

Almost three-quarters of public want terrestrial TV protected, with low awareness that its future is under threat, new report warns

- New report from Digital Poverty Alliance comes as ministers decide on the future of terrestrial TV service, which only a third of the public realise is currently at risk
- Three quarters of people believe that terrestrial TV helps reduce loneliness, and 73% want to see this service protected
- The DPA's research shows that 96% of people trust terrestrial TV for its accuracy and impartiality

13 March 2025, London: The Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA) is today calling on the government to give long-term protection to the UK's free-to-air terrestrial TV service, as new research finds strong support (73%) for retaining it and low awareness that its future is under threat. Ministers are currently examining the future of TV distribution ahead of a decision on whether to continue terrestrial TV beyond the early 2030s or whether to push all TV to online streaming.

Produced in collaboration with academics working in the fields of community cohesion and global digital politics, the report reveals terrestrial TV's universal coverage and free-to-air transmission - which allow all households to watch TV without the need for high speed broadband or monthly subscriptions - are crucial to the UK's social resilience.

The report defines the UK's 'social resilience' as the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt, endure and recover from adversity, while fostering positive relationships and maintaining cohesion. The report finds that terrestrial TV is one of our last truly universal services as defined by the ability for all audiences in the UK, regardless of economic means or social background, to access a broad range of content - without the challenges of paying for broadband and digital skills.

As Britain faces mounting external threats, from geopolitical instability to climate change, and its internal social fabric comes under strain from increasing polarisation, the effects of social media and widening digital divides, terrestrial TV makes a crucial and unique contribution to the UK's social resilience. A significant majority (96%) trust terrestrial TV as a source of accurate and impartial information. Younger people were the most likely to agree that the access to British programming, live events, and local news which terrestrial TV provides increased their sense of British identity and made them feel more connected to their community.

The threat to terrestrial TV is imminent, with some incremental services such as CBBC and BBC 4 at risk of being lost within the next year. However, the report findings show that 69% of the public are unaware that the future of terrestrial TV is under threat at all.

Terrestrial television guarantees universal access to culture and entertainment, as well as balanced sources of news and information. It facilitates shared national moments which unite the country in celebration and during times of crisis. This universal reach is unique to terrestrial television and cannot be easily or straightforwardly replicated by other means of distributing television content, such as internet TV, which rely on households accessing and paying for a fixed highspeed broadband connection, smart technology and potentially expensive monthly streaming subscriptions. Nine in ten members of the public (90%) agree that terrestrial TV is valuable for ensuring that those who cannot afford these expensive monthly bills have universal access to information and entertainment. Even those who do not currently rely on terrestrial TV to stay connected value it, with 70% feeling reassured that it is available as a fallback option.

Of those who live in rental accommodation and watch terrestrial TV, more than one in three (34%) would feel isolated and more than one in four (27%) would feel disconnected if they lost access to terrestrial TV. Rental costs are becoming increasingly unaffordable, with renters overrepresented among the most financially vulnerable.¹ Free-to-air terrestrial TV is a valued lifeline for those forced to make difficult choices about how to allocate their resources.

The report comes as ministers gather evidence to inform a decision on the future of terrestrial TV beyond the early 2030s. As the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, the DPA is contributing to the government's Future of TV Distribution Stakeholder Forum. The DPA is also playing a key role in the government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan, partnering to protect the millions of vulnerable communities by tackling digital exclusion

As members of the Broadcast 2040+ coalition, campaigning for the long-term future of broadcast services, the DPA is calling on ministers to extend broadcast licences beyond 2034 in order to safeguard universal access to TV and protect our social resilience - avoiding pushing more people to the wrong side of the digital divide. The report warns that without this guarantee, the UK risks disconnecting millions of people from crucial information, deepening existing digital inequalities.

Elizabeth Anderson, CEO of the Digital Poverty Alliance, said:

"As our new report demonstrates, for the millions of people living in or at risk of digital poverty, free-to-air terrestrial TV is a lifeline. It reaches over 98% of homes across the UK, with no need for a high-speed fixed broadband subscription or the latest smart tech.

"Terrestrial TV underpins our social resilience by ensuring we can all stay connected, regardless of our economic means or digital skill level. Its long-term future should be guaranteed by ministers and the threat of its removal must never be used as a way of coercing vulnerable people into taking on new financial burdens simply to watch TV. Universal, free-to-air terrestrial TV is a priceless asset which we lose at our peril."

Social cohesion academic Professor Ted Cattle CBE DL, said:

"Terrestrial TV remains one of the few truly universal services, creating ties that bind us and cement our nation's cohesion. Despite our differences, we are united when we gather with our families whether it is to cheer for our athletes at the Olympics, or to tune in to vital government updates that impact all of our lives. These shared moments create a sense of unity, bridging divides across regions, income levels, and generations."

Dr Gregory Asmolov, Lecturer in Global Digital Politics at King's College, London said:

"Reliable communication during a crisis is essential not only to keep affected communities informed and alerted but also to ensure efficient community mobilization. Terrestrial TV plays a vital role in strengthening the resilience of crisis communications."

Ends -

¹ Haglund, A. (2023). Young renters are struggling and increasingly financially vulnerable. [online] Intergenerational Foundation. Available at: <https://www.if.org.uk/2023/11/08/young-renters-are-struggling-and-increasingly-financially-vulnerable/>.

Notes to Editors:

- The report *Safeguarding Britain's Social Resilience: The Critical Role of Terrestrial Television* finds that terrestrial TV stands as the key guarantor of the UK's universally accessible TV services.
- Key findings of the report:
 - **96%** trust the information they receive on terrestrial TV
 - **90%** value terrestrial TV for ensuring people who cannot afford expensive monthly bills have universal access to information and entertainment
 - **75%** agree that terrestrial TV helps reduce loneliness
 - **73%** believe that terrestrial TV should be protected well beyond 2035
 - **85%** say that terrestrial TV is important to help understand history and traditions
 - **70%** of the public feel reassured knowing that terrestrial TV is there as a backup
 - **More than 2/3** of people (69%) are unaware that terrestrial TV is under threat
- The report recommends to Government a four-point plan to protect the UK's social resilience:
 1. Provide a clear commitment to the protection of Terrestrial TV services well beyond current commitments, including the extension of licences to safeguard terrestrial TV and the broadcast services it delivers.
 2. Acknowledge the role of terrestrial TV in supporting the UK's social resilience, recognising its unique capacity to provide universal access to trusted information, foster community through shared experiences, and act as a vital safety net for those at risk of digital exclusion.
 3. Require Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) to sustain universal broadcasting via terrestrial TV, with a clear commitment in the next BBC Charter period.
 4. Prioritise the voices of listeners, particularly those facing digital poverty or exclusion, in government and Ofcom decision-making processes, including safeguarding the true essence of universality, ensuring that services are accessible to all, regardless of income or location.
- Digital Terrestrial TV (DTT) is television broadcasting that transmits signals through radio waves from broadcast towers directly to receivers (such as household aerials). The licenses which support Digital Terrestrial TV in the UK expire in the early 2030s and government has not committed to renew them.
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport has launched a Future of TV Distribution Stakeholder Forum to advise on the future of UK television: [link](#).

About the Digital Poverty Alliance

The Digital Poverty Alliance is a UK-based charity dedicated to addressing the digital divide and combating digital exclusion across vulnerable communities. With a mission to ensure that no one is left behind in an increasingly digital world, the DPA works to highlight the social, economic, and educational challenges faced by those who lack reliable access to digital technologies and the internet. The Alliance collaborates with government bodies, tech companies, and community organizations to advocate for policies and initiatives that promote digital inclusion, particularly for marginalized groups such as the elderly, low-income families, and those living in rural areas. Through research, campaigns, and partnerships, the DPA strives to create a more equitable and connected society, where everyone has access to the tools and opportunities needed to thrive in the digital age.

The DPA is a member of the Broadcast 2040+ campaign to get the government provide a public commitment to safeguarding broadcast TV and radio to 2040 and beyond.

<https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/>

About Broadcast 2040+ Campaign

The Broadcast 2040+ campaign was launched in 2022 by five founding members. The coalition has now grown to 37 partners, all working to secure the future of digital terrestrial television and radio broadcasting services for the millions of people across the country who rely on them. These crucial services are only guaranteed up to the early 2030s, with no certainty that they will be available beyond 2034. We want to see the Government commit to a long-term future for terrestrial TV, to 2040 and beyond.

<https://www.broadcast2040plus.org/>