

# How diverse is the housing association workforce in the North West of England?

National Housing Federation regional analysis of sector-wide equality, diversity and inclusion data

# Background

The social housing sector is grounded in a social purpose that places a responsibility on us to be a beacon for inclusion and diversity.

Alongside the powerful moral case for greater equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), there is a strong business case, which is detailed in our 2020 insight review:

- Talent can be found all around us and attracting it from the widest possible pool creates competitive advantage – don't miss out on available talent.
- Diverse teams (especially at board and executive levels) make better decisions.
- People trust those who reflect the diversity of the people they lead, the customers they service, and the communities in which they are rooted.

The insight review highlighted huge gaps in our knowledge and the importance of this knowledge to know where we are, where we want to be, and to be able to measure our progress.

In response we launched the EDI data tool.

# The EDI data tool

The EDI data tool allows housing associations in England to compare the diversity of their workforce to the communities they serve, based on characteristics of the population where their stock is located.

We first launched in 2021 and asked NHF members to submit their completed tools, enabling us to build the first national profile of the workforce of housing associations in England.

Two years on we have repeated the data collection exercise to provide an updated picture of diversity and representation in the social housing sector and to begin to explore how this picture is changing over time, presented in our report [‘How diverse is England’s housing association workforce in 2023?’](#)

We have published regional breakdowns of the data we received through the EDI data tool collection.

**The following slides presents the findings for housing associations with headquarters in the North West of England.**

# About the data

The data is for the housing association workforce (including executive level positions), executives (chief executives, managing directors, and any other senior leaders), and board members.

To understand representation, the characteristics of these workforce groups have been compared against the characteristics of the population where housing association homes are located and, where relevant, against data we received on their residents.

## **Please note:**

Data represents different time points for different organisations.

Some data gaps are due to categories in the tool not matching categories in data collected by housing associations (for example, marital and civil partnership status).

Where social housing is part of an organisations wider business, and where possible, organisations have separated staff responsible for housing from wider employee data.

# Language and terminology

Phrasing of questions and categories within the EDI data tool follows recommendations from ONS harmonised standards, where available, and aligns with Census 2021.

This means we can be assured we are collecting the intended information and that we can compare sector data to Census data at population level.

Due to the specific questions and definitions, however, it limits the language we use in the data tool and this report (for example, sexual orientation instead of sexuality, and separating sex and gender identity).

This does not mean we think people can be put into boxes. The tool is not a replacement for talking to staff and understanding their views of themselves and equality, diversity, and inclusion within organisations.

**Further notes on language are include within the national report.**

# Who submitted their data?

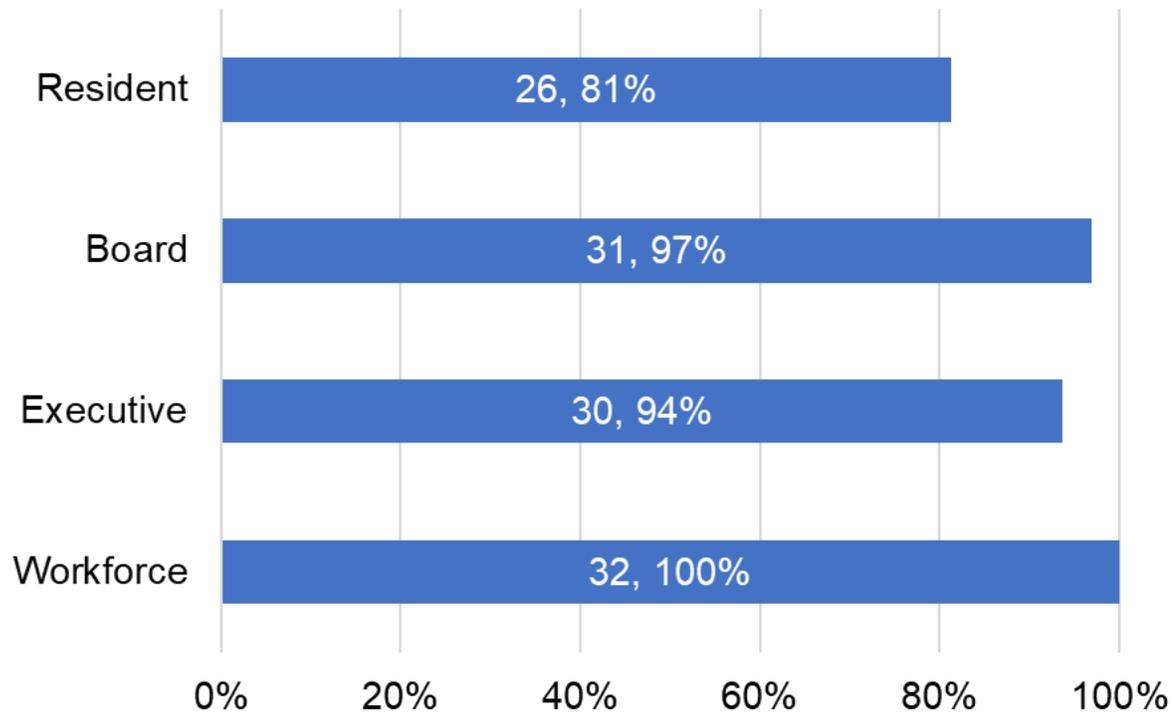
**Housing associations/ALMOs that submitted their data by region as a proportion of membership of the NHF**

Region	Number of submissions	Response as % of member SDR stock in region
London	39	85%
<b>North West</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>60%</b>
East of England	19	84%
South East	18	63%
West Midlands	18	79%
Yorkshire and Humberside	18	92%
South West	17	92%
North East	11	99%
East Midlands	5	87%
Grand total (England)	177	79%

- 177 housing associations across England, representing 79% of members' homes and 76% of all housing association homes in England.
- 32 housing associations with headquarters in the North West of England, representing 60% of members' home.

# Who submitted their data?

**Proportion of responding housing associations that provided data on each group**

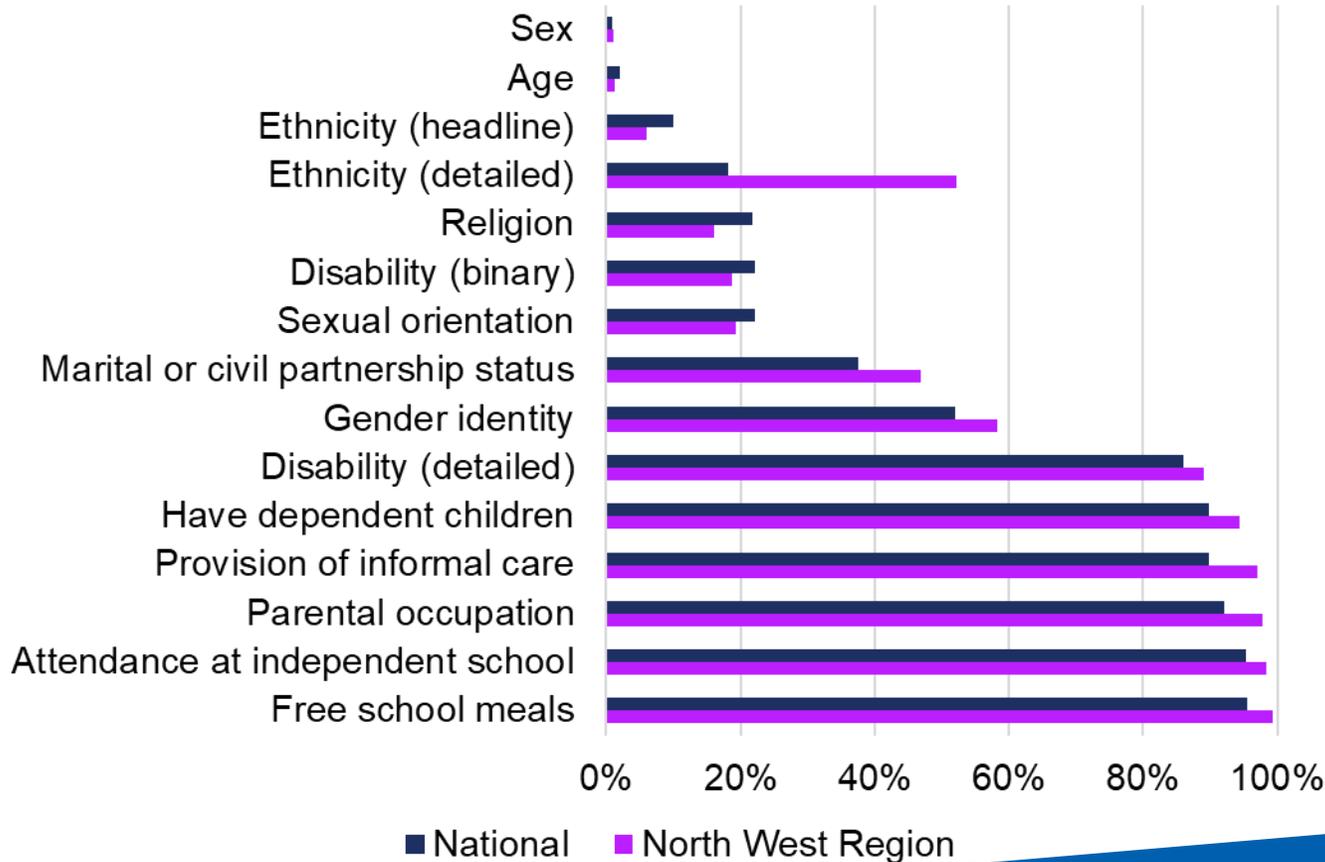


- Over 90% of housing associations based in the North West provided at least some data on all workforce groups.
- 81% provided data on residents, higher than the 66% nationally.

# North West of England results

# Where are the biggest gaps in data?

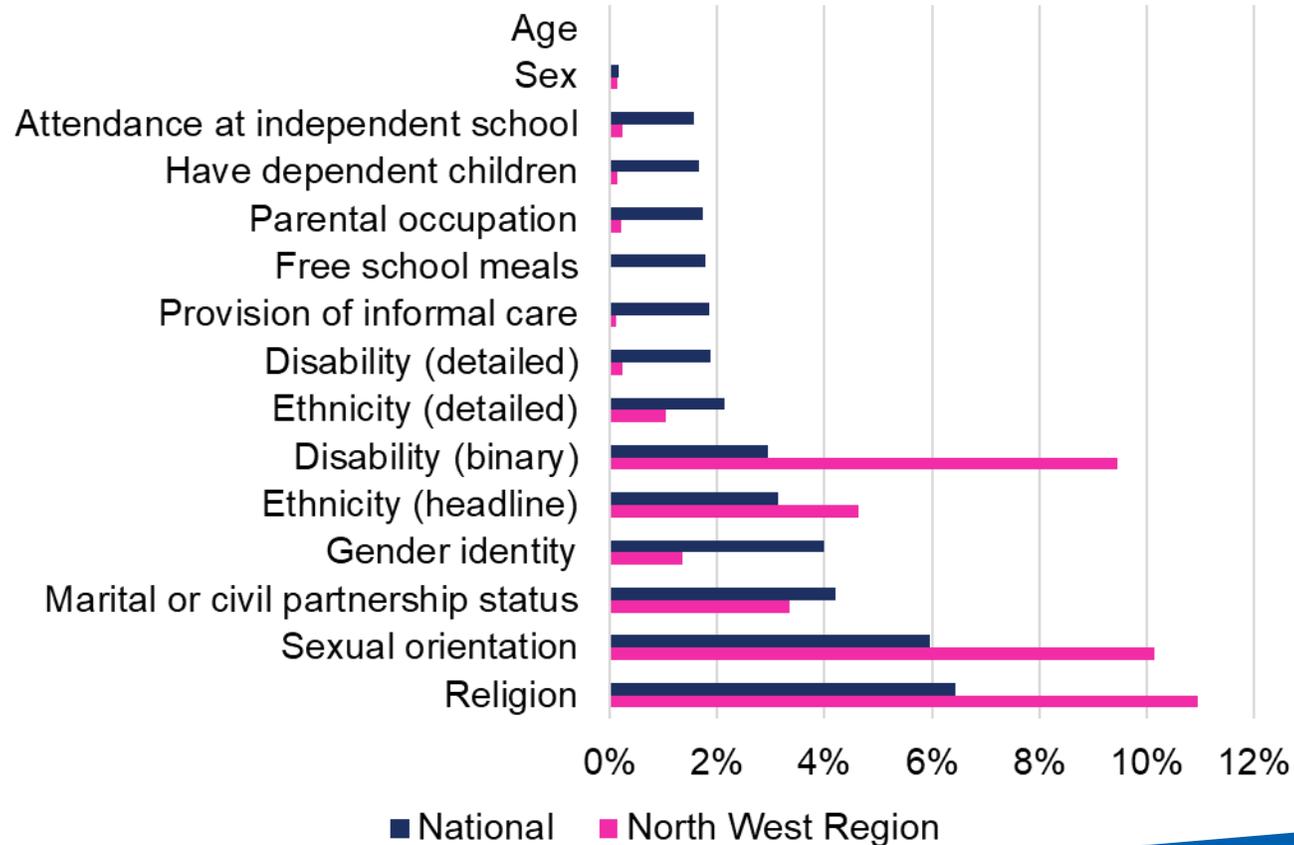
## Proportion of workforce where we don't have data for each characteristic



- We received the most complete data for age and sex – missing only 1% of workforce data for both.
- The largest data gaps are for socioeconomic characteristics and caring responsibilities, where we're missing 98-99% of workforce data on socioeconomic characteristics (larger gaps than in the national data).
- However, the gaps in data for these characteristics have started to close. In 2021 we were missing almost 100% of workforce data on socioeconomic characteristics.

# What are people choosing not to share?

## Proportion of workforce where person selected 'prefer not to say' for a characteristic



- Across all groups, including residents, people were least likely to disclose their religion and sexual orientation – for example, 10.9% of the workforce responded “prefer not to say” for religion.
- This is higher than the national data where 6.4% chose not to disclose their religion.
- 9.5% of the workforce chose not to disclose whether they had a disability or long-term health condition, compared to 2.9% of the national workforce.

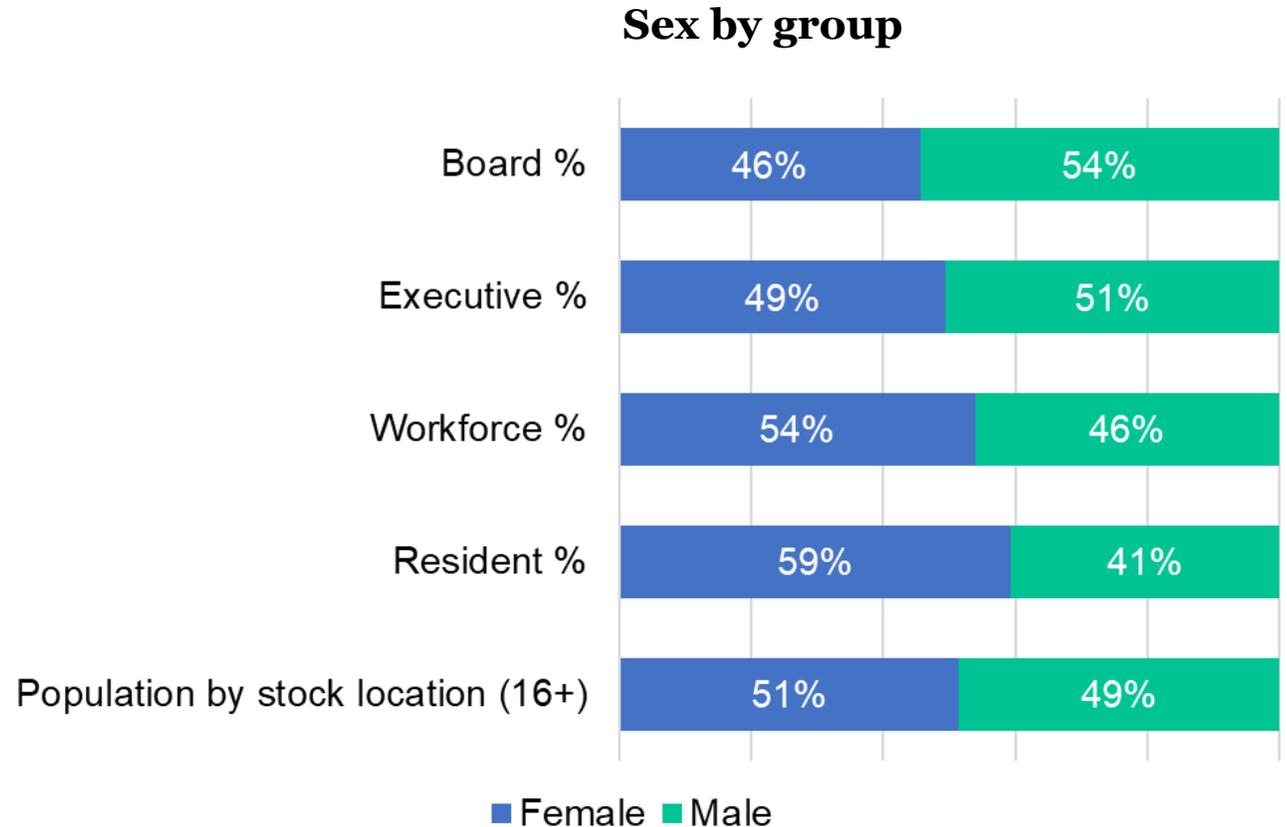
# How representative is the workforce?

The following slides explore representation by characteristic. Please note:

- Due to gaps in data for socioeconomic characteristics and caring responsibilities, these have not been included within the regional summaries.
- The data is presented without 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say' responses. This means the totals vary by characteristic.

# Sex

- There is good female representation within the workforce – 54% compared to 51% of the population and 59% of residents.
- However, there's less female representation within leadership positions.
- There has been an increase in female board members compared to 2021 (from 39% to 46%).
- However, there has been no progress within executive teams (50% in 2021 to 49% in 2023), but still higher than national data (47%).



# Gender identity

- Trans\* people are poorly represented across all workforce groups, with no representation at leadership level.
- Within the workforce, there is no representation of people who identify as a trans(gender) woman, trans(gender) man or non-binary.
- We need to collect more complete data to improve our confidence in these results – for example, we are missing 58% of workforce gender identity data.

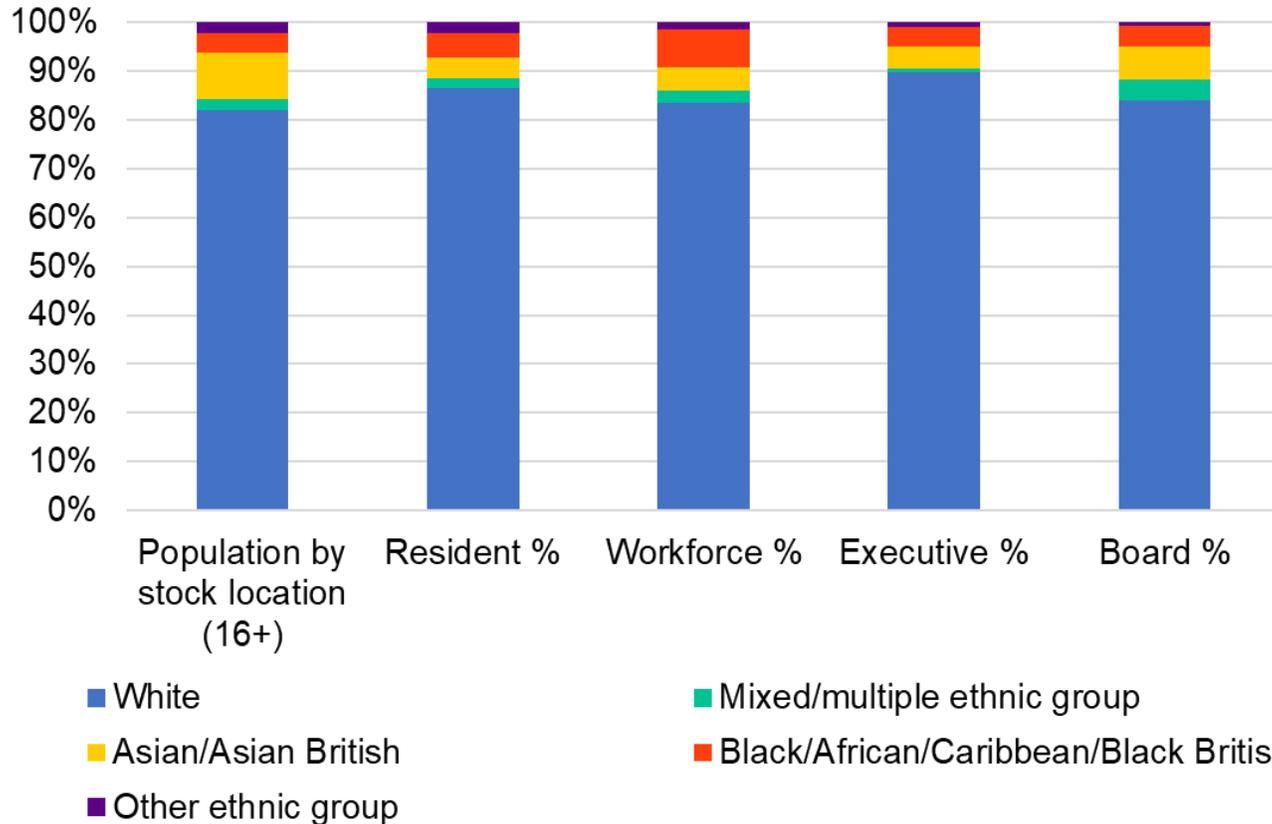
\*We are using the term “trans” as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth, as defined by [Stonewall](#).

## Gender identity by group

	Population by stock location (16+)	Workforce %	Executive %	Board %
Gender identity same as sex at birth	93.4%	99.7%	100.0%	100.0%
Identify as trans(gender) woman	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Identify as trans(gender) man	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Identify as non-binary	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth, but not listed	6.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%

# Ethnicity

## Ethnicity by group

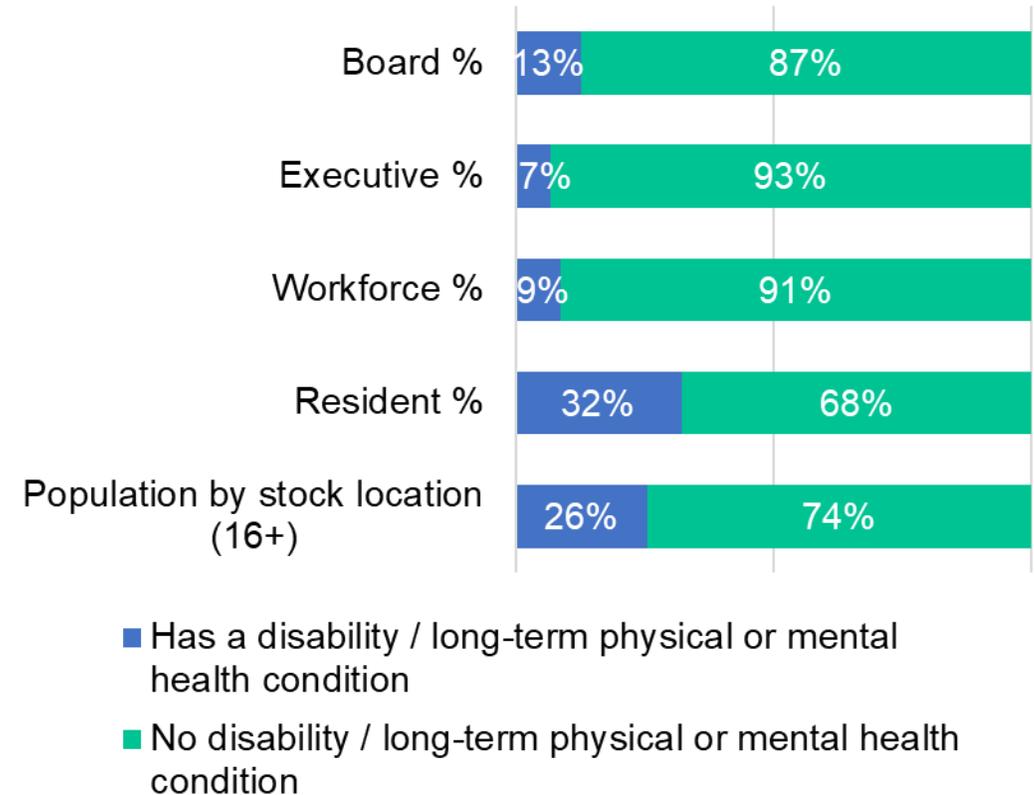


- The workforce and board members are largely representative of the population – 84% of the workforce and boards are White compared to 82% of the population.
- There's a lack of ethnic diversity at executive level, as 90% of executives are White, but this has improved since 2021 (95%).
- Only 4% of executive and board members are Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, compared to 8% of the workforce.
- People who are Asian/Asian British are underrepresented at all levels – 10% of the population compared to 5% of workforce and executives and 7% of board members.

# Disability

- Disabled people are underrepresented within the workforce (9%) and executive positions (7%), compared to the population (26%).
- Representation of disability is important given the higher proportion of residents who have a disability or long-term health condition (32%).
- There has been a small increase in representation across all workforce groups compared to 2021, when 7% of the workforce, 4% of executives and 6% of boards had a disability or long-term health condition.

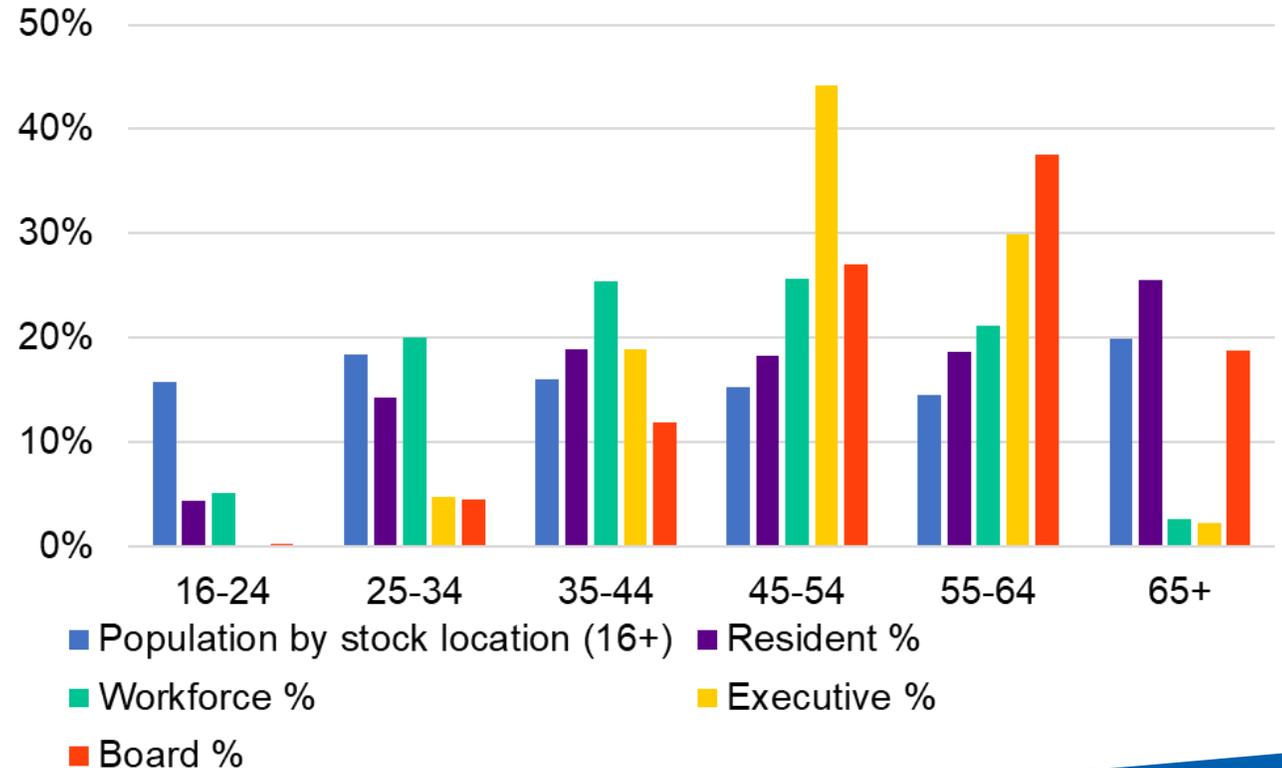
**Disability (Yes / No) by group**



# Age

- The workforce is largely representative, particularly of residents, although there are fewer members of the workforce aged 65 and over.
- Board members are more likely to be older – 56% are aged 55 and over, compared to 24% of the workforce.
- Reflecting the national trend, executives are younger than they were in 2021 – e.g. 0.5% were younger than 35 in 2021, compared to 4.7% in 2023.

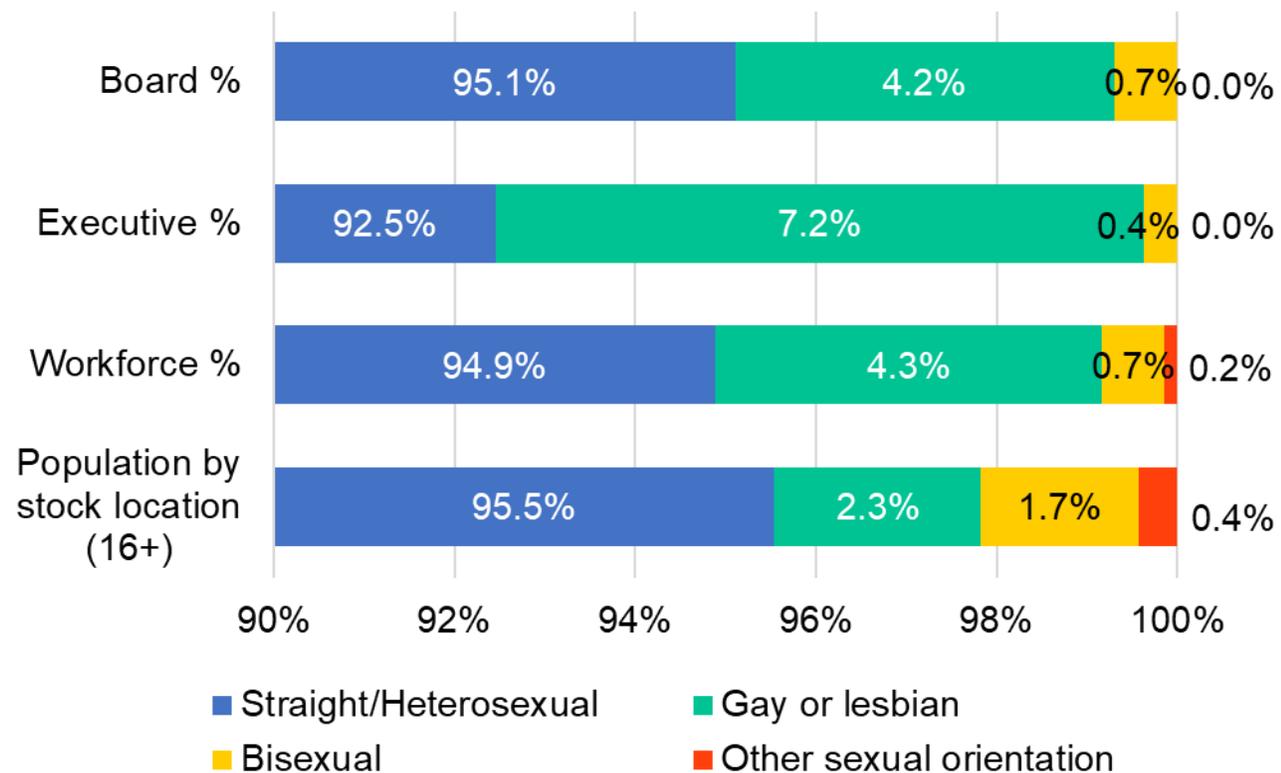
Age by group



# Sexual orientation

- People who identify as gay or lesbian are well represented across all workforce groups.
- People who are bisexual or other sexual orientations are underrepresented – for example, 0.7% of the workforce are bisexual, compared to 1.7% of the population.
- This could be affected by the fact that over 10% of the workforce and executives chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. This is higher than in 2021 (2% of the workforce and 4% of executives).

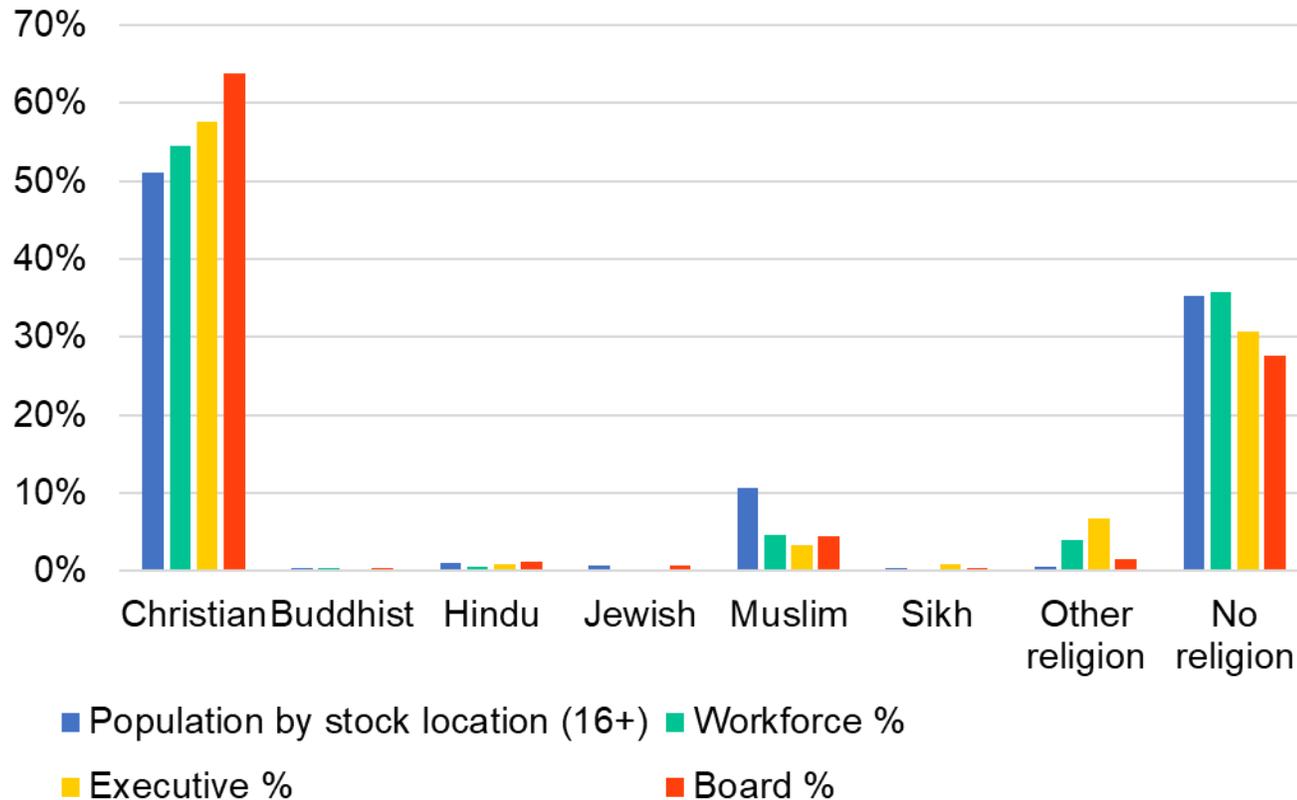
Sexual orientation by group



Please note, axis starts at 90%

# Religion

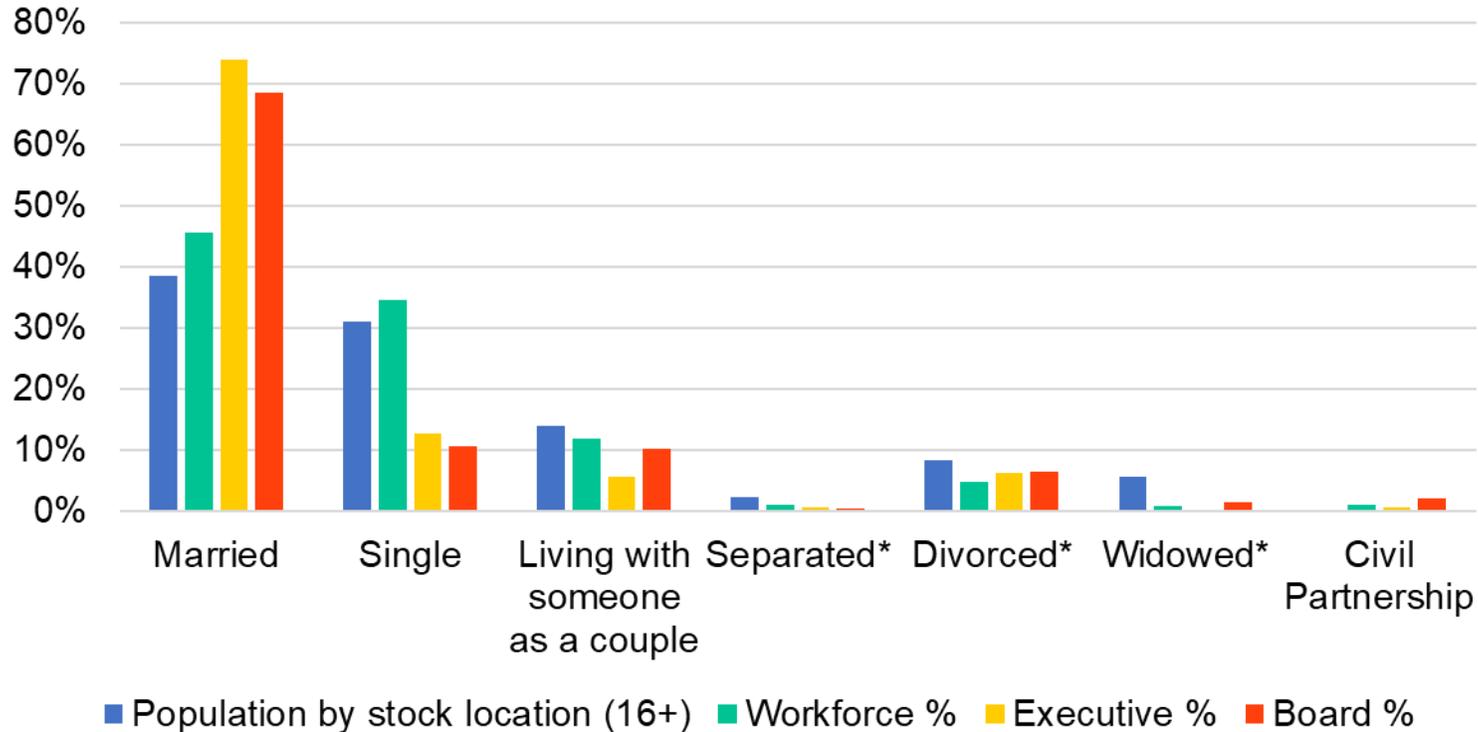
Religion by group



- The workforce largely represents the population, although all workforce groups are less likely to be Muslim – for example, 5% of the workforce are Muslim, compared to 11% of the population.
- Those in leadership positions are more likely to be Christian and less likely to have no religion, compared to the workforce – for example, 64% of board members are Christian, compared to 54% of the workforce.

# Marital and civil partnership status

Marital and civil partnership status by group



- The workforce represents the population.
- Those in leadership positions are more likely to be married and less likely to be single, compared to the workforce.
- 74% of executives are married, compared to 46% of the workforce. This is higher than in 2021, when 69% of executives were married.

\*Includes (former) civil partnerships

# Key areas for improvement

## **Housing associations in the North West of England should aim to:**

- Increase female representation at leadership level, particularly on boards.
- Increase ethnic diversity at executive level, particularly representation of people who are Black, African, Caribbean or Black British at both executive and board level.
- Increase the representation of Disabled people at all levels.
- Engage with staff to build trust, confidence, and greater inclusivity so that fewer staff respond 'prefer not to say' for questions around religion, sexual orientation and disability.
- Collect more complete data on socioeconomic characteristics and caring responsibilities.

# Recommendations for the sector

1. Review your organisation's processes for collecting equality, diversity and inclusion data.
2. Use the data to set targets and shape plans and strategies to meet those targets, together with the expertise of those with lived experience



# Next steps for the NHF

- The [EDI data tool](#) and [suggested questions to ask your workforce](#) are still available for members.
- We will continue to share [best practice resources on equality, diversity and inclusion and case studies](#) highlighting ways that housing associations can use the EDI data tool to address specific EDI needs.
- We'll use your feedback when building the next iteration of the EDI data tool.
- Work with our member steering group to develop an action plan for driving improvement.
- Repeat the data collection in 2026 to measure progress across the sector.

# We want to hear from you

We're looking for examples of how members have used their data tool to inform EDI strategies and action plans to add to our bank of case studies on the NHF website. For example:

- Have you improved the way you have collected your EDI data?
- Have you used your EDI data tool to identify areas for improvement, set targets and taken measures to meet those targets?
- Have you engaged with staff to explore and overcome barriers to sharing EDI information?
- Have you engaged with staff to explore and overcome barriers to recruitment, retention and progression within the organisation for some groups of people?

We'd also welcome any feedback on the EDI data tool and the data collection process

Please get in touch via [Katie.Hipkiss@housing.org.uk](mailto:Katie.Hipkiss@housing.org.uk)