

REPORT LAUNCH:

Enablers of digital inclusion in primary care for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities



Agenda

- About us
- Intro to Gypsy, Roma & Traveller communities
- Health context
- Our methods
- Our findings
 - Digital exclusion
 - Key enablers for digital inclusion
- Recommendations
- Q&A



About us



About us

This report was produced by Friends, Families and Travellers and Roma Support Group, as members of the [VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#).

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) are a national charity based in Brighton, and work to end racism and discrimination against Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life. We support individuals and families with the issues that matter most to them, at the same time as working to transform systems and institutions to address the root causes of inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.



Roma Support Group (RSG) is a Roma-led charity based in East London, working to improve the quality of life for Roma refugees and migrants by helping them to overcome prejudice, isolation, and vulnerability. Every year, RSG supports around 2,000 Roma people with access to welfare, health services including mental health, education, financial inclusion, campaigning and policy, housing and cultural activities.



The VCSE Health & Wellbeing Alliance

The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance (HW Alliance) is a partnership between voluntary sector representatives and the health and care system. It is jointly managed and funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and the UK Health Security Agency.

The HW Alliance's mission is to enable policy, commissioning and provider organisations to design services and support based on the needs of people and communities who face disadvantage and exclusion. **Together, we work to:**

- **Improve access to health and care services and support for those who experience barriers.**
- **Ensure health and care providers and policymakers are supported and challenged to embed inclusion in service design and improvement.**
- **Improve inclusivity and codesign across the voluntary sector.**



Opening poll:

How would you rate your knowledge of digital access in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?



Introduction to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities



Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Communities: An Introduction

The term [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller \(GRT\)](#) encompasses **various communities, including Romany Gypsies (English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, Welsh Gypsies, and Romany people more widely), Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Boaters, Showmen and Roma.** Each of these communities have rich and distinct cultures and histories. This diversity includes some groups, families or individuals being more traditional with their cultural practices and way of life, with others being less traditional. **It is therefore important to note that not all issues or health inequalities discussed may be relevant or applicable to all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.**

There is a **lack of accurate data to reflect the size of all communities under the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller umbrella.** In the 2021 UK Census, 172,465 people from Romany Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities disclosed their ethnicity. However, **it is likely that the official census record is an underestimate of the true population size.**

Use of the 'GRT' grouping is not always preferred, as some people argue that it fails to reflect the true diversity of the communities referenced - nevertheless, it is often used in policy and research contexts.

This [video produced by Travellers' Times](#) provides a short, animated history of Britain's nomadic communities, while [this video produced by the European Roma Rights Centre](#) offers some important information about Roma communities.



Health context



Health Context for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

Due to **chronic exclusion across mainstream health datasets**, it can be difficult to gain a clear picture of the health status for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK. However, the data we do have shows:

- Members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have **the worst health outcomes of any ethnic group in the UK** ([House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2019](#)).
- The [2021 census](#) for England and Wales revealed that 14% of Gypsy or Irish Traveller respondents described their health as “**bad**” or “**very bad**”, more than **twice as high** as the White British group.
- The [Race Disparity Audit](#) reveals that Gypsy and Traveller people are **less likely to be satisfied with access to a GP** than white British people (60.7% compared to 73.8%) and are **also less likely to be satisfied with the service they receive** (75.6% compared to 86.2% for white British).
- 42% of English Gypsies are **affected by a long-term condition**, compared to 18% of the general population ([Royal College of General Practitioners, 2013](#)).
- Roma communities experience specific social exclusion factors and barriers in access to health and care services. They have multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health and a life expectancy up to 10 years less than non-Roma communities in Europe ([European Public Health Alliance, 2018](#)).



Wider determinants of health

Social inequality across a range of areas puts Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities at greater risk of poor health, of experiencing poor health earlier in life, and of facing subsequent barriers to healthcare services. Community members can face multiple inequalities including economic/ financial exclusion and barriers to employment, difficulty accessing adequate accommodation, inequalities in education, criminalisation and social exclusion.

Discrimination

Education

Accommodation

Employment



Social Determinants Influencing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Health

Discrimination

- Members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities can experience high levels of discrimination throughout their lives, which has a direct impact on health and wellbeing.
- The 2018 Equalities and Human Rights Commission report [Developing a National Barometer of Prejudice and Discrimination in Britain](#), found that more people expressed openly negative feelings towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (44%) than any other group, double that towards Muslims (22%), and transgender people (16%), which were the next highest groups. This figure is borne out in other surveys, showing high levels of prejudice and negativity held towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

Education

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children have the [lowest educational attainment at all key stages](#) and have the [highest rate of school exclusions](#) out of any ethnic group in the UK.

Employment

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals have a higher risk of poor health due to high levels of unemployment.
- According to the 2021 Census, 41% of Gypsies and Irish Travellers were employed or self-employed, compared to 70.9% of wider England and Wales population.
- According to the Census 2021, 28.5% of employed Roma work in elementary occupations, while the national average is 10.5%.

Accommodation

- Inadequate housing and poor living conditions can directly impact health and wellbeing. [48% of Roma Support Group's health advocacy project service users stated they face challenges relating to 'poor housing conditions'](#)
- The lack of appropriate accommodation available for Gypsies and Travellers exacerbates inequalities in health and standards of living. This is exacerbated by a national shortage in both permanent and transit Traveller sites across England.
- A lack of a fixed address can negatively impact health, as it can pose a barrier to accessing health services. [Despite NHS guidelines indicating that a fixed address is not necessary for GP registration, many patients are wrongly refused on this basis.](#)

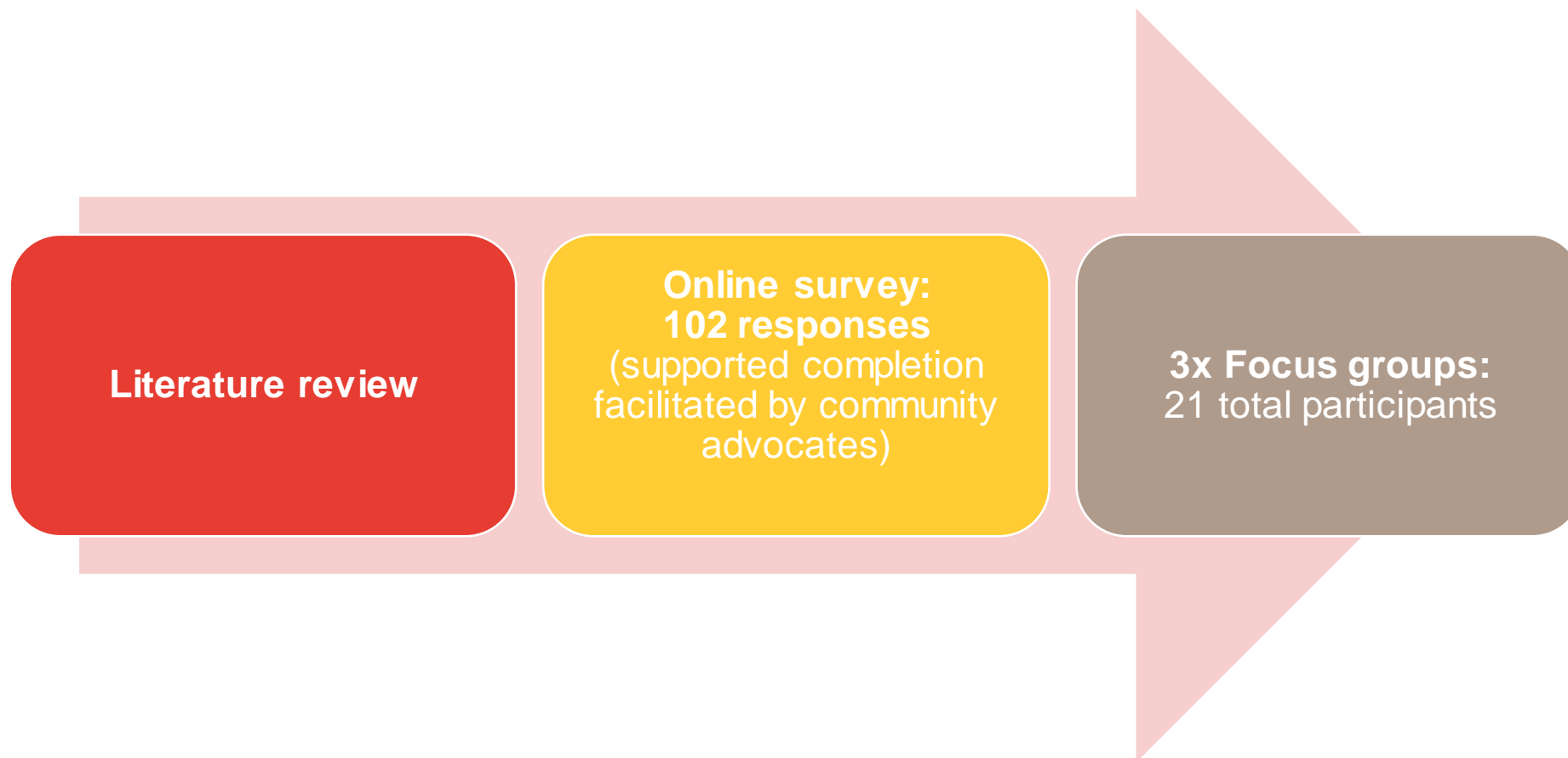


Our research process

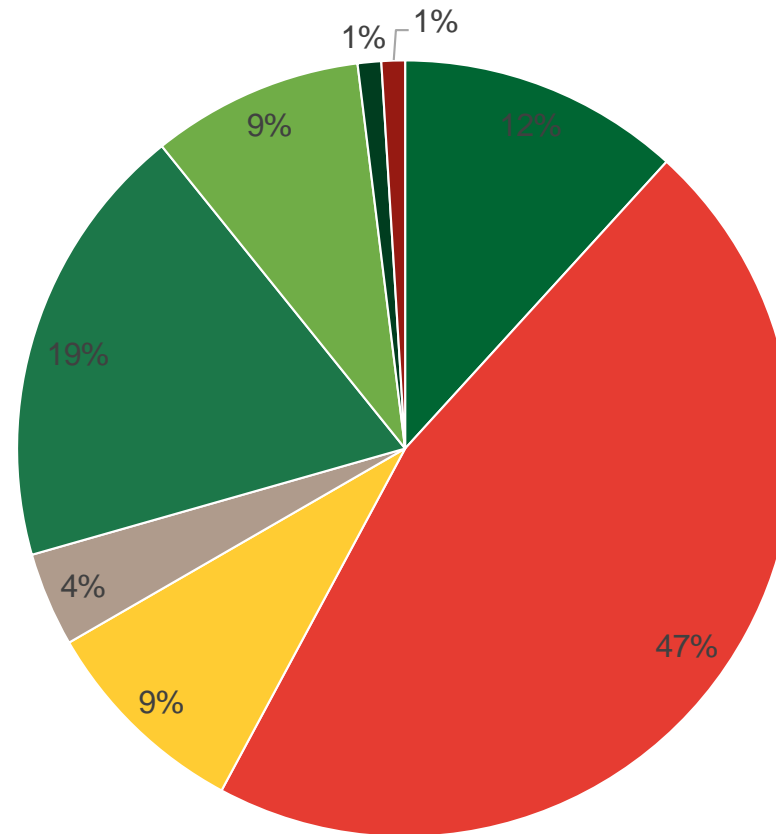


Methodology

This research project was **shaped by the input and insights of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members at every stage**. The project also benefitted from the expert advice of the [Good Things Foundation](#), our HWA partner organisation specialising in digital exclusion.



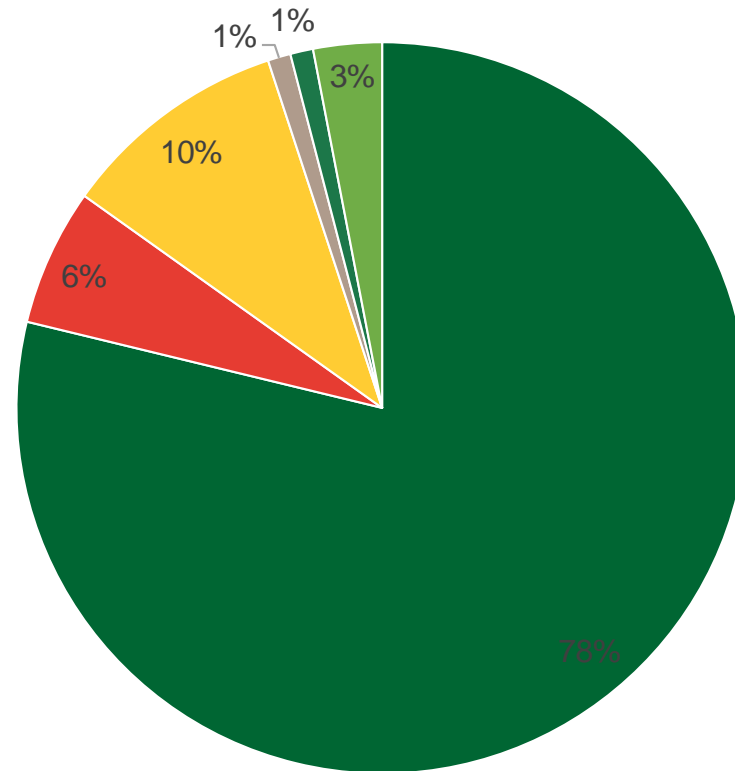
Survey participants – cultural background



- Romany Gypsy (12%)
- Roma (47%)
- Irish Traveller (9%)
- Other Traveller (4%)
- New Traveller (19%)
- Boater (9%)
- Showmen (1%)
- Scottish Traveller (1%)



Survey participants – accommodation type



- Settled accommodation/bricks & mortar housing (78%)
- Liveaboard boater (10%)
- Private site (1%)
- Roadside (6%)
- Local authority site (1%)
- Other - 'Sofa surfing, trailer on a farm' etc. (3%)

“Digital access is a great thing but should not take the place of adequate human interaction (phone or in person). It assumes all people are equal in circumstances, needs and ability. It is taking over at a rate that **isn’t ethically viable** when you consider that many people are unable to access health services in this way due to financial, cultural or health related reasons.”

Community member’s survey response
August-September 2023



Our findings



General findings

Low levels of
digital
platform/services
use

Low digital skills
& confidence

Lower access to
data/signal

Low access to
devices &
equipment

Major differences
between distinct
communities



1. Digital exclusion in Gypsy, Roma & Traveller communities



1. a) Levels of digital exclusion

Device access

Survey respondents had the option of selecting which devices they owned or had access to:

- **87% of survey respondent said they had their own smartphone**, compared to 92% of the general UK population ([Ofcom Technology Tracker](#))
- **25% of respondents had their own laptop**, compared to 72% of the general UK population
- **17% of respondents had their own tablet**, compared to 63% of the general UK population



1. a) Levels of digital exclusion

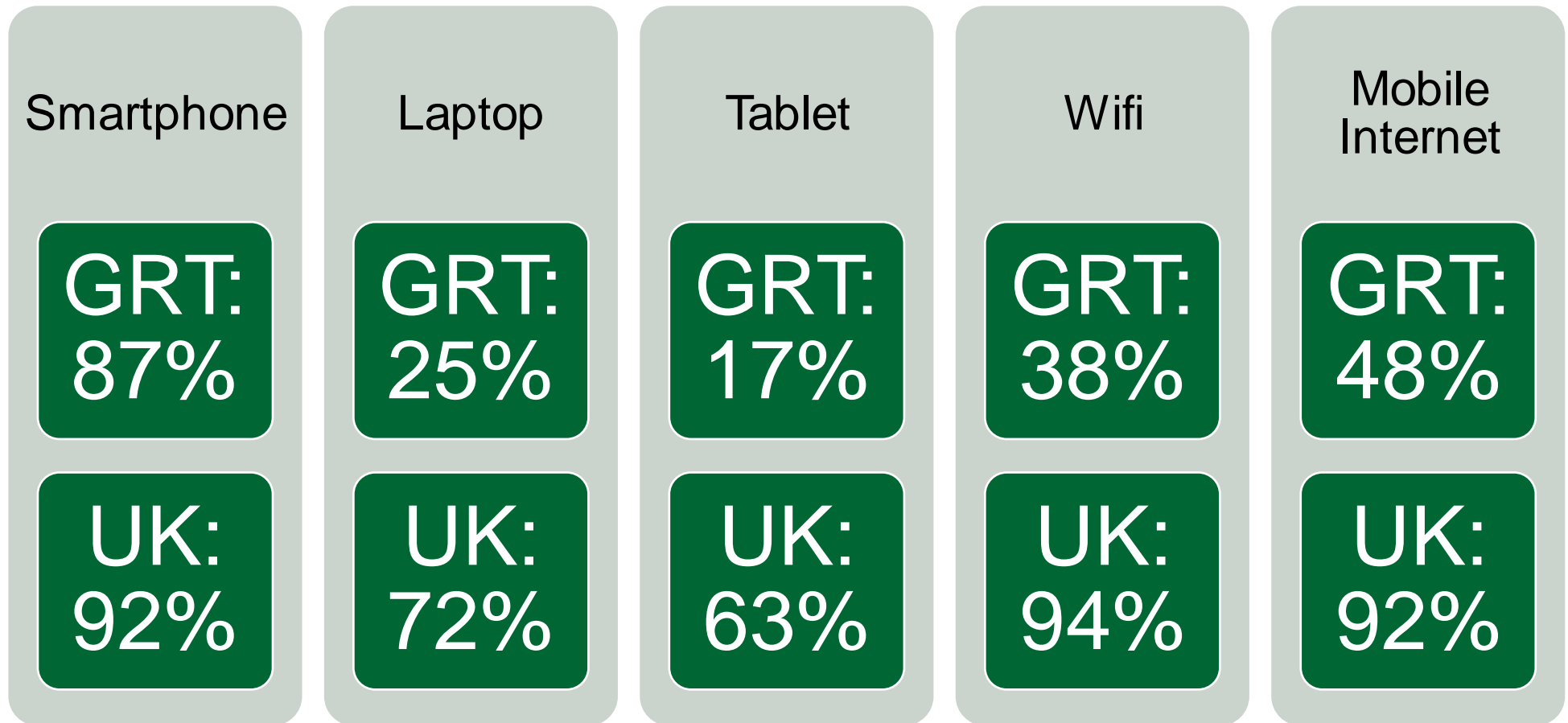
Internet access

- **38% of survey respondents had their own wi-fi**, compared to 94% of the general UK population
- **48% of respondents had mobile internet**, compared to 92% of the general UK population
- **4% of respondents use public wi-fi**, such as in a public library



1. a) Levels of digital exclusion

Access to devices and internet for Gypsy, Roma & Traveller community survey respondents, compared to UK wide data (Ofcom):



1. a) Levels of digital exclusion

Survey responses indicated large **variations in access and experiences** depending on the specific community within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller umbrella.

- Across communities there is a significant **variation in smartphone ownership, ranging from 25% for 'Other Travellers' to 100% for Irish Travellers and Boater respondents.**
- Similar variation is found in **ownership of laptops, with values ranging from 0% for Roma to 89% for Boater respondents.**
- **Tablet ownership varied from 0% for Roma respondents to 44% for Boater respondents.**
- Internet access also varied significantly, with **77% of Irish Traveller respondents reporting access to their own wifi, compared to 9% of Roma respondents.**



1. b) Usage & access trends

General digital usage (e.g for social media or email) in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities was surveyed, as well as use of digital primary care services.

- **The majority of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities surveyed (71%) use digital means to access social media on a daily basis, while 51% reported checking their email accounts with the same frequency.**
- **This is lower than the UK wide data (96.7% of the general population are reported to use social media daily).**

However, this data shows that community members were comfortable utilising digital means for certain uses, suggesting that adaptations could be made to create digital primary care services that are more accessible and engaging.



1. b) Usage & access trends

Use of digital NHS and primary care services:

- **29% of survey respondents reported using the NHS app, compared to 75% of the adult population of England, who are registered users**
- **40% of survey respondents reported accessing GP services online**
- **12% or less reported accessing pharmacy services, dentists or opticians online**
- **47% reported never using the internet to make health appointments**



1. b) Usage & access trends

Once again, there were significant variations in reported usage of digital primary care services, depending on the specific community. For example:

- **78% of Irish Traveller respondents reported using the NHS app, compared to 2% of Roma respondents**
- **75% of 'Other Traveller' respondents reported accessing GP services online, compared to 25% of Roma respondents**
- **22% of Boaters reported accessing pharmacy services online, compared to 6% of New Traveller respondents**
- **44% of Irish Traveller respondents reported accessing dental services online, compared to 0% of Roma and Boater respondents**



1. c) Barriers to general digital access

In terms of barriers to general digital access...

English
language
issues

Literacy issues

Cost of internet
access
(wifi/data)

General lack of
confidence with
technology



1. d) Barriers to digital primary care services

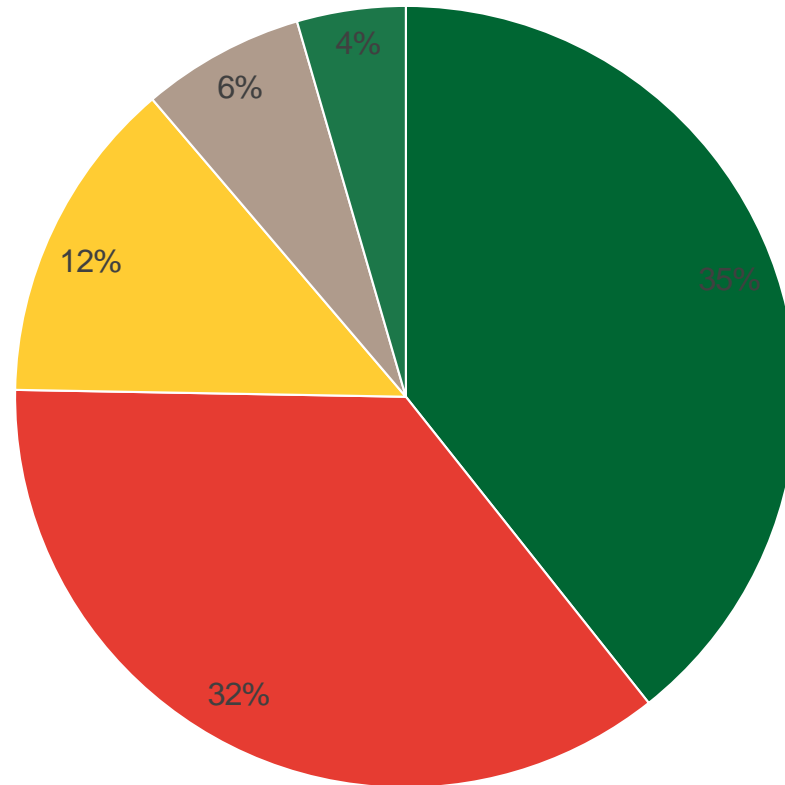
Survey respondents reported several key barriers to accessing digital primary care services specifically:

- **General lack of confidence with technology (35%)**
- **Issues with English language (32%)**
- **Issues with literacy (12%)**
- **The cost of mobile data (6%)**
- **The cost of wifi (4%)**

Another barrier emerging from focus group discussion was the **lack of culturally appropriate education and learning opportunities around digital skills**. Practical training on how to use devices, websites or apps (e.g GP websites or NHS App) was raised as a measure to support digital access.



1. d) Barriers to digital primary care services



- Not confident with tech in general (35%)
- Struggle with English (32%)
- Literacy issues (12%)
- Cost of data (6%)
- Cost of wifi (4%)



1. d) Barriers to digital primary care services

Experiences of **barriers varied hugely depending on the community in question**. For example:

- 68% of Roma respondents struggled with English, compared to 0% of respondents from other communities
- 50% of Roma respondents were not confident with technology generally, compared to 0% of boaters and 11% of Irish Traveller respondents
- 33% of Romany Gypsy respondents struggled with literacy, compared to 11% of Irish Traveller or Roma and 0% of Boater respondents



“I can’t even read the text messages they send me. I give it to my husband or children. But to make my online appointments, I can’t - I can’t even read, making appointments is another level.”

Community member’s focus group contribution
August-September 2023



1. e) Need for non-digital access to care

Our survey responses highlighted the importance of maintaining options for non-digital access to care. Participants highlighted the need for telephone and in-person service options, both due to practical barriers and due to their emotional or social need for direct contact with care providers.

39% of all survey respondents stated their preference for non-digital access to care, particularly when discussing sensitive health issues.



“I move about and often find mobile data signal is poor. I don’t want to rely on internet access for healthcare.”

“Lots of places boaters live have really poor or non-existent phone or internet signal, so having purely online digital services is not a good idea. We can’t always access email to check responses...”

“This [digital] is not how healthcare should go. Feeling cared for requires an interpersonal relationship.”



“I like that my surgery doesn’t push me to use technology. They are very understanding and helpful and realise that talking to a real person is sometimes the best way – especially for those with mental health issues brought about by solitude or loneliness.”


Community member’s survey response
August-September 2023



2. Key enablers for digital access



2. a) Building awareness



Awareness among service designers & providers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities & their access needs

Awareness among community members of digital service availability



2. b) Design prioritising accessibility, simplicity & consistency

When designing digital interventions, some key factors should be kept in mind...

Low-
literacy

Language
barriers

Ease of GP
registration

Simplicity
of use



2. c) Access to necessary resources

Access to devices, equipment and the internet remain a major barrier to use of digital primary care services

Facilitating access to necessary resources is an important enabling factor

Planning & implementation of these actions should take into consideration the demographics and circumstances of targeted communities, to ensure that the relevant resources are provided

For example, nomadic Gypsy or Traveller community members may require more support accessing data or wifi, while Roma people may benefit more from training or 1:1 access support

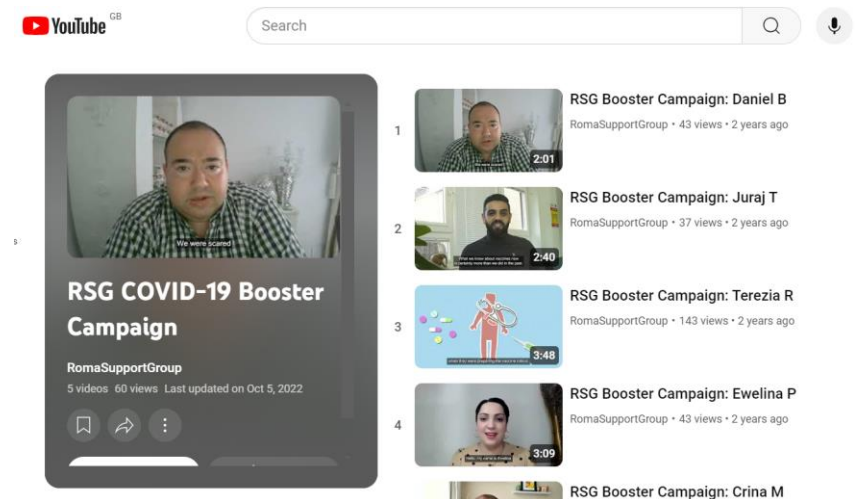
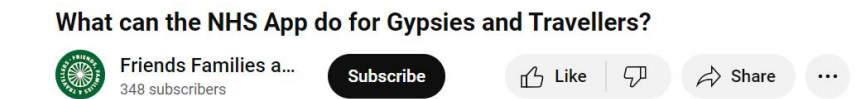
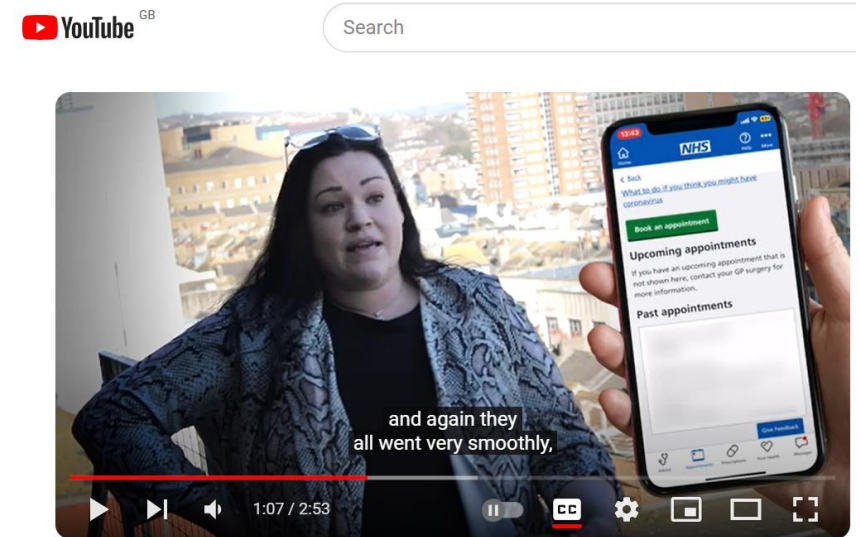


2. d) Access to culturally pertinent support, training and resources

Working directly with people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to improve digital skills can be one of the main enablers to increasing access to digital primary care services.

Developing culturally pertinent tutorials and training materials can be a key element of this – such resources could raise awareness that online services and apps exist, while providing accessible and culturally relevant info on how to use them.

For example, FFT have produced a tutorial on the NHS App, while RSG created a video series on the COVID-19 Booster Campaign:



3. Conclusions & good practice



Key conclusions

Differences in experiences across different communities
– need for specific adjustments

Preference for face-to-face interactions

Existing engagement
– can be optimised according to good practice principles...



Good practice principles

Ensure services are flexible

(offer non-digital options as well as digital routes)

Develop tailored, culturally pertinent and accessible resources

Provide local, in-person support

Design services that recognise literacy and language barriers

Encourage partnerships between the NHS & VCSE sector organisations

Provide information that is accessible for people with literacy barriers



Our recommendations



Recommendations (Annex A)

	Services awareness of issues around digital exclusion for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people awareness of primary care digital services	Design with accessibility in mind (with low-literacy, language barriers and for ease of registration)	Access to necessary resources	Access to culturally pertinent support, coaching and resources
Local primary care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller barriers to primary care services. • Engaging with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller patients to identify preferred methods of communication in primary care. • Engaging with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller patients to identify preferences in regard to digital or non-digital access in primary care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tailored, culturally pertinent promotion materials. • Run awareness raising activities with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller patients on primary care services available. 	<p>Ensure that designing new or existing digital features for your services includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a 'one stop shop' per service where possible, not requiring patients to download multiple apps or navigate multiple different processes/websites; • Using simple, plain language and pictures or illustrations; • Providing explanations when addressing questions through online forms. • Designing smartphone friendly versions of digital services. • Functions enabling options such as "text to speech", "browse aloud", larger text or clear imagery. • Functions enabling usage of voice/video messaging, such as using WhatsApp. • Translation functions. <p>Work with Roma patients to establish accurate interpreting needs and source this accordingly (e.g. many Roma people have Romanes/Romany as their main language, a distinct language with many dialects).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of free, secure wi-fi (e.g. provided in GP practice or in community spaces, in spaces with options for privacy). • Facilitating access to good/stable internet connection for nomadic people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ specialists from within the communities, such as health advocates to facilitate support. • Ensure information is shared through relevant and accessible channels.
PCN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with Gypsy Roma and Traveller organisations/groups/advocates or people to identify barriers to accessing digital services in primary care. • Ensure the identified barriers are considered for the development of local strategy on expanding digital primary care services. • Engaging with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller patients to identify their abilities to access digital resources more generally. • Enabling support and/or training for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller patients on using the online tools developed for use in primary care and the NHS App. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tailored, culturally pertinent promotion materials. • Develop local awareness raising strategies targeting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ specialists from within the communities, such as health advocates to facilitate support. • Ensure information is shared through relevant and accessible channels.



ICB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Gypsy Roma and Traveller organisations/groups/advocates or people in regional strategy development on expanding digital primary care services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tailored, culturally pertinent promotion materials. • Develop regional strategy aiming to raise the level of awareness of digital primary care services within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This strategy should include resourcing and working with people from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that contracts of primary care services with digital service design companies include engaging with people with low-literacy and low knowledge of English during the service design process. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design resources and tools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. • Resource and support members of the specific community to be able to contribute to the design process. • Address specific language and accessibility needs in designing resources. • Employ specialists from within the communities, such as health advocates to facilitate support. • Ensure information is shared through relevant and accessible channels.
NHS England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Gypsy Roma and Traveller organisations/groups/advocates or people in policy and strategy developments on expanding digital primary care services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a national awareness raising campaign targeting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in regards to digital/primary care services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the NHS App follows the recommendations set out above at local primary care service level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating access to adequate equipment for nomadic people or those living in remote areas. • Enabling access to funding for equipment and/or internet for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. • Raising awareness of support available should follow guidance provided at the "Awareness among the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population of primary care digital service availability". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design resources and tools for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. • Resource and support members of the specific community to be able to contribute to the design process. • Address specific language and accessibility needs in designing resources. • Provide funding for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations to deliver training to communities on accessing digital primary care services. • Ensure information is shared through relevant and accessible channels.
VCSE sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in policy work targeting primary care services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations in their efforts to raise awareness of digital/primary care services among Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling access to funding for equipment and/or internet for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide face to face training on how to access digital primary care services.



Closing poll:

How would you rate your knowledge of digital access in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?



Q&A





**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

VCSE

health &
wellbeing
alliance ■

ROMA
SUPPORT GROUP

Thank you

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