



## Digital Poverty and Exclusion in Scotland: Digital Lives of Care Experienced Children

- Children's digital rights must be respected, and we must include their voices in discussions about digital progress. Children have a right to digital privacy, support and inclusion online and must have equal access to connection, kit and skills training.
- Digital exclusion should be viewed as a spectrum rather than in a binary way. The landscape involves a variety of users, rather than just those who are offline and online. Exclusion can be measured via connection to the internet, digital skills and digital kit.
- Levels of exclusion are closely connected to offline socioeconomic factors and disadvantage online is compounded by multiple factors. Poverty and digital poverty are closely linked.
- Low-income impacts exclusion. Broadband and data bills have increased, and poverty premiums mean those who earn the least spend four times as much on their broadband as households on the average UK income. Costs of devices can also be prohibitive.
- Connection figures are high across the UK but just under a third are considered to be narrow internet users – this means they only go online to carry out one to four tasks.
- The rural vs urban digital divide is wider in Scotland – 17% of Scotland has zero access to 4G and 83% receive superfast broadband, in comparison with 96% in the UK overall.
- Children and young people in care struggle to get phone contracts without a trusted adult to act as a guarantor. They face barriers getting online where they live due to a risk focused approach, deficit in staff and carers' digital skills, and restrictive and outdated technology. This means that young people do not approach staff or foster/kinship carers for support, feel frustrated at a lack of digital understanding, and do not have their digital skills developed at home.
- During Covid, children in care experienced a double loop of digital inequality. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds were excluded when they could not get access to education online in the same way as their peers. This increased the gap in digital skills, confidence and outcomes in addition to impacting educational attainment. This online inequality subsequently exacerbated their offline poverty, creating a cycle. This continues to be an issue post-pandemic, with some schools continuing to use digital systems.
- Young people are incorrectly assumed to be digital natives, but a range of factors cut across age, including education, income and self-confidence. This assumption leads to the voices of children being ignored on issues of digital privacy, safety and data protection, and incorrectly assumes that all children have the skills they need to succeed in a digital world. In reality, digital education is variable between affluent and less affluent areas and those in care experience educational disruption and digital exclusion at a higher rate than their peers.
- Smartphones are the device of choice for those under twenty-four and increasingly those under forty-five are using them exclusively. Smartphones have more limited functionality and those who use them exclusively tend to have fewer digital skills, be more financially vulnerable and live in more deprived areas.