

How diverse is the housing association workforce in the South 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 South 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

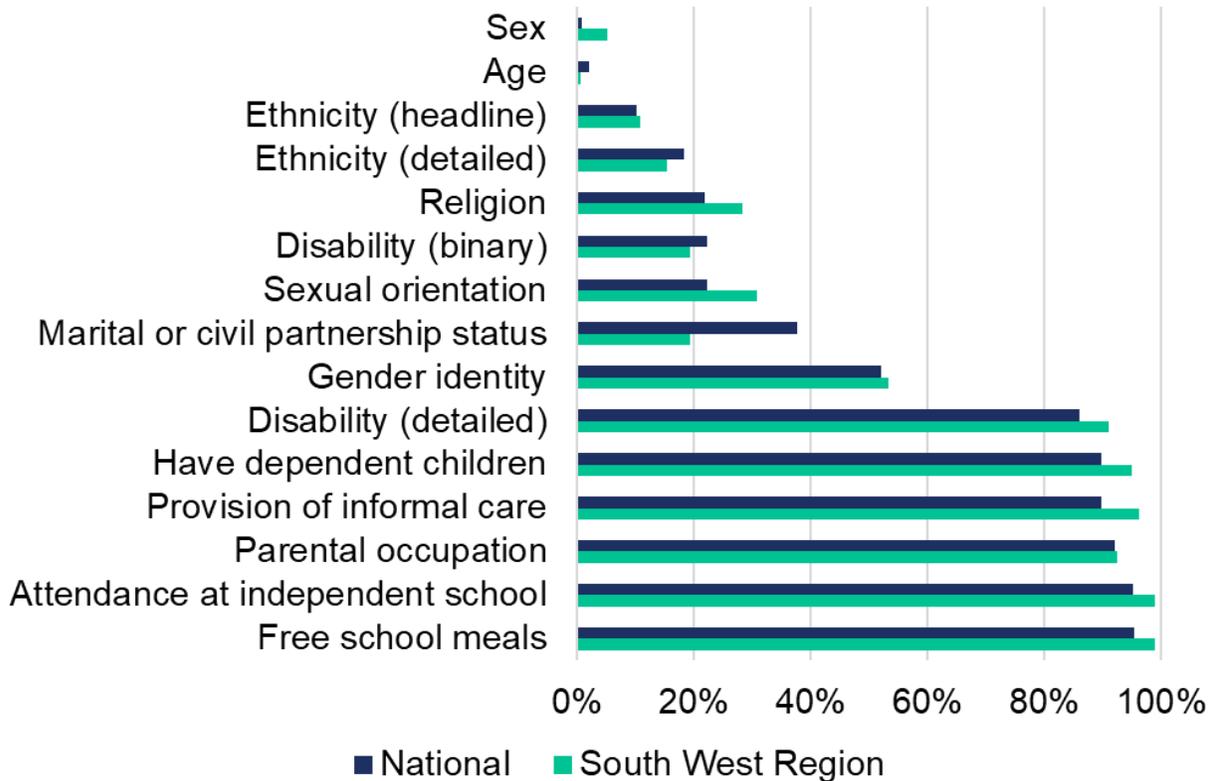
Region	Number of submissions	Response as % of member SDR stock in region
London	39	85%
North West	32	60%
East of England	19	84%
South East	18	63%
West Midlands	18	79%
Yorkshire and Humberside	18	92%
South West	17	92%
North East	11	99%
East Midlands	5	87%
Grand total (England)	177	79%

- 177 housing associations across England, representing 79% of members' homes and 76% of all housing association homes in England.
- All 17 housing associations provided workforce data, 16 (94%) provided executive and board data and 9 (53%) provided resident data.

South West of England results

Where are the biggest gaps in data?

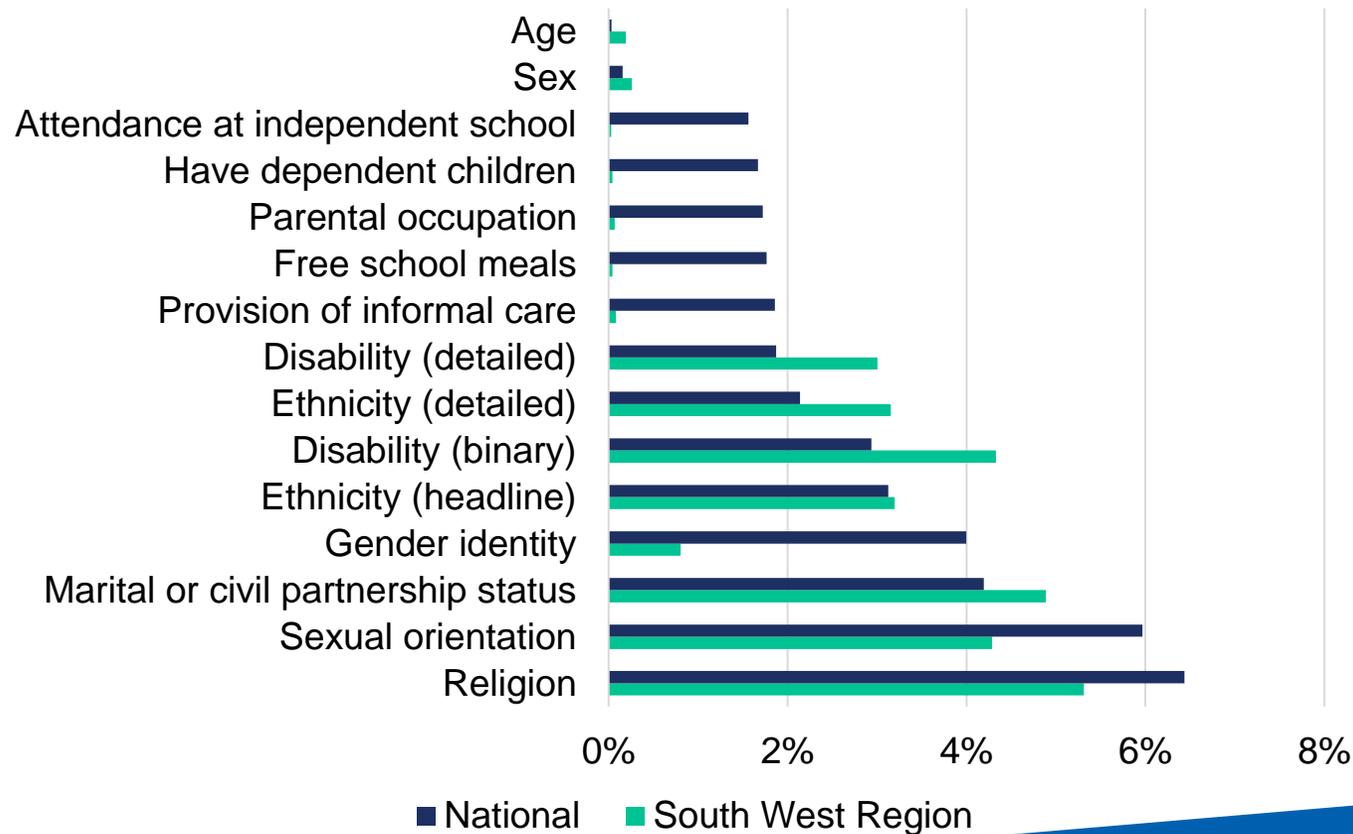
Proportion of workforce where we don't have data for each characteristic



- We received the most complete data for sex and age, where we're only missing 0.5% of workforce data for age and 5.2% for sex. However, we are missing 17.0% of executive data for age.
- As we've seen nationally, the largest data gaps are for socioeconomic characteristics and caring responsibilities, where we're missing 95.1-99.1% of workforce data. However, there fewer gaps for executives and board members
- We received more complete data for parental occupation than we did in 2021, particularly for executives – missing 56.8% of data compared to 83.6% in 2021.

What are people choosing not to share?

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



- Across all workforce groups, people were least likely to disclose their religion – ranging from 5.3% of the workforce to 7.5% of board members who responded 'prefer not to say'.
- While board members were less likely to disclose their religion compared to the workforce and executives, they were more likely to share most other characteristics.
- Over 4% of the workforce did not disclose their sexual orientation, marital and civil partnership status and whether they have a disability.

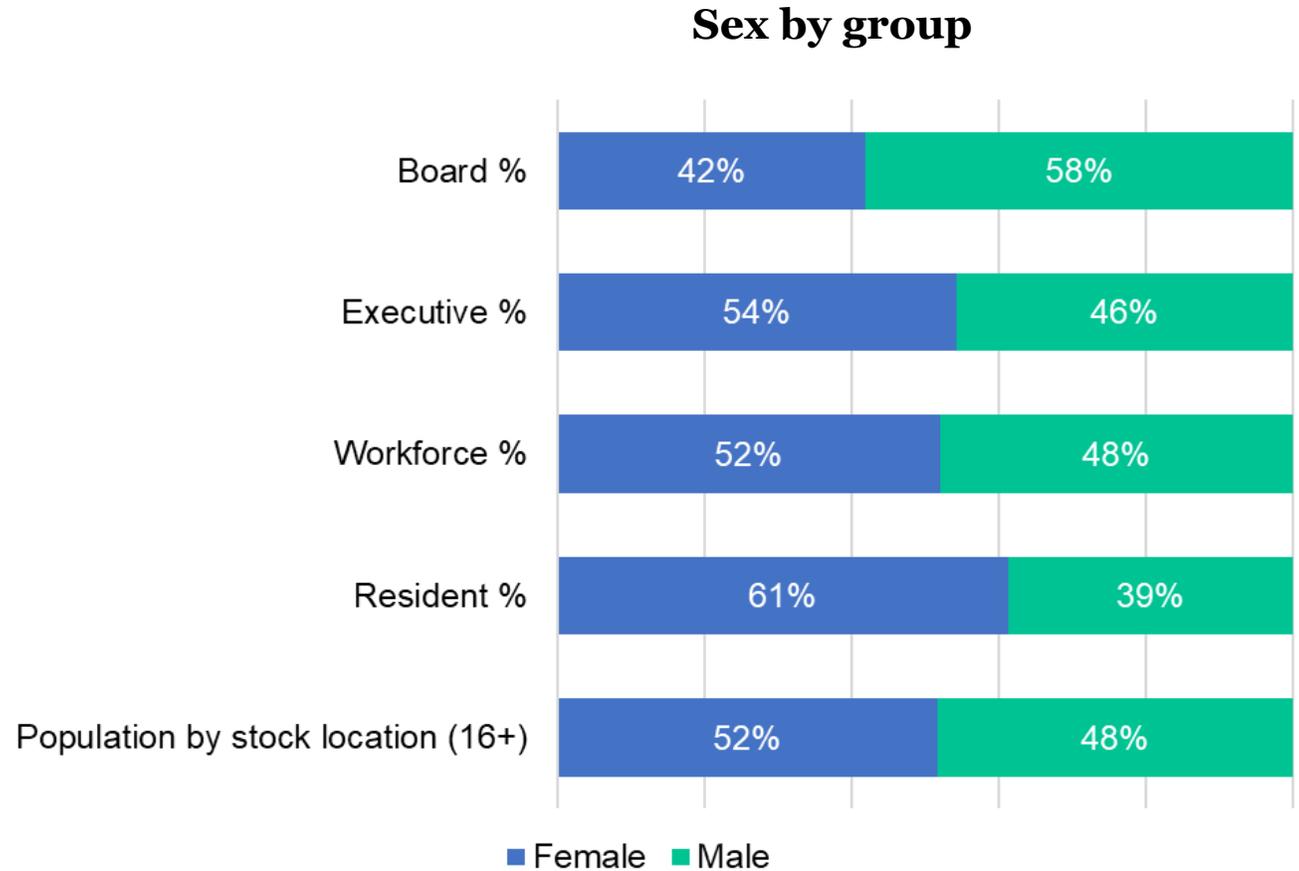
How representative is the workforce?

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

- Female representation within the workforce reflects the population where stock is located (both 52%), but the proportion of female residents is higher (61%) than the workforce.
- Representation of female executives (54%) is higher than in the workforce and the national data (47%).
- While the proportion of female executives has increased since 2021 (from 50%), the proportion of female board members has decreased from 49% to 42%.



Gender identity

- Trans* people are underrepresented at all levels.
- While the proportion of the workforce identifying as non-binary reflects the population (0.1%), there is no representation of trans(gender) women or men across any of the workforce groups.
- The lack of trans representation at leadership level is reflected in the national data as well.
- However, we are missing 40-53% of data on gender identity which affects the confidence in these findings.

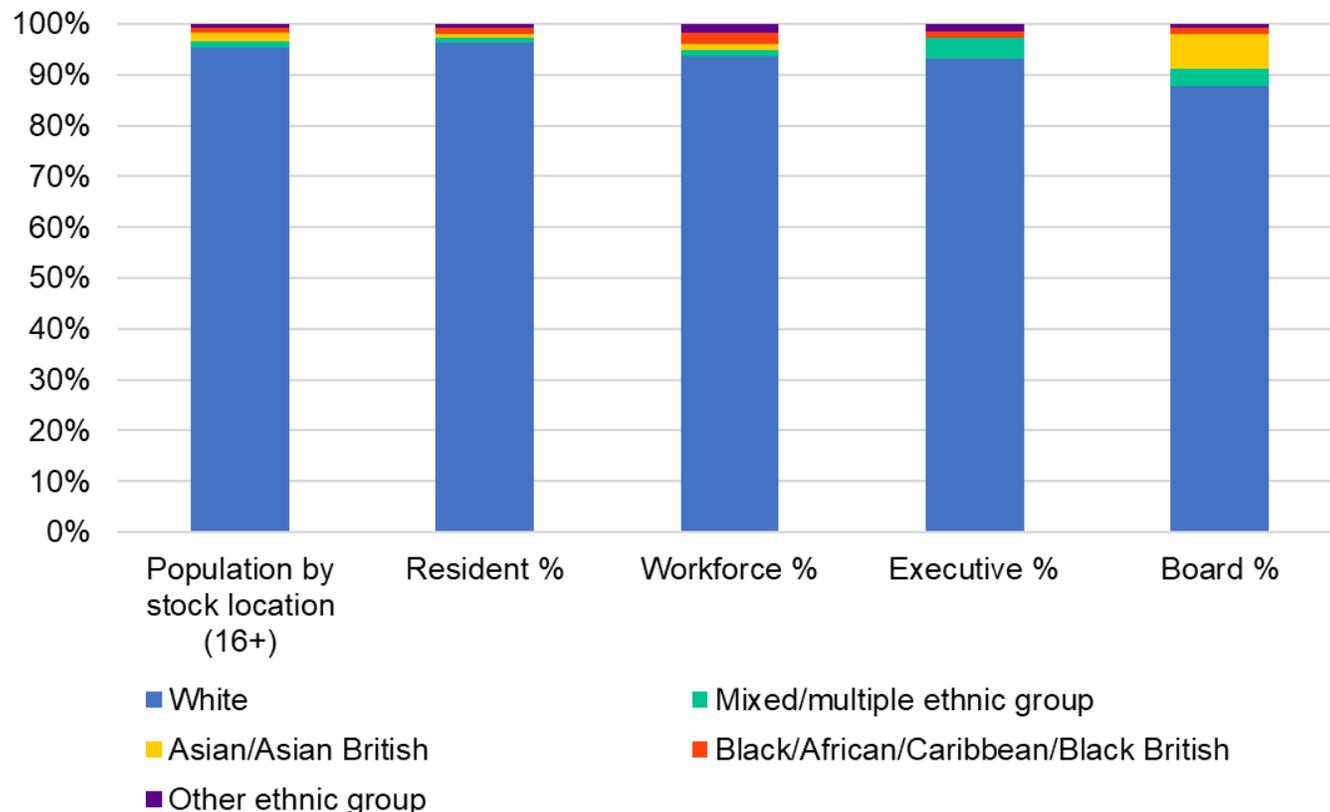
*We are using the term “trans” as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth, as defined by [Stonewall](#).

Gender identity by group

	Population by stock location (16+)	Workforce %	Executive %	Board %
Gender identity same as sex at birth	94.0%	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%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth, but not listed	5.8%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Ethnicity

Ethnicity by group

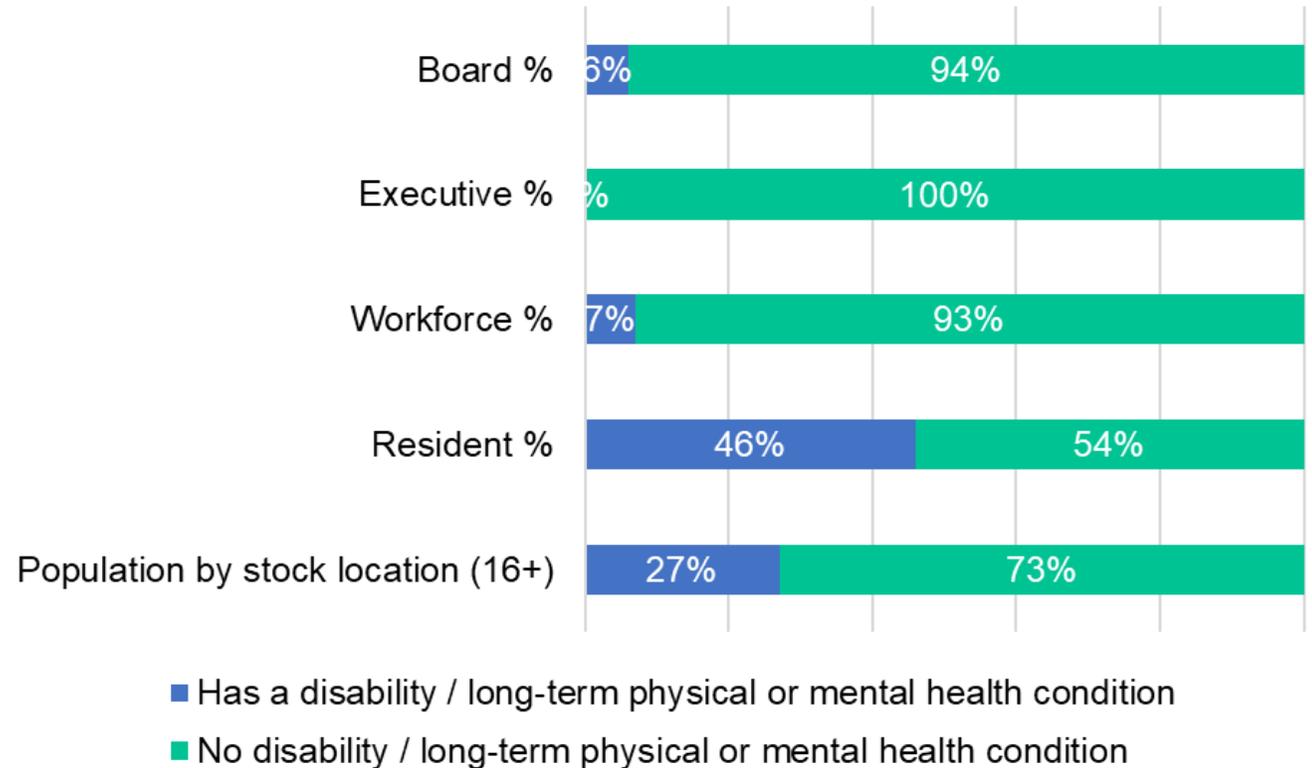


- Compared to national data, there is a lack of ethnic diversity across all workforce groups, however this is representative of the population and residents of housing associations based in the South West of England.
- Boards are more diverse compared to the workforce – for example, 7% of board members are Asian / Asian British, compared to 1% of the workforce.
- Across all workforce groups, there's been a small increase in diversity compared to 2021 – for example, 94% of the workforce are White, compared to 97% in 2021.

Disability

- Disabled people are poorly represented across all workforce groups, particularly at executive level where no one reported that they have a disability or long-term health condition (compared to 5% in 2021).
- Disability representation is lower than nationally (9% of the national workforce compared to 7% in the South West), despite a higher prevalence of disability within the population and among residents – for example, 46% of residents, compared to 29% nationally.

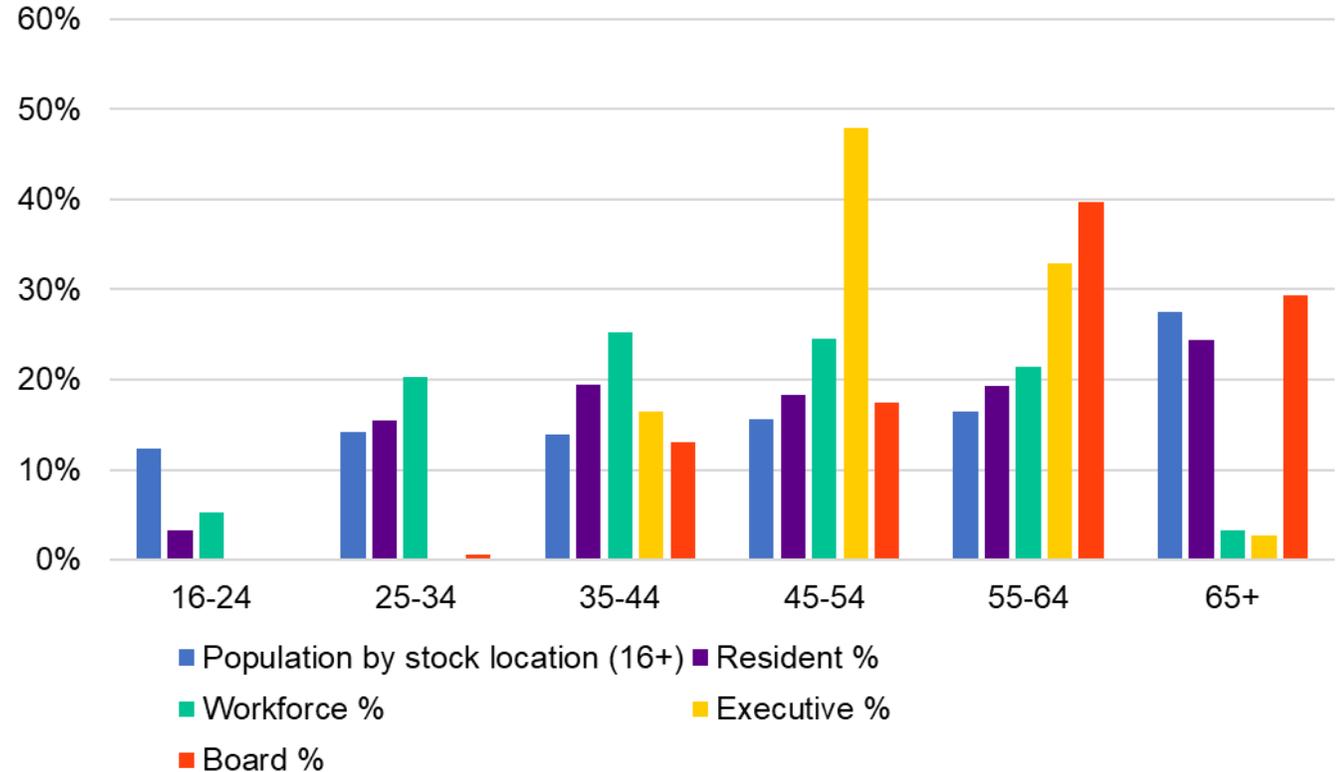
Disability (Yes / No) by group



Age

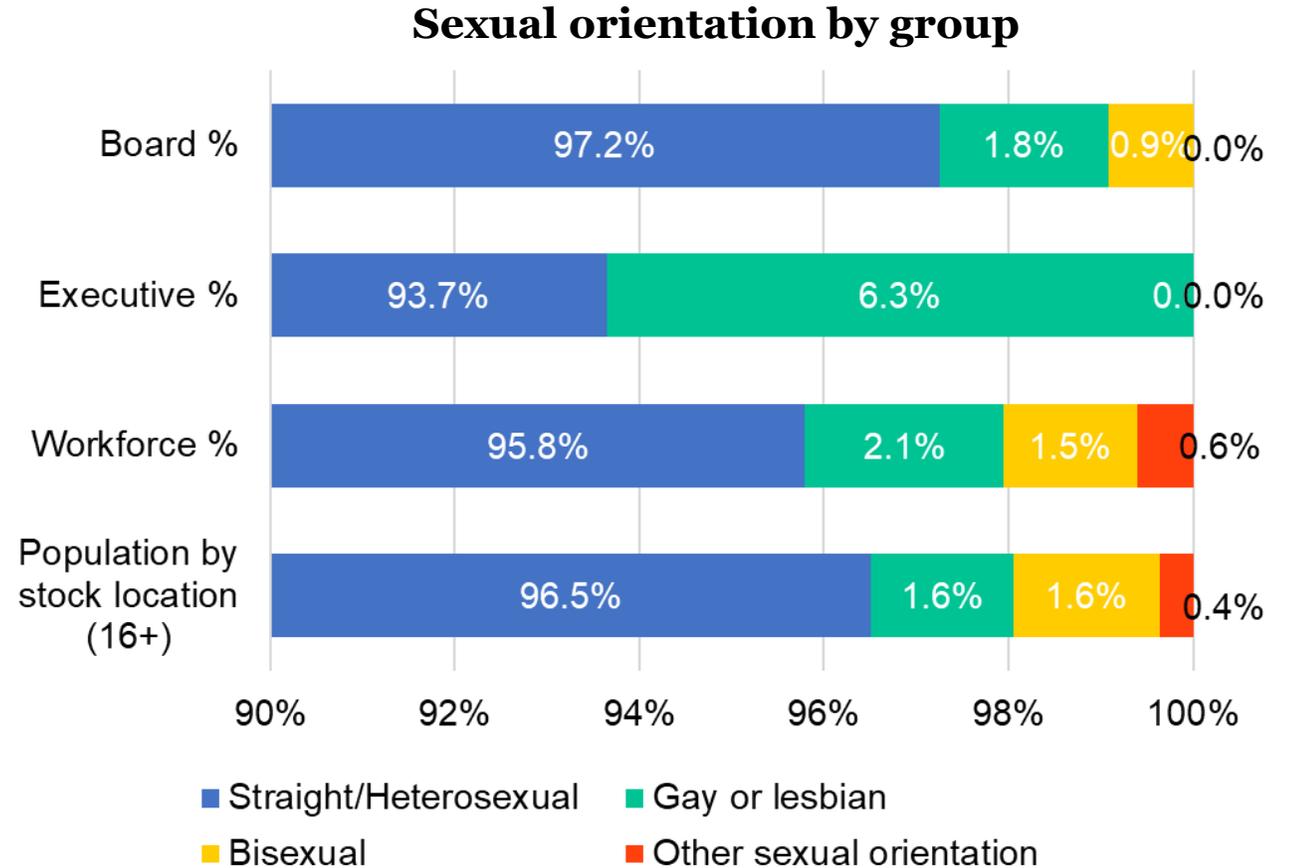
- The workforce largely represents the population and residents, although is less likely to be aged 65 and over.
- As expected, those in leadership positions are more likely to be older than the workforce.
- For example, 29% of boards are aged 65 and over, compared to 3% of executives and the workforce, and higher than nationally (21%).
- There hasn't been much change compared to 2021.

Age by group



Sexual orientation

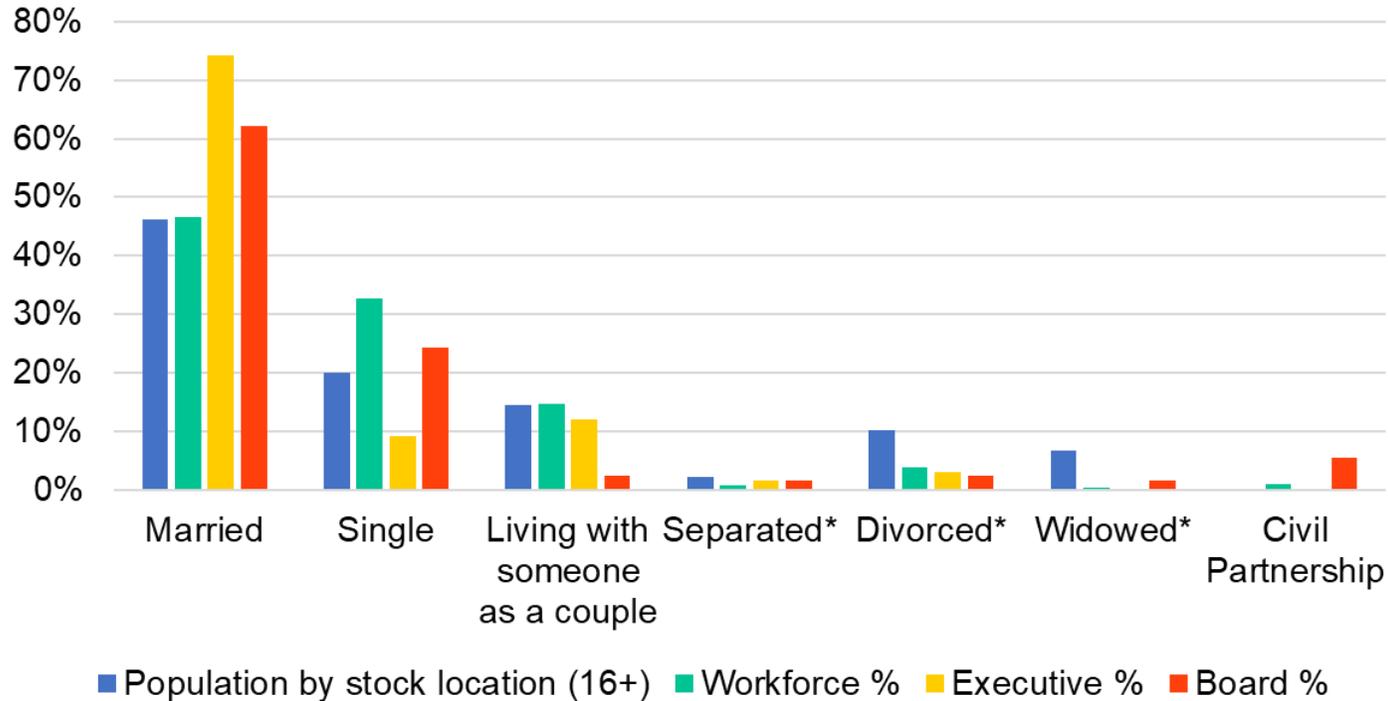
- The workforce reflects the population where stock is located.
- As with the national data, people who are gay or lesbian are represented across all workforce groups, but people who are bisexual are underrepresented at leadership level.
- No executives reported that they are bisexual (compared to 0.6% nationally). This was the same in 2021, although we have more data this time.



Please note, axis starts at 90%

Marital and civil partnership status

Marital and civil partnership status by group

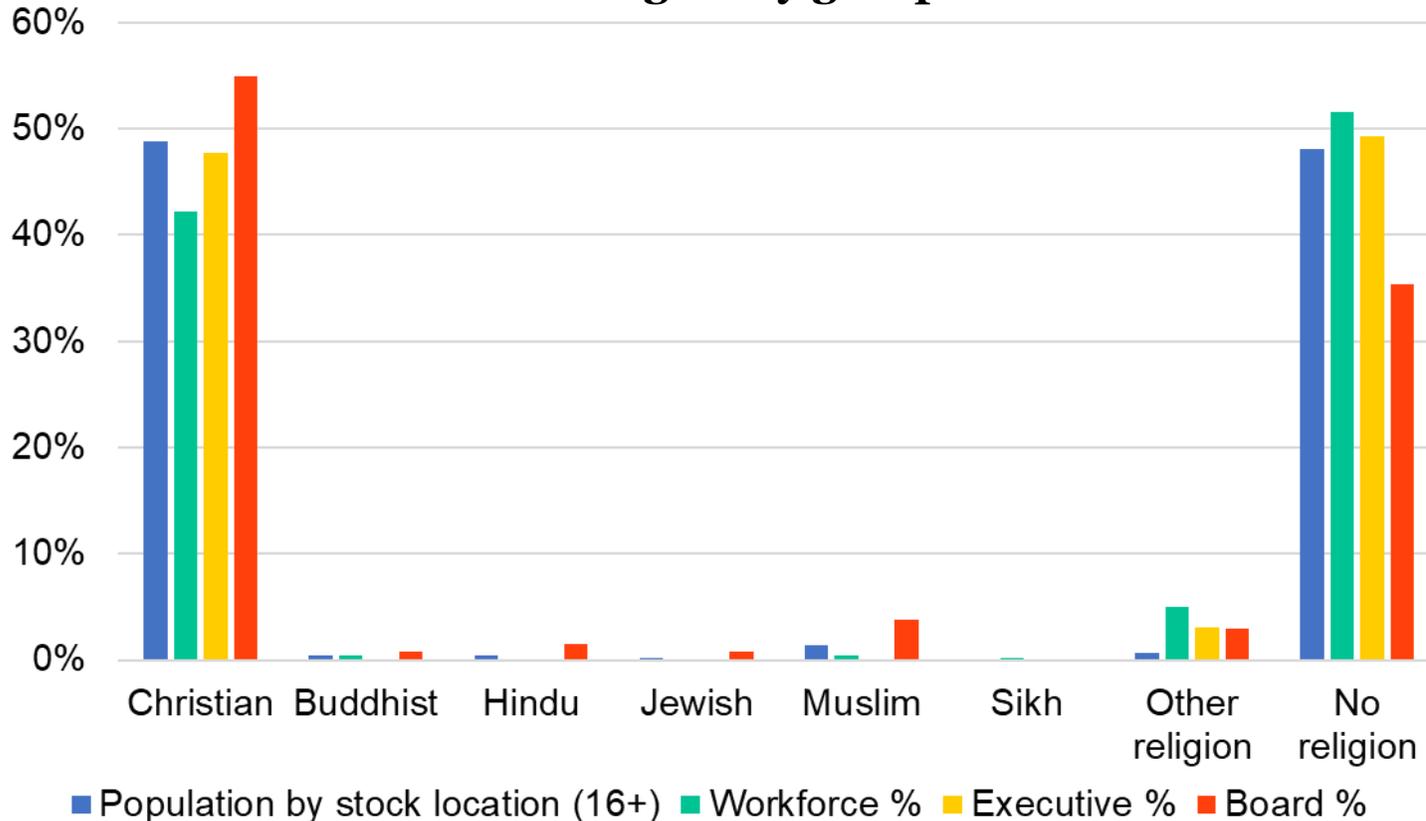


- The workforce is representative of the population, although more of the workforce are single.
- As with the national data, the leadership are more likely to be married – 74% of executives and 62% of board members, compared to 47% of the workforce.
- Compared to 2021, fewer board members are married (from 83% in 2021 to 62% in 2023) and more are single (5% to 24%).

*Includes (former) civil partnerships

Religion

Religion by group



- Across all groups, including the population, a diverse range of religions are not represented – 94% of the workforce are either Christian or have no religion.
- Board members are less likely to have no religion – for example, 35% of board members have no religion, compared to 52% of the workforce.
- These results are similar to 2021, although the proportion of executives who are Christian has fallen from 63% to 48% (while those with no religion has increased).

Areas for future focus

Housing associations in the South West of England should aim to:

- Increase female representation at board level.
- Increase the representation of Disabled people across all levels, but particularly in executive positions.
- Increase the representation of people who identify as trans or non-binary, particularly at leadership level.
- 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