

80% of UK adults have never heard of the Priority Services Register, new research reveals

- *Millions of vulnerable people are missing out on free support and protection, despite Ofgem telling energy providers that they need to be better at identifying customers in need and adding them to the Priority Services Register.*
- *Energy firms simply do not know who their vulnerable customers are, says [Vulnerability Registration Service](#).*

UK, EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 Tuesday 21 March 2023 – New research from not-for-profit organisation, the [Vulnerability Registration Service \(VRS\)](#), has revealed that very few people – **less than 20% of UK adults** – are aware of the Priority Services Register (PSR), despite the ongoing energy crisis.

Offered by each energy provider and devised by Ofgem, the PSR is a vital service that supports and helps protect vulnerable people, including pensioners, households with children under five, people with health conditions or impairments and those dependent on medical equipment.

With many more people falling into fuel poverty and forced prepayment meter practices being exposed, the PSR *should* be playing a crucial role in protecting vulnerable people from unfair and potentially harmful actions.

According to the Vulnerability Registration Service, which works to help organisations to identify vulnerability and treat their customers fairly, there is still very little awareness of the PSR and the people that desperately need to be protected by the PSR have no idea it even exists.

More specifically, the research highlighted that 63% of vulnerable people have not heard of the PSR. Only 22% of people aged 79-85 and 17% of people aged 67-72 had heard of the PSR, while 42% of households with children under the age of five had heard.

This lack of awareness is not a new issue. [Back in 2013, Ofgem found that only 24% of the population knew about the PSR](#) and has called on energy firms to get better at identifying vulnerability and registering customers on the PSR.

Ten years later, and despite further reports from Ofgem criticising energy suppliers for failing their vulnerable customers, the situation has worsened and even fewer households know about the PSR. The issue is made worse by the fact that each energy provider has its own PSR and details are not shared between them. Individuals must register with each provider separately and, if they switch provider, there is no automatic transfer of their details.

Helen Lord, CEO of the Vulnerability Registration Service, said: “Very little is being done by energy firms to raise awareness of the PSR and to better identify their vulnerable customers. If they don’t know who their vulnerable customers are, how can they treat them fairly and meet their legal obligations to protect customers. The forced prepayment scandal is evidence of this.

“Around [three million people are registered on the PSR](#). However, considering there is more than [three million elderly people aged over the age of 80 in the UK](#), and that’s before looking at people with young children or health issues, millions are missing out on the desperately needed protection and support.”

Finding information on the PSR from an energy provider's website isn't easy either, nor is it always made easy to register on the PSR. The Vulnerability Registration Service team recently carried out a 'mystery shopper' exercise involving the websites of 17 UK energy providers to understand how difficult it was for people to find out about and register on the PSR.*

In the majority of cases, finding information about the PSR was difficult, with links not being immediately obvious. Once found, many only allowed registration online. Only three out of the 17 websites had dedicated phone numbers for vulnerability related queries. The rest subjected vulnerable customers to a call routing system, with no specific reference to the PSR.

Helen Lord concluded: "It's being made far too difficult for people who are at their most vulnerable and struggling to cope with day-to-day tasks to find and understand what support they are entitled to. Energy firms are not doing enough to identify who their vulnerable customers are and provide them with targeted support. The fact many vulnerable people have never even heard of the Priority Services Register shows there is a long way to go."

For more information on the Priority Services Register, visit

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/getting-extra-help-priority-services-register>

Vulnerable people can register for free with the Vulnerability Registration Service <https://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/>, a central, independent register of vulnerable people, that helps organisations to identify vulnerability and treat their customers fairly and appropriately.

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For more information or to arrange an interview with Helen Lord, please contact Serj Hallam at Nellie PR. Email: serj@nelliepr.co.uk Tel: +44 (0) 7789 372 771 or Ellen Carroll at Nellie PR. Email: ellen@nelliepr.co.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1392 927746 Mob: +44 (0) 7790 631 547

Note to editor:

Helen Lord is available to be interviewed and provide comment about how vulnerable customers can be better identified and supported.

*A copy of the results of the VRS 'mystery shopper' exercise can be provided on request.

The PSR research was conducted by Censuswide with a nationally representative sample of 2,006 respondents between 06/03/23-08/03/23. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

About The Vulnerability Registration Service: www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/

We help financial services providers and utility companies to identify and ensure the fair treatment of vulnerable customers – helping to reduce debt, financial problems and harm.

[The Vulnerability Registration Service](http://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/) (VRS) is a not-for-profit company providing the UK's first central vulnerability database. Registering with the VRS is completely free for vulnerable customers and their representatives to help inform financial services, utility, debt collection and other organisations of their vulnerable circumstances such as financial abuse, risk of fraud, over-indebtedness, and power of attorney. The Vulnerability Registration Service is used by organisations to help them ensure vulnerable customers are treated fairly and appropriately, and that their financial and vulnerable circumstances are taken into account.