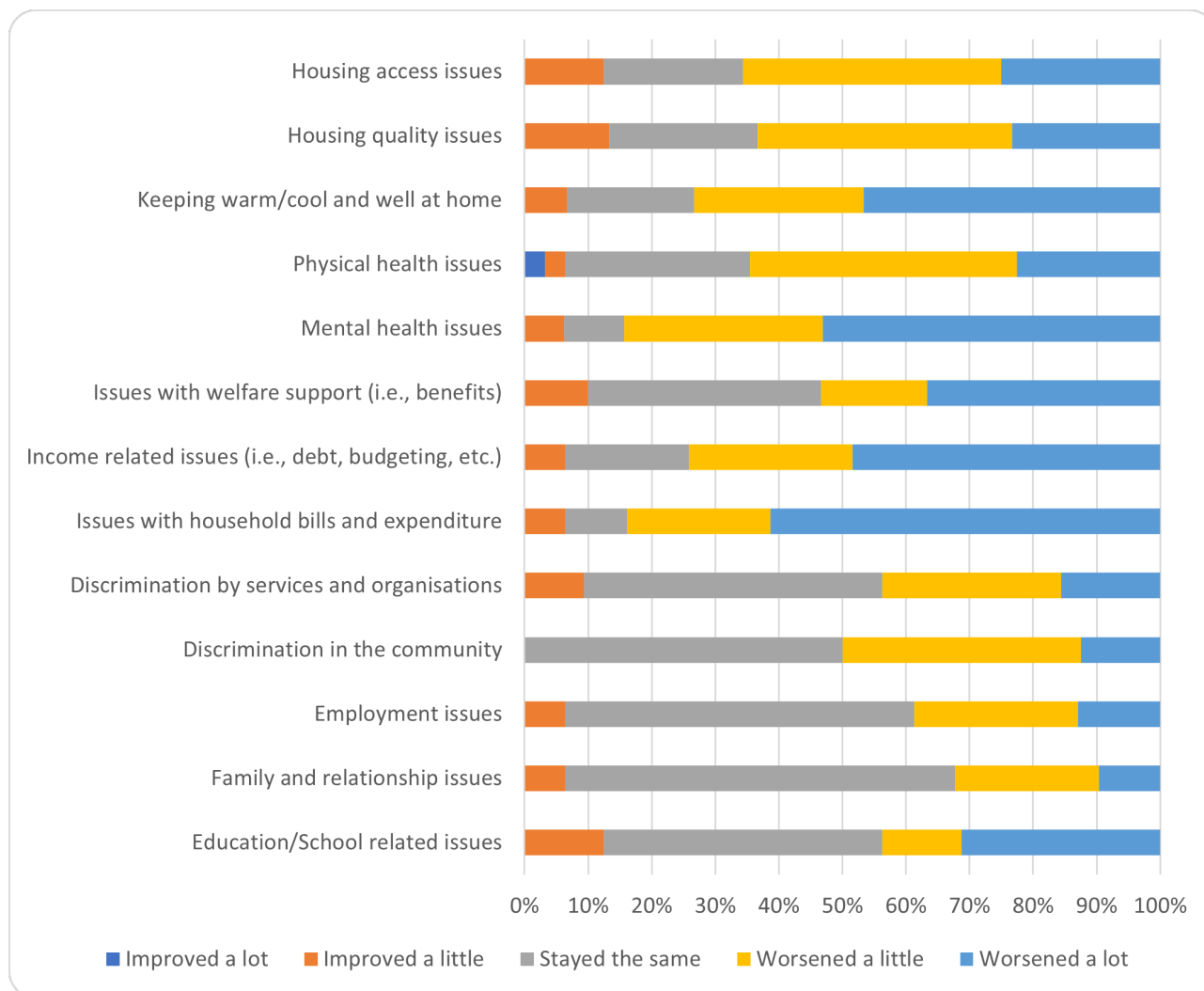


Figure 26: Extent to which issues have improved or worsened for GTRNCs in last 3 years (n = 32)

Respondents were asked to expand on their answers and pointed towards the impact of Covid-19 and the energy price and cost-of-living crises, in particular the ways in which they had affected income and employment, as well as health. One stated that: “at best, things have just about stayed the same”.

There was, however, limited mention of Covid-19 and the impacts of lockdown. One stakeholder described the pandemic as having had a positive impact on their capacity to reach certain communities:

Whilst also being a negative point the pandemic has allowed us to access these communities in a positive way. E.g., offering the Covid vaccination to these communities in a way that suits their needs.

With regards to negative impacts, interviewees described how certain elements of everyday life had not resumed following the pandemic and lockdowns, such as the imposed lockdowns leaving communities with feelings of being like prisoners, particularly those living on sites. Some also referred to challenges in returning to routines from before lockdown, for example with children returning to school. As one CFE respondent noted:

Covid-19 has had a very big impact on the GRT communities that I work with as many have not sent their children back into schools.

Drawing a focus to the cost-of-living and energy price crises in 2022-2023, households were asked about changes to daily life specifically in the last year (see Figure 27). This focused on typical daily activities, such as cooking, cleaning, and socialising with family and friends, and whether these things may have got easier or harder to do.

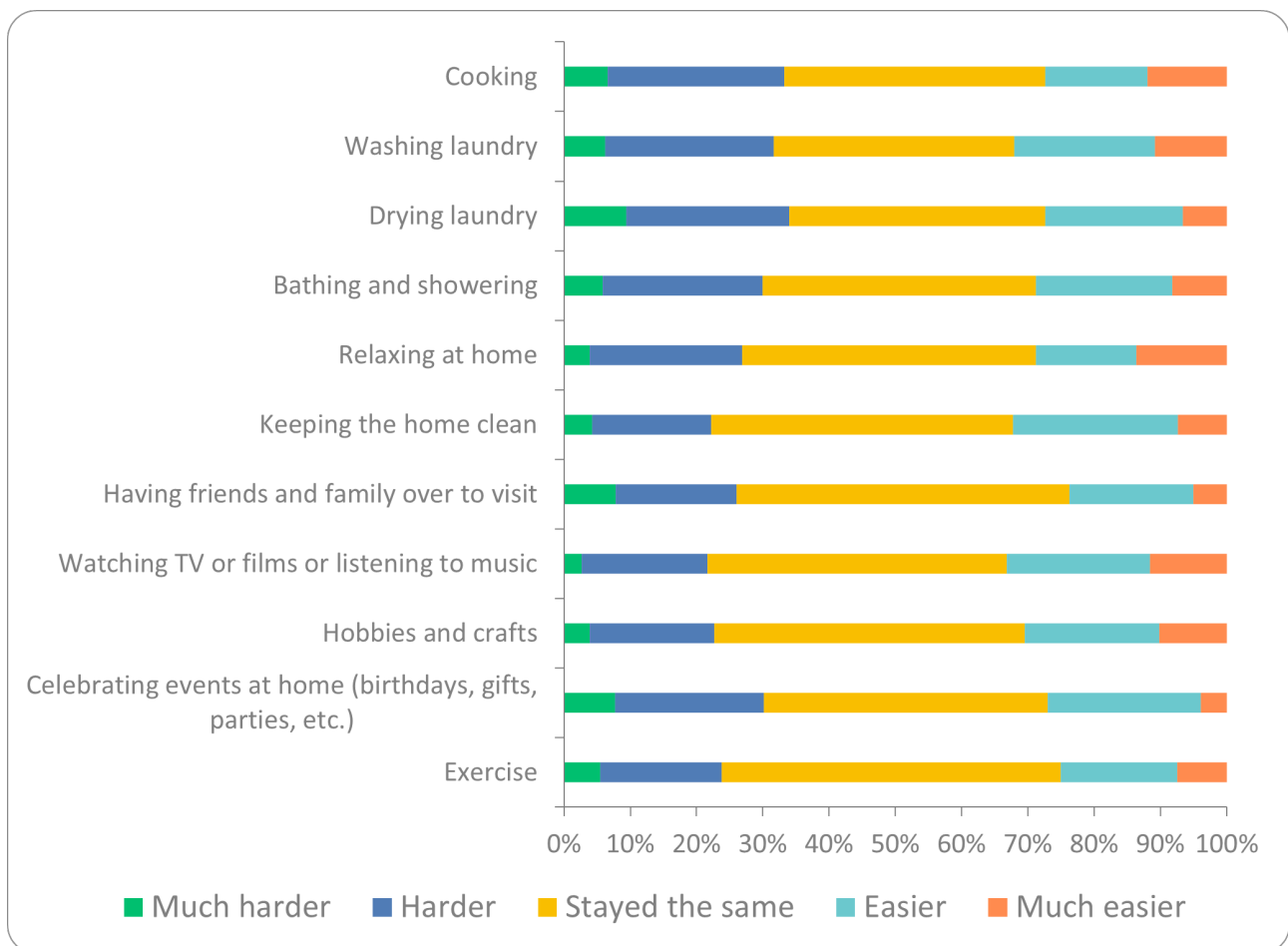


Figure 27: Changes to daily activities of households in the last 12 months (n = 259).

As Figure 27 shows, for a large proportion of respondents many of these everyday activities have stayed the same in terms of how easy or difficult they have felt over the last 12 months. There was also a fairly even mix of households that reported each activity as having got easier or harder over the last year. This may suggest that households that reported things as ‘staying the same’ have not had daily struggles with many of these activities, or perhaps that things were ‘hard’ further back than the last 12 months and remain just as ‘hard’ now.

Across all categories, at least one in five respondents have reported that daily activities have got 'harder' or 'much harder', and although the difference is only minimal, those activities that require energy/fuel, such as cooking, laundry, and cleaning (discussed earlier), were among the most commonly cited as getting harder. Indeed, around 1 in 3 people said drying laundry (34%) and washing laundry (32%) had become harder or much harder; 33% said cooking was harder to some extent; while 30% said celebrating events at home had become harder or much harder.

Government support – Energy Bill Support Scheme and Alternative Fuel Payment

Nationally, 700,000 households (as of July 2023) had missed out on vital government support through the energy crisis, with those living in park homes and on boats among the key groups affected⁶⁸. In this research 43% of GTRNC households told us that they had not received any money from government schemes to help with energy/fuel costs.

Stakeholders, interviewed in late 2022, identified that households living on sites and boats were not receiving support, and that information about such support for those without a direct energy supplier relationship or a PPM was not available:

...it became apparent, from my visits to different sites in South Wales, that the cost-of-living help was not filtering down to gypsies and travellers.

Another stakeholder highlighted experience of what they called 'discriminatory practice' for those living on sites whereby site managers/owners, in some cases the local authorities, acted as 'brokers' for energy supply, and that this had led to no household-level support being passed on:

Because of the discriminatory practice of the electricity and water companies, the electricity companies will not give people individual electricity accounts on old sites... I've noticed that... There are some very interesting things happening around people who buy their electric from the council. The council has received the £400 payment for them, but they're not giving them access to that money because they say that they have been keeping them on a low rate of energy for X amount of years, and that has been benefiting them. And the lower rate benefits them and takes into account the £400 they've received for those individuals.

For Boaters, the issue related to whether or not they were classified as a 'continuous cruiser', and if they were, this meant they were not eligible for support under the government's energy crisis support package. Stakeholders and householders talked about the unfairness of this, while also describing the extensive and incredibly stressful processes that services and their clients had been through to try and get clarity over this issue though the worst months of the energy crisis. As one Boater, a paramedic living with their two sons, told us:

I'm well educated, I'm working... I still feel angry that situation has arisen and they're treating us less than and not giving us equal things. People who had two homes, they got it twice and we didn't get it at all. Do you know what I mean? If you can afford to have two homes, you probably don't need it. There are lots of boaters who have been missed out. It does make me really angry.

One stakeholder, representing a project that was specifically trying to support Boaters through the energy and cost-of-living crises noted:

We know that a lot of the boating community weren't given any of the cost-of-living payments. So they have been affected. Everyone else in the country has had some form of payment from the government. Not this community. They haven't received anything. So we are very much aware that they have been disproportionately affected than everyone else.

There were also several examples of households being asked to meet additional demands in terms of providing paperwork or evidence that was difficult or impossible to get. As one householder, a frontline advice worker who lives on a site told us:

Most private sites didn't get it... So, they're just - the amount of information they're asking me for, like I can read but my brother can't read or write at all. There was absolutely no way that the majority of my family would have...They want a passport. They want a driving licence. They want two forms of ID with a phone bill paid to your address. We don't get - phone bills don't come to our address. We don't have an electricity card. I haven't got an electricity bill. This is why we're in this situation that now you're supposed to be doing it, so you just end up it's like stacked against you, and it's like if I'm finding it difficult to navigate this, I don't know how anyone else is.

Surveyed households were asked how they had found out and gathered more information about support (see Figure 28), with the most common ways being a combination of via family/friends (51%), social media (41%), and through websites (37%).

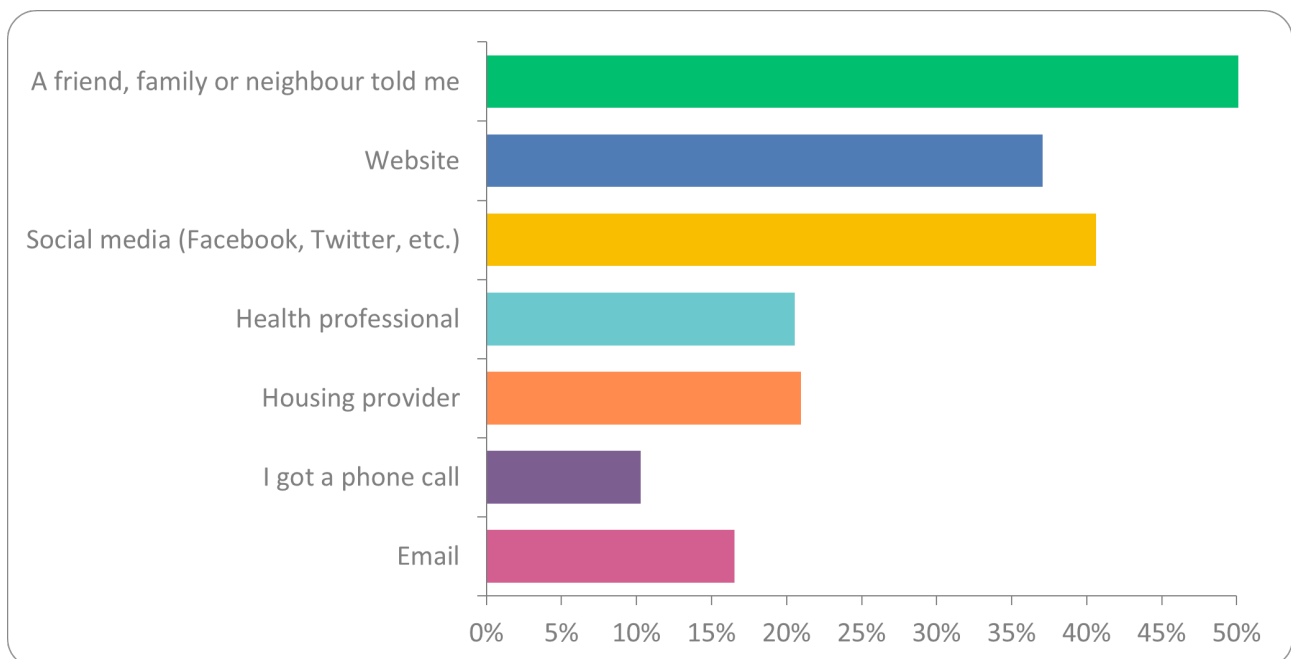


Figure 28: Modes for learning about and accessing forms of energy-related government support (n = 224)

It is important to note that the large majority of respondents completed the household survey online and so it is somewhat expected that there would be more engagement via online methods reported. Respondents did, however, outline a number of other ways by which they learned about government and other energy-related support, including via local organisations, on the news, and that financial support (i.e., vouchers) arrived automatically on a bill or through the post.

SUMMARY

Stakeholders and householders illustrated that there are services and organisations delivering not just effective, but exceptional support. And that this has been delivered during years of unpredictability and instability because of multiple crises. Despite this, there remain many challenges and issues. Several barriers to providing support are observed, including a need to better understand and respond to specific GTRNC needs, including those associated with digital exclusion, level of literacy and numeracy, complex health, language barriers, and trust, stigma, and discrimination. As such, this research has found that GTRNCs are not being as effectively supported as they could be and their needs are not well-understood or being met and, in some cases, this is leading to unfairness, or perceived unfairness. This is particularly observed among key actors in energy policy and practice design, such as energy suppliers and government, where the design and delivery of key policy has failed to meet these needs or be amended in a timely manner once a gap has been identified. Packages of support in response to the Energy Crisis, in particular the Alternative Fuel Payment, have highlighted where access to support and services is failing to meet the needs of GTRNCs.

CONCLUSIONS

Gypsies, Travellers, Roma, and other people who identify as belonging to a Nomadic Community (e.g., Boaters, Bargees, etc.) (GTRNC) are regarded as being among the most overlooked and marginalised communities in society. They disproportionately experience poverty, poor housing, poor access to services, and poor health.

This research has drawn together data generated from stakeholder and householder interviews, an expert stakeholder Call for Evidence (CFE), community co-production workshops, and householder survey and diaries. It foregrounds the views and voices of 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.

Fieldwork for this research was undertaken during the height of the energy price crisis in 2022-2023. Data was gathered both before, during, and after the rollout of the significant package of government support and it is known that more than 700,000 households, including those living in park homes and on boats, were refused or missed out on this essential support.

For GTRNCs who are not living in bricks and mortar, energy vulnerability and fuel poverty manifest in much the same way as for those who are. Energy and fuel costs combined with poor housing and inefficient or broken heating systems create situations in which GTRNC households are struggling to keep warm, well, comfortable, and safe in their homes. For GTRNCs however,

particularly those not in bricks and mortar, such experiences are often more severe, access to energy more difficult, and day-to-day life and meeting essential needs more challenging. Health and wellbeing are affected, and perceptions of safety and security impacted, too. Everyday behaviours and practices, such as cooking, eating, and washing, are impeded by more complex and challenging arrangements, as well as disproportionate price rises for prevalent energy sources (for example, gas bottles). Nonetheless, strong social ties and community connectedness offer some protection against the worst of the impacts.

It is clear from this research that there are services and organisations delivering not just effective, but exceptional support. And that this has been delivered during years of unpredictability and instability as a result of multiple and long-lasting crises. Despite this, many challenges and issues remain. Barriers to providing support include the need to better understand and respond to specific needs and challenges among GTRNCs, in particular those associated with digital exclusion, levels of literacy and numeracy, complex health, language barriers, and trust, stigma, and discrimination. As such, GTRNCs are not being as effectively supported as they could be, and their needs are not well-understood or being met. Challenges in this respect have been identified among key actors, such as energy suppliers and government, where the design and delivery of key policy or regulation has failed to meet these needs or be amended in a timely manner once a gap has been identified. Packages of support in response to the Energy Crisis, in particular the Alternative Fuel Payment, have highlighted where access to support and services is failing to meet the needs of GTRNCs.

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PLUGGED IN

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

A report by National Energy Action



Action for Warm Homes



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