

How diverse is the housing association workforce in the West Midlands?

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 West Midlands.

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?

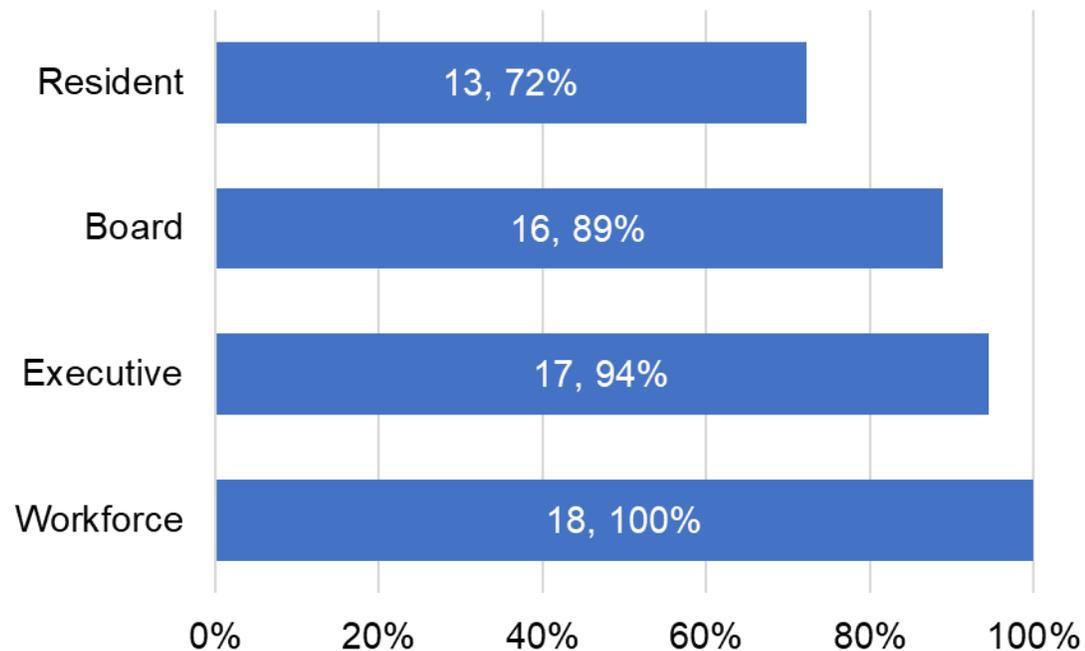
Housing associations/ALMOs that submitted their data by region as a proportion of membership of the NHF

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.
- 18 housing associations with headquarters in the West Midlands, representing 79% of members' homes.

Who submitted their data?

Proportion of responding housing associations that provided data on each group

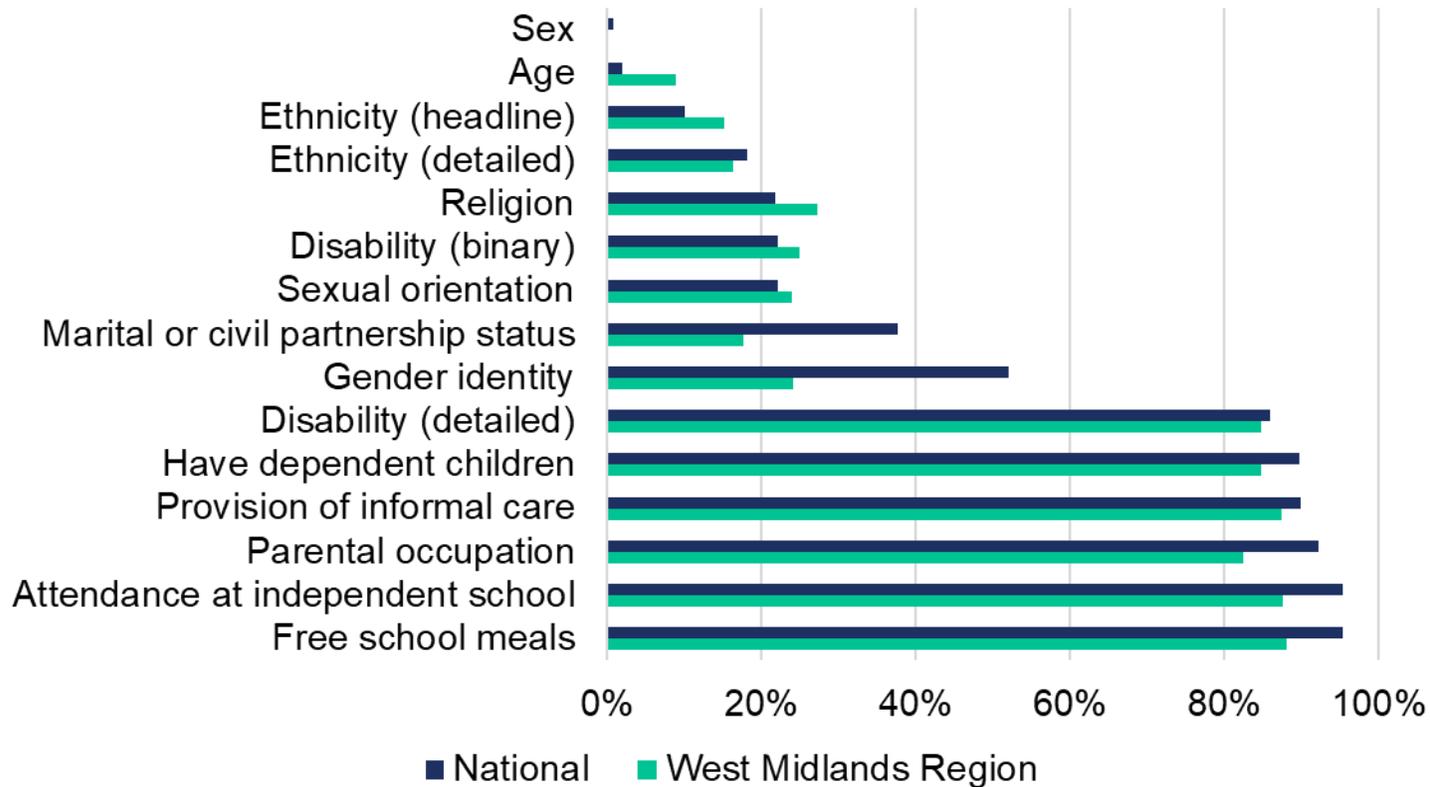


- 89% of housing associations based in the West Midlands provided at least some data on all workforce groups.
- 72% provided data on residents, higher than the 66% nationally.

West Midlands results

Where are the biggest gaps in data?

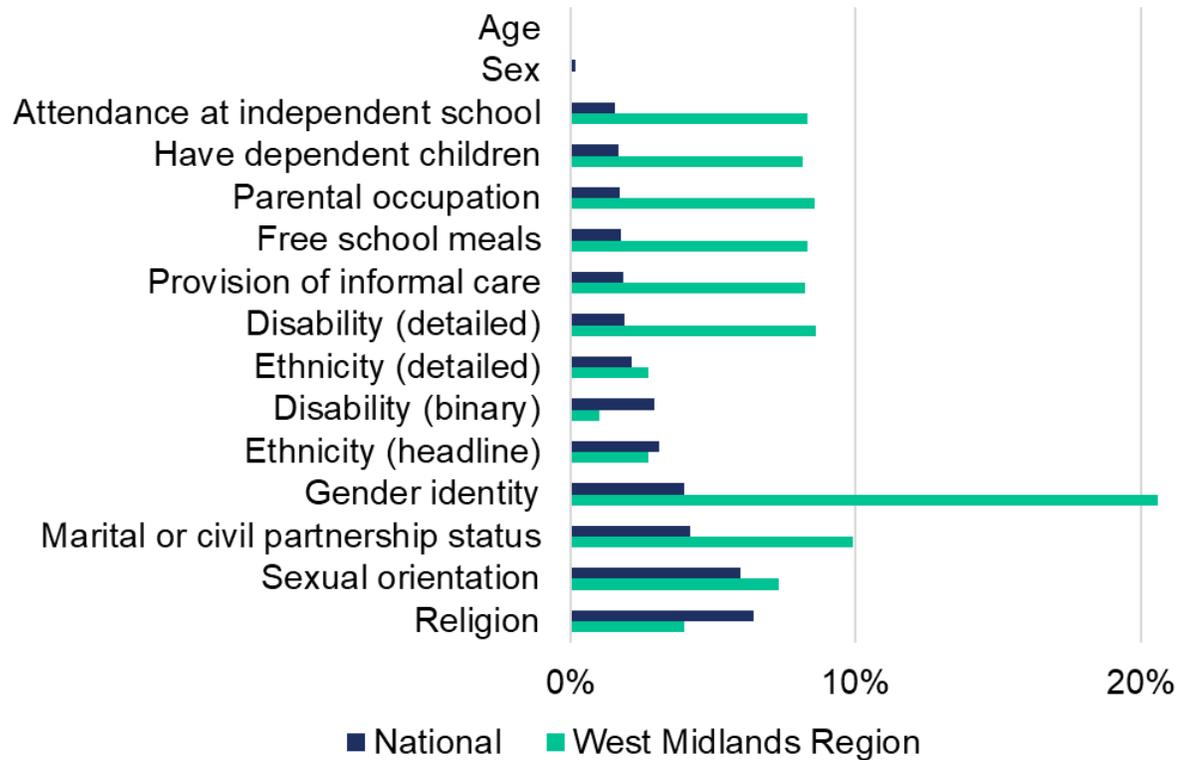
Proportion of workforce where we don't have data for each characteristic



- We received the most complete data for sex – missing only 0.1% of workforce data and no executive data.
- We received the least complete data for socioeconomic characteristics and caring responsibilities.
- However, we received more complete data for these characteristics compared to 2021 and compared to the national data – for example, we're missing 82% of workforce data on parental occupation, compared to 99% in 2021 and 92% nationally.

What are people choosing not to share?

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



- The workforce were least likely to disclose their gender identity – 20.6% responded 'prefer not to say', higher than in the national data (4.0%).
- Across most characteristics, the workforce were less likely to disclose information than the national workforce.
- Executives were least likely to disclose whether they have dependent children (8.0% responded 'prefer not to say', compared to 1% nationally).
- Boards were least likely to disclose their sexual orientation (9.6%, compared to 4.9% nationally).

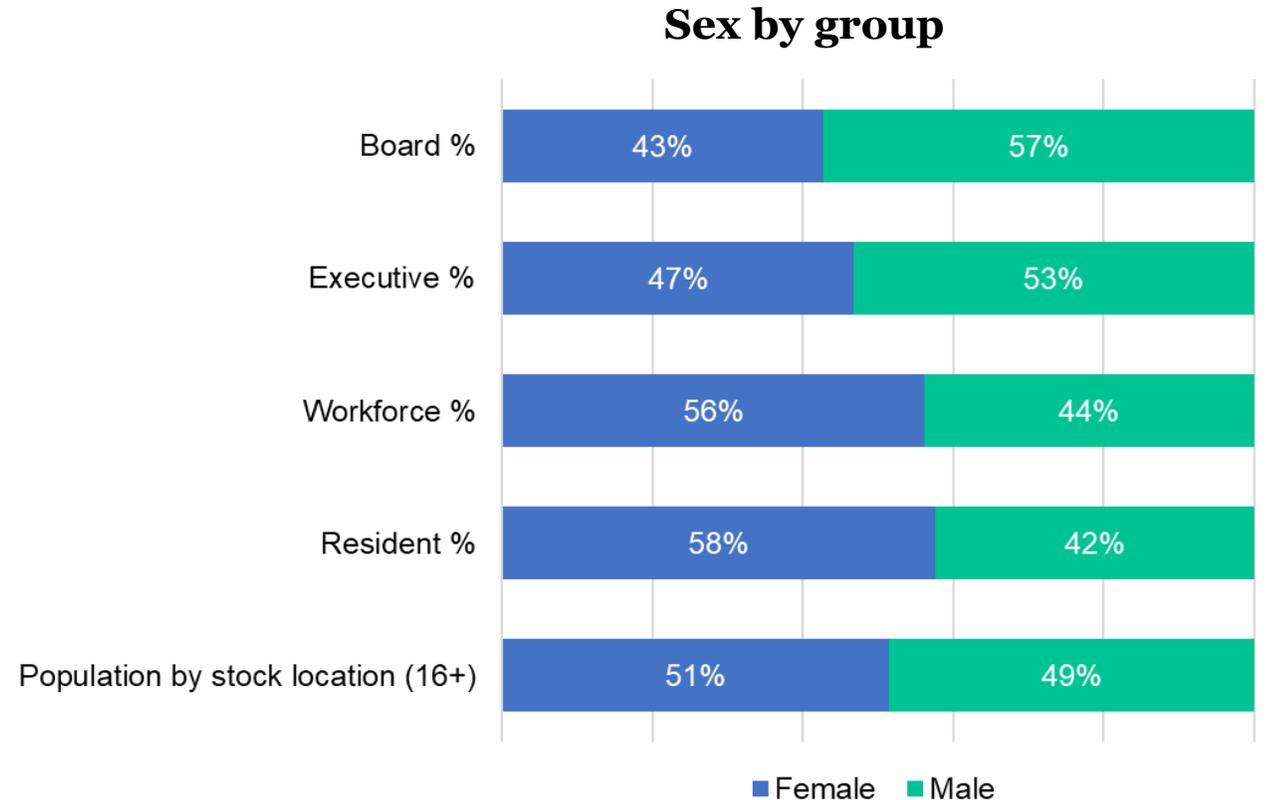
How representative is the workforce?

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

- The workforce is representative of the higher proportion of female residents in homes owned by housing associations based in the West Midlands.
- There is a lack of female representation at leadership level, particularly on boards where 43% are female, compared to 56% of the workforce.
- This is similar to the national data where 44% of board members and 47% of executives are female.
- There are more females in leadership positions compared to 2021, when 37% of board members and 44% of executives in the West Midlands were female.



Gender identity

- Trans* people are underrepresented across all workforce groups – there is no representation of trans men or trans women.
- These figures may hide those who do identify as trans, but did not want to disclose this information – 20.6% of the workforce and 8.6% of board members responded 'prefer not to say' for gender identity.

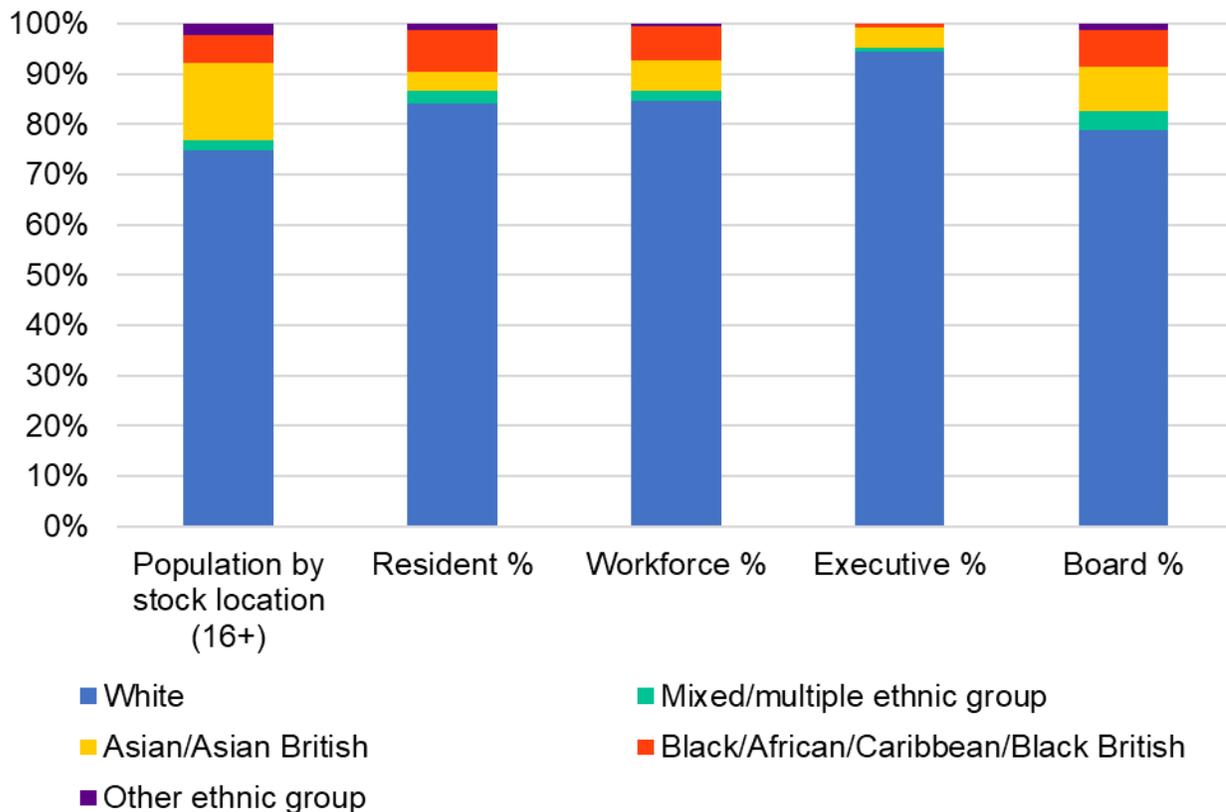
*We are using the term “trans” as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth, as defined by [Stonewall](#).

Gender identity by group

	Population by stock location (16+)	Workforce %	Executive %	Board %
Gender identity same as sex at birth	92.5%	99.6%	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	7.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%

Ethnicity

Ethnicity by group

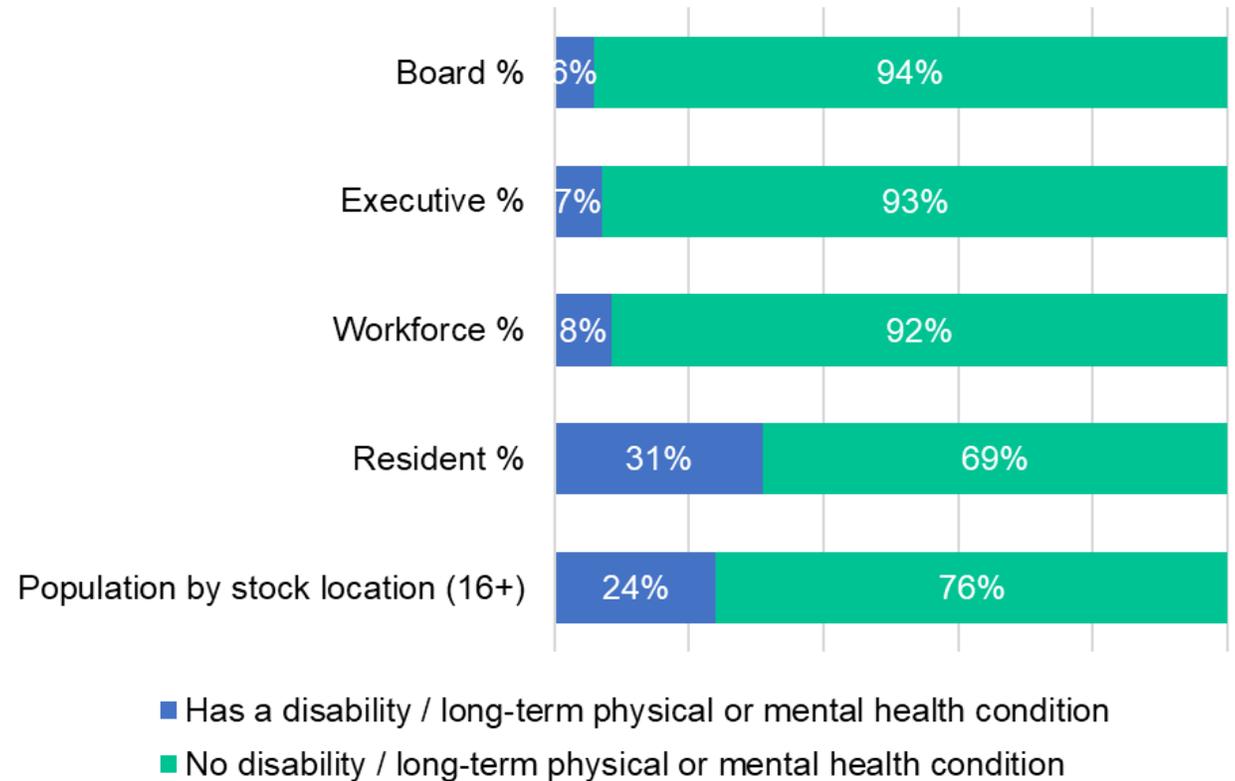


- The workforce closely represents the ethnic diversity of residents.
- Board members are representative of the workforce, but executives are less diverse – 94% of executives are White, compared to 85% of the workforce and only 1% are Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, compared to 7% of the workforce.
- Executive teams are less diverse than they were in 2021, when 90% of executives were White and 5% were Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

Disability

- As with the national data where 9% of the workforce are Disabled, Disabled people are underrepresented across all workforce groups – for example, only 8% of the workforce are Disabled, compared to 24% of the population.
- There has been a small increase in disability representation within the workforce, up from 6% in 2021.
- However, there has been a small decrease in this at leadership level, from 10% to 7% of executives and 7% to 6% of board members.

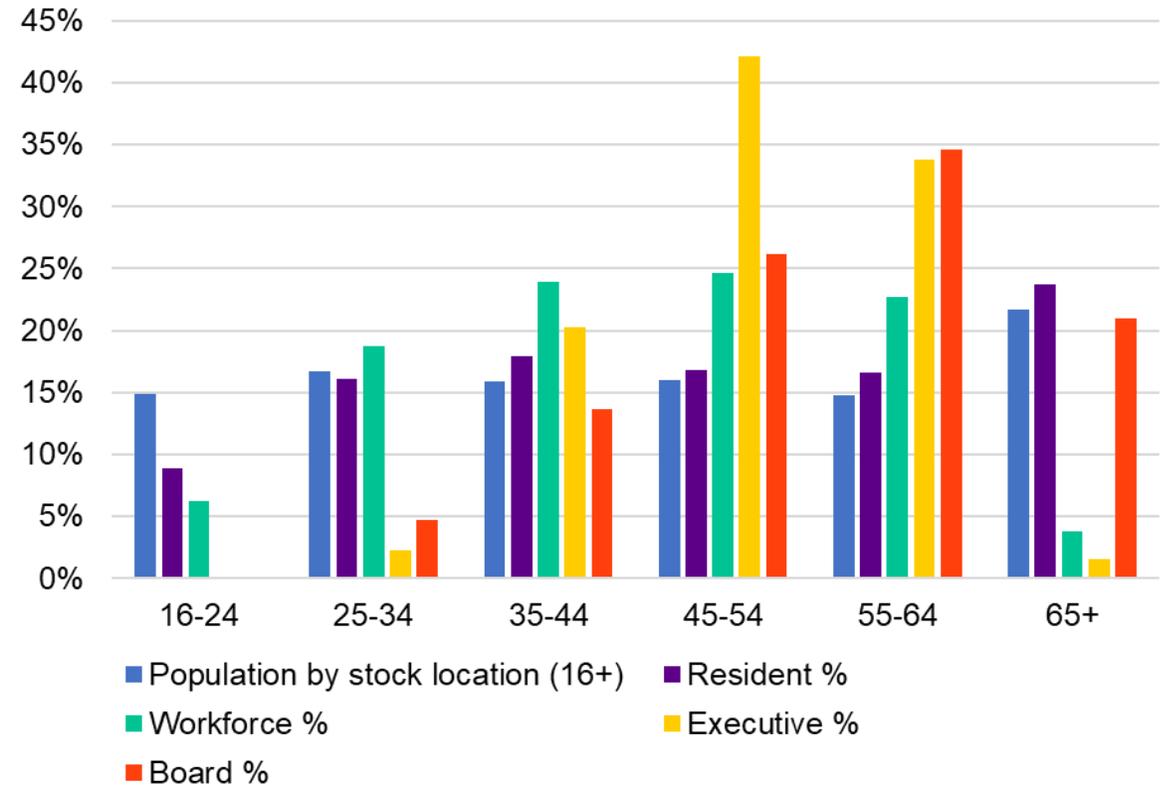
Disability (Yes / No) by group



Age

- The age of the workforce is largely representative of residents and of the population.
- Executive and board members are more likely to be older – for example, 56% of board members are aged 55 and older, compared to 27% of the workforce.
- This is similar to 2021, although as we have seen with the national data, there are more executives aged 35-44 now (20% compared to 17% in 2021).

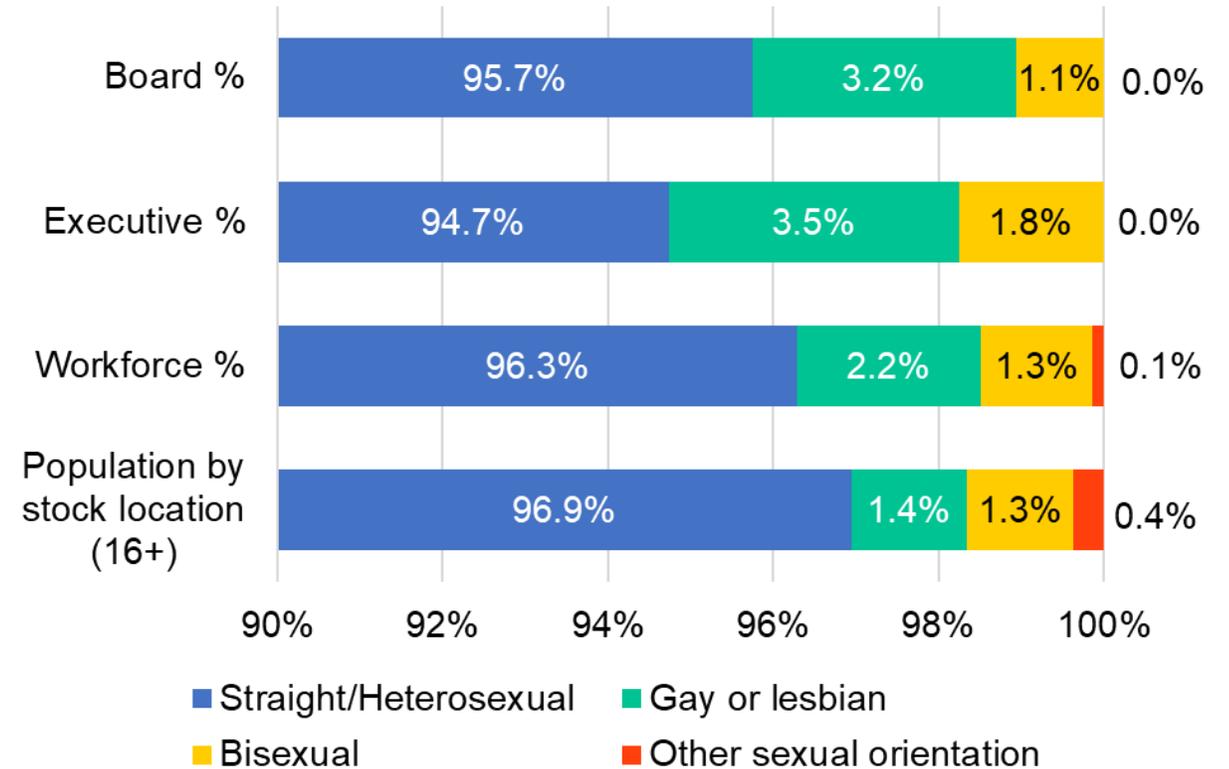
Age by group



Sexual orientation

- Across all workforce groups there is good representation of most sexual orientations apart from those not listed (Other sexual orientations).
- This is similar to the findings from the national data, where, for example, 95.7% of the workforce are straight or heterosexual.
- Compared to 2021, the proportion of gay or lesbian people in leadership positions has halved (from around 7% for both). Although, there are more executives who are bisexual (0.0% in 2021 compared to 1.8% in 2023).

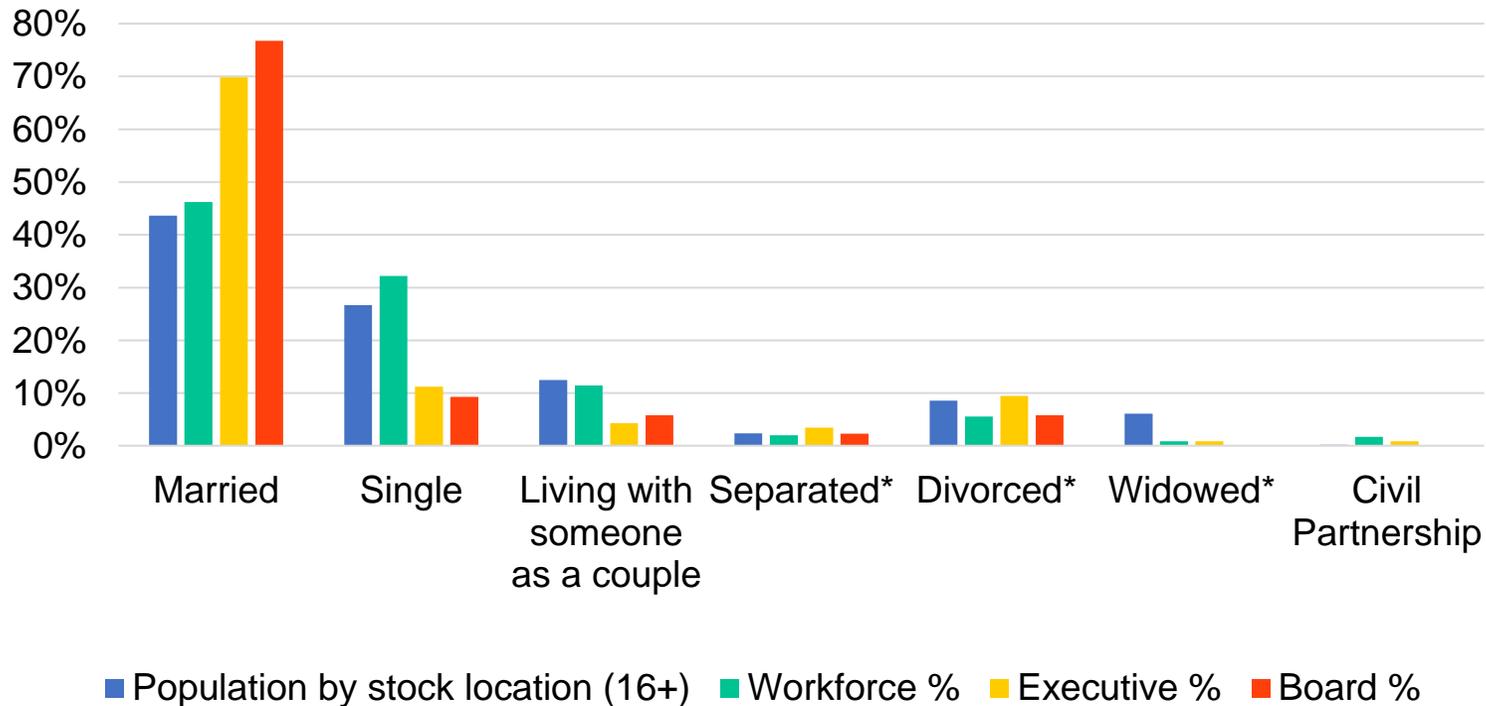
Sexual orientation by group



Please note, axis starts at 90%

Marital and civil partnership status

Marital and civil partnership status by group

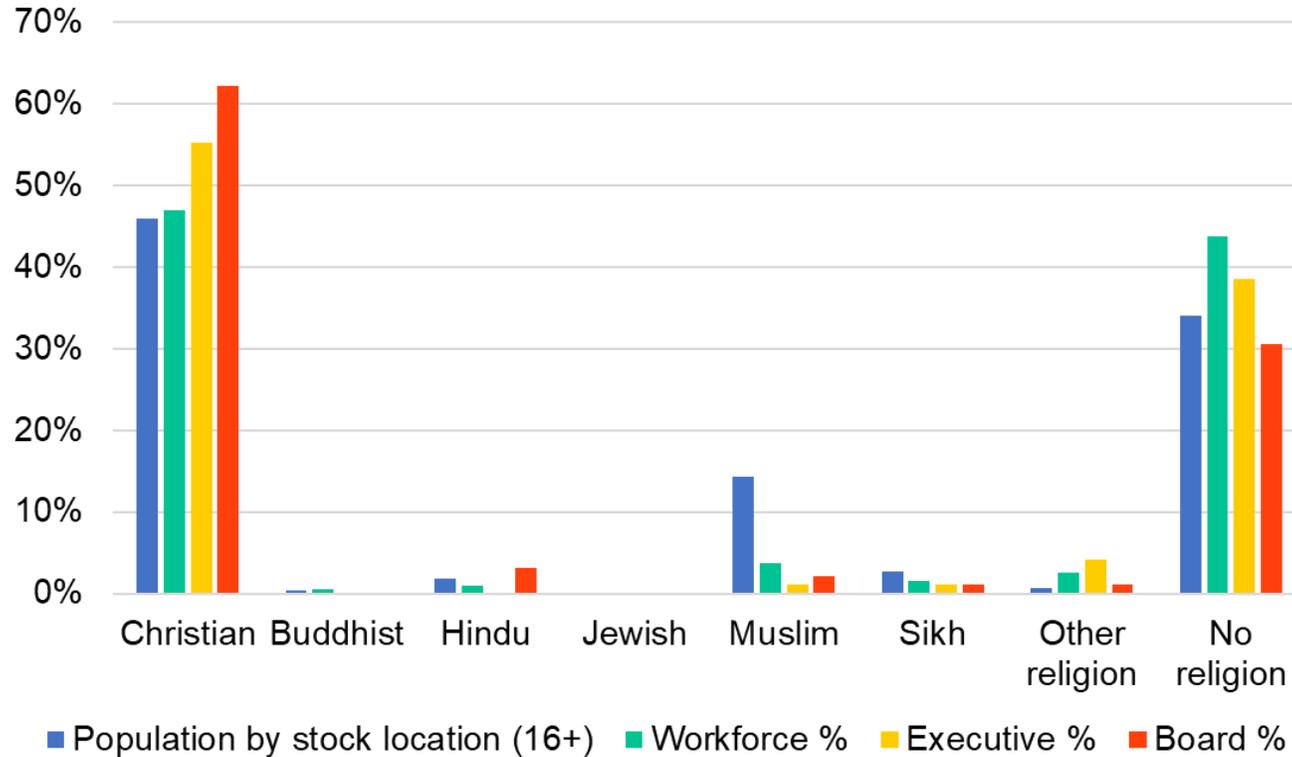


- The workforce closely represents the population.
- As we've seen in the national data, those in leadership positions are more likely to be married – over 70% are married, compared to 46% of the workforce.
- These results are similar to 2021.

*Includes (former) civil partnerships

Religion

Religion by group



- The workforce closely reflects the population, although people who are Muslim are underrepresented across all workforce groups – for example, 4% of the workforce are Muslim, compared to 14% of the population.
- As we've seen in the national data, those in leadership positions are more likely to be religious, Christian in particular - e.g. 62% of board members are Christian, compared to 47% of the workforce.

Areas for future focus

Housing associations in the West Midlands should aim to:

- Increase female representation in leadership positions.
- Increase ethnic diversity in executive teams.
- Increase the representation of Disabled people across all workforce groups.
- Engage with staff to build trust, confidence, and greater inclusivity so that fewer staff respond 'prefer not to say' for questions around gender identity, and marital or civil partnership status.

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