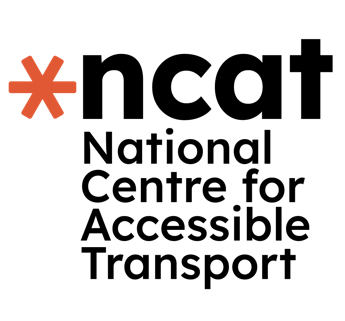
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**Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport**

The experiences of disabled people in the UK

Highlights Report, November 2024



This report is part of a series of research conducted by the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) since its launch as an Evidence Centre in early 2023. Whilst this is a standalone report, we would recommend it is considered alongside other ncat research published from late 2024. As ncat progresses, further reports and insights will also be published on our website [www.ncat.uk](http://www.ncat.uk)

ncat encourage you to freely use the data available in this report for your research, analyses, and publications. When using this data, please reference it as follows to acknowledge ncat as the source:

ncat (2024). ‘Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport’. Available at [www.ncat.uk](https://wsp-uk.shinyapps.io/ncat_dashboard/www.ncat.uk)

## 1 Why did we do this work?

Disabled people make 38% fewer journeys using transport than non-disabled people. This has not changed for over ten years.[[1]](#footnote-2)

In 2023, the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) was set up to help reduce this transport accessibility gap. ncat works with disabled people and people in the transport industry to understand how transport could be improved.

To ensure that the National Centre for Accessible Transport is informed by the views of disabled people, a survey was developed. The survey aimed to find the barriers that disabled people face while travelling.

We also invited some disabled people to complete travel diaries. In the diary entries, participants told us about the barriers and enablers they experienced when travelling.

Access barriers (often called 'barriers' in this report) are obstacles that prevent or make it difficult for disabled people to access services, information, or physical spaces. This barriers-approach was developed by disabled people in the [Social Model of Disability](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/)[[2]](#footnote-3). For example, wheelchair users experience barriers when travelling because of the lack of step-free train stations, not because they use a wheelchair or have a mobility impairment.

## 2 What did we do, how did we do it, and who did we work with?

### How did we design the research?

A group of nine disabled people, called Experts by Experience, helped to design and create the research.

We wanted to make sure that disabled people could access the survey easily. It was tested for accessibility and survey participants could respond online, by phone, or through a Video Relay Service for British Sign Language users.

### Who responded to the research?

A total of 1,195 people completed the survey, including people from ncat’s [Community of Accessible Transport (CAT) panel](https://www.ncat.uk/get-involved/join-our-panel/). They also provided 1,274 comments. The survey included responses from disabled people living in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It included responses from people who use all modes of transport, such as trains, cars, and boats.

14 disabled people participated in the travel diary study. Over two weeks, they completed 62 diary entries. They wrote about their normal day-to-day journey experiences and shared photos. We gathered stories from across the UK.

## 3 What did we find?

Disabled people face widespread barriers when they travel. But this is not new. Disabled people have been sharing their experiences and campaigning for change for a long time. However, the transport accessibility gap has not improved for 10 years[[3]](#footnote-4) and disabled people are not optimistic that things will change anytime soon.

## This research shows that the barriers that disabled people experience continue to create access inequality. This makes it hard or sometimes impossible for many people to use certain modes of transport.

### 3.1 What do disabled people think about transport?

#### Finding 1: Disabled people do not think transport is accessible. Most do not think this will change in the next 10 years.

* **Transport is not accessible in the UK**. Most disabled people surveyed said that transport is currently not accessible. The average accessibility score for all modes of transport was 4.4 out of 10[[4]](#footnote-5).

Except for cars and wheelchair accessible vehicles, all modes of transport scored 5 or lower out of 10.

* **There is little optimism about future improvements.** Disabled people are not confident that accessibility will improve in the next 10 years. The average score for future improvements was only 3.4 out of 10[[5]](#footnote-6).

#### Finding 2: Disabled people experience barriers when travelling. 92% face barrier(s) on at least one mode of transport.

* **Cars and wheelchair accessible vehicles are the most used modes of transport.** This was followed by walking, wheeling, cycling or scootering.
* **Most disabled people surveyed have experienced barriers on at least one mode of transport.** 92% of respondents reported facing at least one barrier. Train users face the most barriers.

### 3.2 How does inaccessible transport impact disabled people?

#### Finding 3: Inaccessible transport makes disabled people travel less, and it makes journeys take longer.

* **Transport barriers affect how often disabled people travel**. Barriers when travelling create inequalities between disabled people and non-disabled people. 79% of disabled people travel less often and 84% experience longer journey times due to transport barriers.

#### Finding 4: Inaccessible transport impacts the wellbeing of many disabled people.

* **Transport barriers impact the wellbeing of many disabled people**. 77% of disabled people said that transport barriers have a negative effect on their physical or mental wellbeing. 75% said that transport barriers make them feel stress when travelling.

### 3.3 What barriers do disabled people face when travelling?

#### Finding 5: Disabled people face many barriers when they travel. These include badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance.

* **The issues with accessible transport are diverse and widespread**. The barriers that impact the highest proportion of disabled people are:
  + **Pavement and curbs** are poorly designed.
  + **Getting on and off a vehicle**, is difficult, including step-free access, gaps, ramps and lifts.
  + **Things on the street** get in the way, such as advertising signs and parked cars.
  + **Using staff assistance** is an issue, including people not being around to help
  + **Step-free stations** are lacking or unreliable.

#### Finding 6: Inaccessible streets and pavements are the biggest barrier in public spaces.

* **Things on the street create barriers for disabled people.** This includes things like cars, bins and advertising signage getting in the way. This is a barrier for 59% of people that walk, wheel, cycle or scoot.

In a disabled person’s words, “I have experienced ongoing problems with shopkeepers placing their signs on the footpath, just giving enough space for pram users and pedestrians just enough space to get past, but not enough for mobility scooter, and then stand laughing.”

* **Pavement and curbs are poorly designed.** 39% of respondents[[6]](#footnote-7) said that pavement and curbs are an issue.

As a disabled person said, “Bad condition of pavements, lack of dropped kerbs, roadworks hampering access i.e. blocking dropped kerb.”

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| **Personal stories: Travel diaries**  Maggie[[7]](#footnote-8) is a woman in her seventies who went on a holiday in Wales with her family. She went to a village where paths and walkways were often narrow and uneven. She has mobility and dexterity impairments, and uses a mobility scooter while out. She experienced barriers with the built environment in a rural area.  When she told us about her journey, she said she “Took my mobility scooter around the village with my sister-in-law, her husband and my husband, to look around, as we were all on holiday, staying in a caravan and it is a very old scenic village.  My main problems were lack of pavements and/or lack of wide enough pavements and/or lack of dropped kerbs, or the dropped kerbs were too high which meant that for most of the time I had to drive my scooter on the road. This was dangerous because of the cars, and made my sister anxious, but it did mean I could travel alongside my sister and talk to her. When able to get on the pavement I had to go in front of her as the pavements weren't wide enough, so we couldn't talk to each other.  The best part was the side roads as there were no pavements, less traffic and the cars were driving more slowly.”  The impact of this uneven and inaccessible streetscape was “Discomfort, danger and lack of control of my scooter.”  Maggie felt that this presented a risk to her and that there were improvements that could improve her journey. These included, “Better pavements, wider and with dropped kerbs that actually are dropped. Alternatively, lanes in the road like cycle lanes, but for mobility scooters.” |

#### Finding 7: Getting on and off vehicles is a concern for many disabled people.

* **Step-free access on and off a vehicle is lacking**.This includes things like gaps on to vehicles, ramps and lifts. This is a barrier for 44% of respondents[[8]](#footnote-9).

As one disabled person commented, “Many of the ‘step free’ platforms still have huge gaps or a small step up to the trains which can cause a lot of anxiety and not all wheelchairs can manage.”

#### Finding 8: Transport stations are not designed to meet the needs of disabled people.

* **Stations are entirely inaccessible for some people.** Many disabled people said that stations were inaccessible. One respondent said that they, “can’t enter [the] station at all.”
* **Toilets and changing places are unavailable or poor quality.** 33% of respondents[[9]](#footnote-10) said these are an issue at stations and transport stops.

One disabled person noted, “Being blind I use the disabled toilets. These are often out of order and not clean (in Britain particularly unfortunately).”

* **Step-free access at stations is lacking or unreliable**. This includes things like stairs to train platforms, lifts and long distances. 43% of respondents[[10]](#footnote-11) said this was an issue.

As a disabled person said, “Sometimes there is no lift at all or a very long wait, as everyone uses it out of convenience.”

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| **Personal stories: Travel diaries**  Annabel is a woman who lives with a range of impairments, including a mobility impairment and chronic pain, which means she often can’t stand for long periods. She told us about picking her brother up from the train station.  She said, “I drove to the train station to pick up my brother…. I arrived at the train station car park 10 minutes before his train arrived. I couldn't find the accessible parking because it was on the second floor rather than the ground floor which was unusual. When I eventually found them, all but one spot (the furthest away) was full. There were 6 cars with no blue badges displayed - I had to walk past them all to get to the station entrance...”  This misuse of the accessible parking bays meant that even before she had got into the station, Annabel had expended energy in overcoming a barrier created by the behaviour of others. She then went on to say, “When I finally got into the train station…there was nowhere to sit within the arrival hall (as in no seating provided at all), and the only seating was within the food area which was limited fixed benches facing away from the arrival gates. This meant I could sit down but not see people arriving to look out for my brother and he couldn't see me. I sat here for 15 mins then sat on the floor of the arrival hall as it got closer to his arrival time. This wasn't comfortable.”  This experience was unpleasant for Annabel, and she reflected that “I was in extra pain and discomfort that could've been avoided.”  To improve her experience next time, she recommended that the station implements “Seating within arrivals, additional seating in general,” and “parking attendants checking accessible spaces were not being abused.” |

#### Finding 9: Interactions with other people can make travelling difficult.

* **Staff assistance is unreliable**.This includes staff being unavailable, even if assistance is booked. 47% of respondents[[11]](#footnote-12) highlighted this issue. As one person said, “No staff means no help!”.
* **Public and staff attitudes and behaviours can be negative.** Thisincludesthe way that staff and the public interact with and treat disabled people when travelling. This impacts 31% of respondents[[12]](#footnote-13).

One respondent described it as “abuse from others, following, stalking me, yelling at me shouting things like you’re not really disabled.”

#### Finding 10: The design of public transport vehicles makes it hard for disabled people to be comfortable when travelling.

* **Moving vehicles create problems for people on board**, including things like lack of handrails or vehicles not stopping for long enough. 33% of respondents[[13]](#footnote-14) said this was a barrier.

One disabled person said, “Walking to the toilet onboard when coach is moving is scary and dangerous; I’m so shaken by the movement on the road I’m scared I’ll fall down.”

* **Toilets and changing places on vehicles are poor.** Thisimpacts **39%** of respondents[[14]](#footnote-15). As one disabled person said, “Not being able to change my incontinence brief on the plane”

**Finding 11: Car journeys have specific challenges, including finding suitable parking spaces.**

* **Finding parking spaces or spaces with enough room can be difficult**. This impacts 32% of car and wheelchair accessible vehicle users. As one disabled person said, “Lack of disabled parking in town centres”.

## 4 What conclusions did we come to?

ncat was set up to help reduce the transport accessibility gap[[15]](#footnote-16). To ensure that ncat is informed by the experiences of disabled people, this research asked for feedback about what people experience when travelling across the UK.

Transport is not accessible for everybody. Transport access barriers prevent or make it difficult for disabled people to access services, information, and physical spaces.

A survey of over a thousand disabled people revealed that 92% have experienced a barrier on at least one mode of transport. Barriers exist on all modes of transport, and across the UK. 68% of disabled people surveyed have more than one access need and face multiple, compounding barriers as they travel.

**The key barriers are badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance.** These should help target key interventions to improve accessible transport.

* **Pavement and curbs** are poorly designed.
* **Getting on and off a vehicle**, including step-free access is difficult, including gaps, ramps and lifts.
* **Things on the street** get in the way, such as advertising signs and parked cars.
* **Using staff assistance** is an issue, including people not being around to help
* **Step-free stations** are lacking or unreliable.

These barriers create access inequality. This failure affects disabled people’s travel choices, spontaneity, and wellbeing.

But this is not new. Disabled people have been sharing their experiences of transport and campaigning for change for a long time. There are many other sources of information available, and some recent ones are listed below.

* House of Commons (2022): [Access to transport for disabled people](https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00601/SN00601.pdf)
* Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (2022): [A new approach to travel, our streets and our places](https://www.imtac.org.uk/files/imtac/media-files/Imtac%20A%20New%20Approach.pdf)
* Innovate UK KTN (2023): [Accessible and Inclusive Transport: Innovation in UK transport to enable access and inclusion, successes and opportunities](https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/InnovateUK_Accessible-and-Inclusive-Transport-Report_Screen_9-3-23.pdf)
* Motability (2022): [The Transport Accessibility Gap](https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/iwaidhxk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf)
* Transport for All (2023): [Accessible transport: legal obligations (Transport Committee)](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/03.2023-Accessible-transport-legal-obligations-Transport-for-Alls-response.pdf)
* Transport for All (2023): [Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Are-we-there-yet_Highlights_PDF-web-compressed-more-compressed.pdf)
* Transport for Wales (2024): [TfW Accessible Travel Policy Making Rail Accessible: Helping Older, and Disabled Passengers - Policy Document](https://tfw.wales/sites/default/files/2024-01/TfW_Accessible_Travel_Policy-Making_Rail_Accessible-Policy_Document.pdf)
* Transport Scotland (2021): [Disability and Transport 2021](https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/jzxntw2c/disability-and-transport-2021.pdf)
* Transport Scotland (2023): [Accessible Travel Framework: Evaluation Research Project Report](https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/dy0dd40p/disability-equality-scotland-accessible-travel-framework-evaluation-research-project-report.pdf)

## 5 What should happen next?

Disabled people make 38% fewer journeys than non-disabled people, but this figure has not changed in a decade[[16]](#footnote-17). For change to happen, people working in the transport sector need to understand and care about the issues outlined in this report.

**But this report about transport barriers is only part of the picture.** Some other important factors to consider can be found in ncat’s other reports:

* **Working together for accessible transport:** This report reviews barriers and opportunities for better transport accessibility in the UK, as seen by people that work in the transport sector. We will also soon be publishing a report about the roles and responsibilities of accessible transport staff in local government.
* **Streetscapes:** This reportis a deep dive into disabled people’s experiences of using streets. It looks at the barriers that disabled people face when using streets, why changes are not being made and prioritises future actions.

This research has shown that **interventions are needed to reduce access barriers, including badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance.** We have therefore made a series of recommendations for people in the transport sector, policymakers, ncat and researchers.

### We have made recommendations for people in the transport and policy sector:

* **Prioritise improving transport services and regulations.** The UK and devolved governments should implement practical changes, informed by the findings of this report. For example:
  + The UK and devolved governments should develop a comprehensive strategy for updating accessible design standards for transport infrastructure, technologies and services. This should focus on accessibility barriers identified in this report, such as the design of transport stations and vehicles. The strategy should ensure that key design standards have been updated by 2030 at the latest.
  + The Department for Transport should prioritise the implementation of its update of the Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR), which set out accessibility requirements for bus and coaches in England, Scotland and Wales. The Department for Infrastructure should carry out a review of the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003 (PSVAR NI). These should incorporate the insights from this research and ongoing input from the [Community for Accessible Transport](https://www.ncat.uk/get-involved/join-our-panel/) panel.
* **Ensure disabled people are decision-makers.** Disabled people need to be decision-makers in the transport industry. Their experiences need to be listened to and acted on.

Commit to working with disabled people on your projects. From the very start of projects, co-produce to identify the issues, work out what needs to happen, and implement changes. Communication needs to be ongoing and two-way.

### We have made recommendations for people conducting research:

Through this research, we gained valuable insights and identified areas that we’d improve in future, which we've explained in the limitations section.

* **Actively include disabled people in research from the beginning.** Enable disabled people to lead research and create supportive environments in research organisations. Consider the diversity of disabled people throughout all research activities, ensuring that they are actively involved in all stages.
* **Make research tools accessible.** From online survey software to the tools used for data analysis, test the accessibility of your products with disabled people.
* **Ensure fair and ethical research practices.** It is important to involve disabled people throughout research, but this must be done in an inclusive and accessible way and when disabled people support research activities, they should be appropriately compensated for their efforts. The activities they take part in should meet their access needs and they should be informed about the outcomes of the activities and the impact of their involvement.
* **Consider that disabled people often have multiple impairments and access needs**. Questionnaires regularly only allow for participants to select a single impairment category, or results are often aggregated. This leaves research with a potentially biased picture of needs and doesn’t capture the reality of most disabled people’s experiences.
* **Ensure research outputs are shared with decision makers and industry**. There is lots of fantastic research out there already that people who can make change don’t know about. ncat can help share findings, so [contact ncat](https://www.ncat.uk/get-involved/get-in-touch/) - we can help.
* **Ensure research outputs are accessible to disabled people**. Reports should not only be provided in PDF formats, as these are often inaccessible. Publish research in Word format, Easy Read and British Sign Language and have these all easily available without the need for special requests.

### We have made recommendations for ncat and its future activities:

* **Provide funding to improve streets, step-free access, and staff assistance.** The data from this research and the [Community for Accessible Transport](https://www.ncat.uk/get-involved/join-our-panel/) panel, will guide ncat’s decisions and investments. ncat will provide grant funding to projects that target the barriers outlined in this report. Find out more on the [ncat website](https://www.ncat.uk/).
* **Share the data from this research**. The data from this survey will be shared publicly in a dashboard on the [ncat website](https://www.ncat.uk/). This will give people that work in the transport sector open information about how access barriers vary by location and mode of transport.
* **Track how things change and update the survey, ideally annually.** Expand the size and representation of the [Community for Accessible Transport](https://www.ncat.uk/get-involved/join-our-panel/) panel to provide richer data. Use different ways of analysing the data to access new trends and insights.
* **Identify barriers preventing travel.** This survey focused on barriers while travelling, not barriers to travelling. Conduct analysis of the barriers that prevent disabled people from travelling or using certain modes of transport.
* **Raise awareness about transport barriers using the experiences shared in this report**. Target communications at key people in the transport sector. This includes driving change with a [Policy Commission](https://www.ncat.uk/2023/09/01/ncat-launches-accessible-transport-policy-commission/) in Parliament.

## 6 About ncat

The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) works as an Evidence Centre developing high quality evidence, best practice, and innovative solutions to inform future disability and transport strategy, policy, and practice by:

* Engaging with disabled people to better understand their experiences and co-design solutions
* Amplifying the voices of disabled people in all decision making
* Collaborating widely with all transport stakeholders
* Demonstrating good practice and impact to influence policy

ncat is delivered by a consortium of organisations that includes Coventry University, Policy Connect, The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC), Designability, Connected Places Catapult, and WSP. It is funded for seven years from 2023 by the Motability Foundation.

For more information about ncat and its work please visit [www.ncat.uk](http://www.ncat.uk)

To contact ncat, either about this report or any other query, please email [info@ncat.uk](mailto:info@ncat.uk)



## 7 References

* [Department for Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey (2021)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/641b0026d3bf7f7ffbe88985/c4-disability.xlsx)
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* [Transport for All, Accessible transport: legal obligations (Transport Committee) (2023)](https://d.docs.live.net/2cd048648ea3fc36/2024-25-33.%20NCAT%20insight%20reports/Project%201%20-%20'Understanding%5eGand%20identifying%20barriers%20to%20accessing%20transport'/Highlights%20Report/A.%20Word%20document/•%09https:/www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/03.2023-Accessible-transport-legal-obligations-Transport-for-Alls-response.pdf)
* [Transport for All, Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023 (2023)](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Are-we-there-yet_Highlights_PDF-web-compressed-more-compressed.pdf)
* [Transport for Wales, TfW Accessible Travel Policy Making Rail Accessible: Helping Older, and Disabled Passengers - Policy Document (2024)](https://d.docs.live.net/2cd048648ea3fc36/2024-25-33.%20NCAT%20insight%20reports/Project%201%20-%20'Understanding%5eGand%20identifying%20barriers%20to%20accessing%20transport'/Highlights%20Report/A.%20Word%20document/TfW%20Accessible%20Travel%20Policy%20Making%20Rail%20Accessible:%20Helping%20Older,%20and%20Disabled%20Passengers%20-%20Policy%20Document)
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1. [The Motability Foundation: The Transport Accessibility Gap, 2022](https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/iwaidhxk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [Inclusion London: The Social Model of Disability](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [The Motability Foundation: The Transport Accessibility Gap, 2022](https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/iwaidhxk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Participants rated accessibility on a scale where 0 is ‘not at all accessible’ and 10 is ‘extremely accessible’. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The rating was on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is ‘not at all likely and 10 is ‘extremely likely’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. . This question was asked to those who walk, wheel, cycle, or use buses, cars, community transport services, private hire vehicles, taxis and wheelchair accessible vehicles. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. In all personal stories, names have been changed to protect confidentiality. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. . This question was asked to users of boats, buses, coaches, community transport services, taxis or PHVs, trains, trams, and underground trains. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. This question was asked to users of boats, cars, trains, trams, and underground trains. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. This question was asked to users of airplanes, boats, trains, trams, and underground trains. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. This question was asked to users of airplanes, trains, and underground trains. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. This question was asked to users of all modes of transport. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. This question was asked to people who use airplanes, boats, buses, coaches, trains, trams and underground trains. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. This question was asked to those who use airplanes and boats. We acknowledge that lack of accessible toilets on other modes, such as trains is also a barrier. This was not included in the survey. This was identified in text comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. [The Motability Foundation: The Transport Accessibility Gap, 2022](https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/iwaidhxk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. [The Motability Foundation: The Transport Accessibility Gap, 2022](https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/iwaidhxk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)