How diverse is the housing association workforce in the South East of England?

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

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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.

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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 East of England.

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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.

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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.

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Who submitted their data?

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

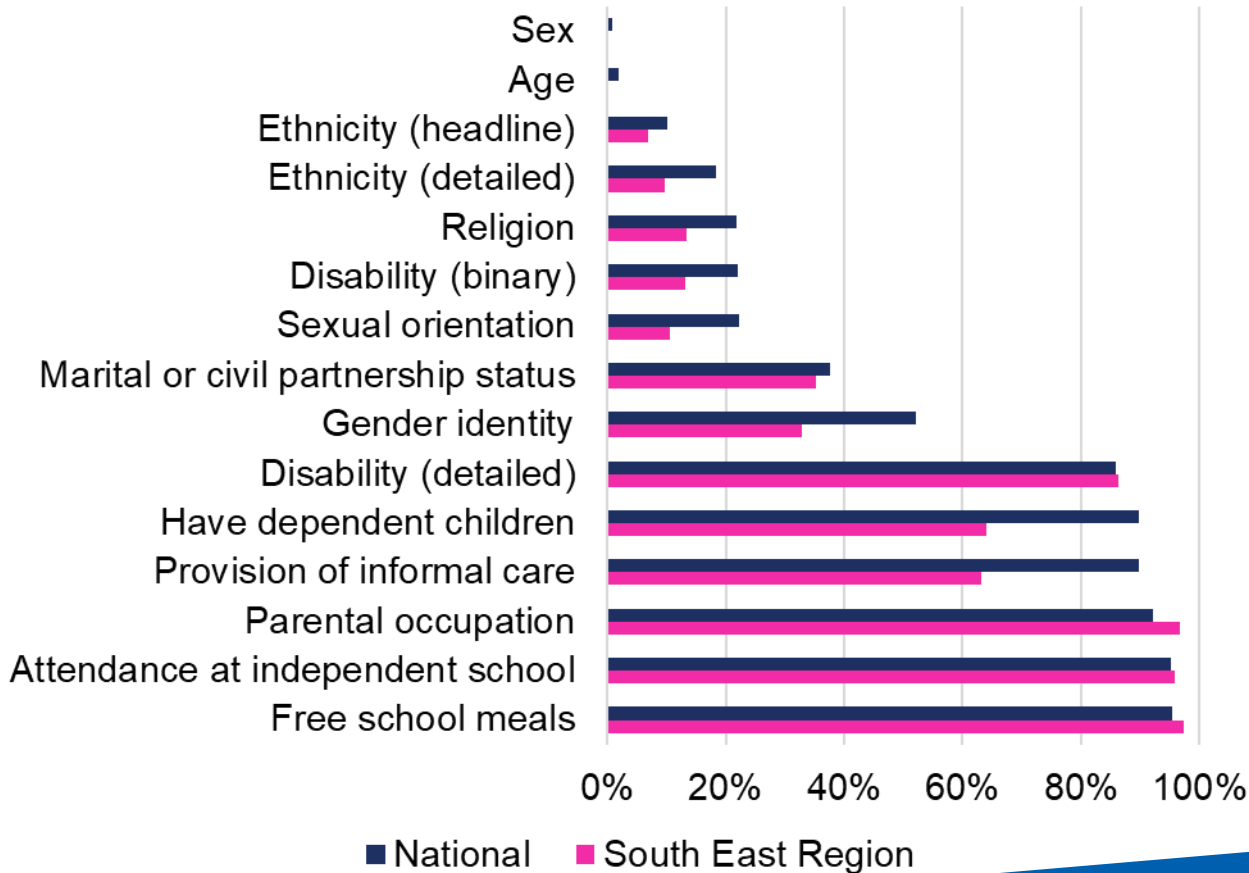| Region	Number of submissions	Response as % of member SDR stock in region
London	39	85%
North West	32	60%
East of England	19	84%
South East	**18**	**63%**
West Midlands	18	79%
Yorkshire and Humberside	18	92%
South West	17	92%
North East	11	99%
East Midlands	5	87%
Grand total (England)	177	79%

- 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 South East of England, representing 63% of members' homes.

- All 18 provided at least some data on their workforce, 17 also provided executive and board data, and 10 provided resident data.

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South East of England results

Where are the biggest gaps in data?

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

Chart categories (top to bottom): Sex, Age, Ethnicity (headline), Ethnicity (detailed), Religion, Disability (binary), Sexual orientation, Marital or civil partnership status, Gender identity, Disability (detailed), Have dependent children, Provision of informal care, Parental occupation, Attendance at independent school, Free school meals

Legend: ■ National ■ South East Region

- We received the most complete data for sex where we have no gaps in workforce data, followed by age.

- We received the least complete data for socioeconomic characteristics, where the data gaps are larger than in the national data, but fewer compared to 2021.

- For most other characteristics, there are fewer gaps compared to the national data, particularly caring responsibilities where we're missing 63% of workforce data on provision of informal care, compared to 90% nationally.

- We received more complete data for caring responsibilities compared to 2021 – for example, in 2021 we were missing 92% of workforce data on provision of informal care.

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What are people choosing not to share?

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

Legend: National (dark navy), South East Region (pink)

Categories (top to bottom): Age, Sex, Attendance at independent school, Have dependent children, Parental occupation, Free school meals, Provision of informal care, Disability (detailed), Ethnicity (detailed), Disability (binary), Ethnicity (headline), Gender identity, Marital or civil partnership status, Sexual orientation, Religion

X-axis: 0% to 8%

- The workforce and executives are least likely to disclose their sexual orientation – 5.3% of the workforce and 4.3% of executives responded 'prefer not to say' to these characteristics.

- Compared to the national data, the South East workforce are more likely to disclose most characteristics, particularly gender identity and marital and civil partnership status.
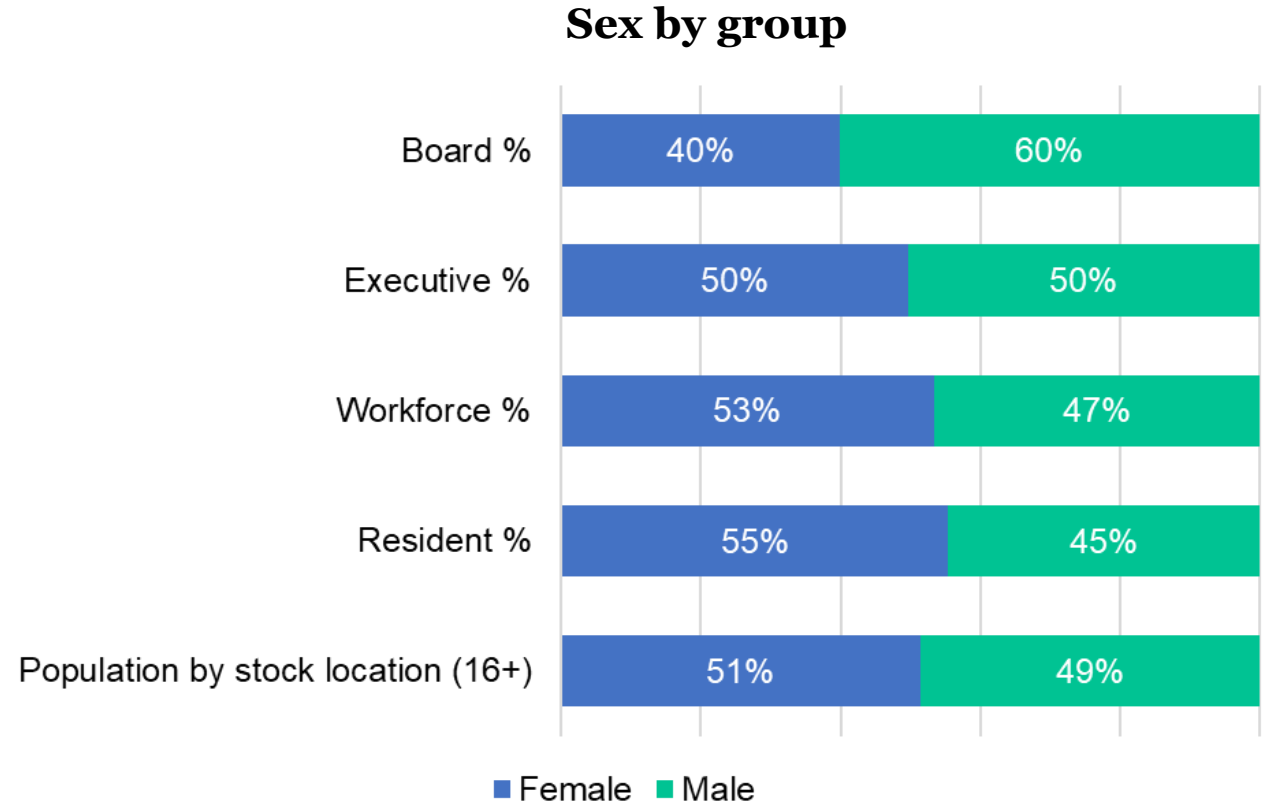
How representative is the workforce?

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 where 53% of the workforce are female, compared to 51% of the population and 55% of residents.

- There are fewer female executives compared to the workforce, however, representation has increased since 2021, from 42% of executives to 50% in 2023.

- However, there is still a lack of female representation on boards – only 40% of boards are female, down from 43% in 2021 and lower than in the national data, where 44% of board members are female.

Sex by group

Group	Female	Male
Board %	40%	60%
Executive %	50%	50%
Workforce %	53%	47%
Resident %	55%	45%
Population by stock location (16+)	51%	49%

■ Female ■ Male

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Gender identity

- Trans* people are underrepresented across all workforce groups.

- Reflecting the national data, there is no representation of people whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth in leadership positions.

- We received more complete data on gender identity compared to the national data. Across all workforce groups we're missing 15-33% of data on gender identity, compared to 44-53% nationally.
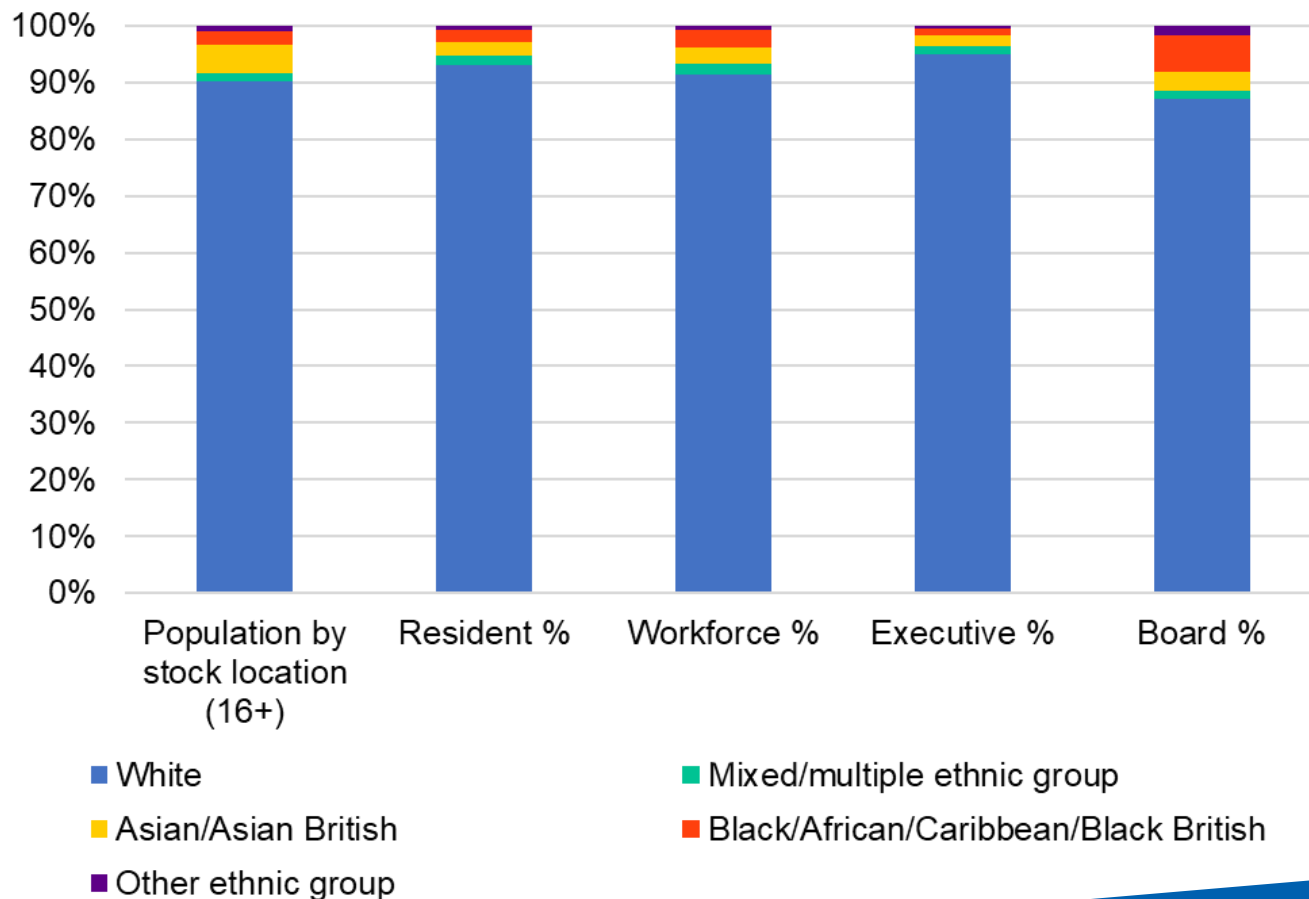
*We are using the term "trans" as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth, as defined by Stonewall.

Gender identity by group

	Population by stock location (16+)	Workforce %	Executive %	Board %
Gender identity same as sex at birth	94.1%	99.8%	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	5.7%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

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Ethnicity

Ethnicity by group

- White
- Asian/Asian British
- Other ethnic group
- Mixed/multiple ethnic group
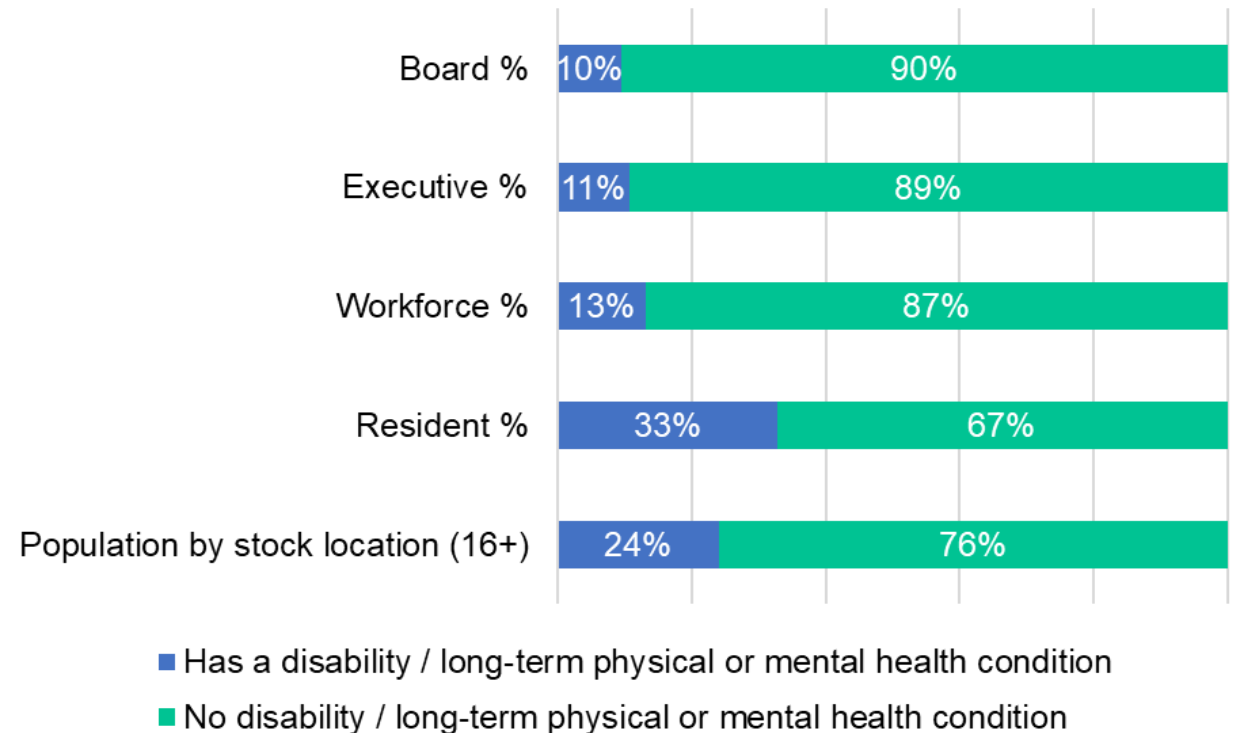- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

- The workforce is representative of the population, which is less ethnically diverse compared to the national data.

- There is good representation on boards, with more ethnic diversity compared to 2021 – for example, 7% of board members are Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, up from 4% in 2021.

- However, executive positions are less diverse where 95% of executive positions are White, compared to 92% in 2021.

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Disability

- Disabled people are underrepresented across all workforce groups – for example, 13% of the workforce have a disability or long-term health condition, compared to 24% of the population and 33% of residents.

- Despite an increase in the proportion of Disabled people across all workforce groups since 2021 (from 9% to 13% of the workforce), an increase in the proportion within the population (from 20% to 24%) means that Disabled people are still underrepresented.

Disability (Yes / No) by group

Group	Has a disability / long-term physical or mental health condition	No disability / long-term physical or mental health condition
Board %	10%	90%
Executive %	11%	89%
Workforce %	13%	87%
Resident %	33%	67%
Population by stock location (16+)	24%	76%

■ Has a disability / long-term physical or mental health condition
■ No disability / long-term physical or mental health condition
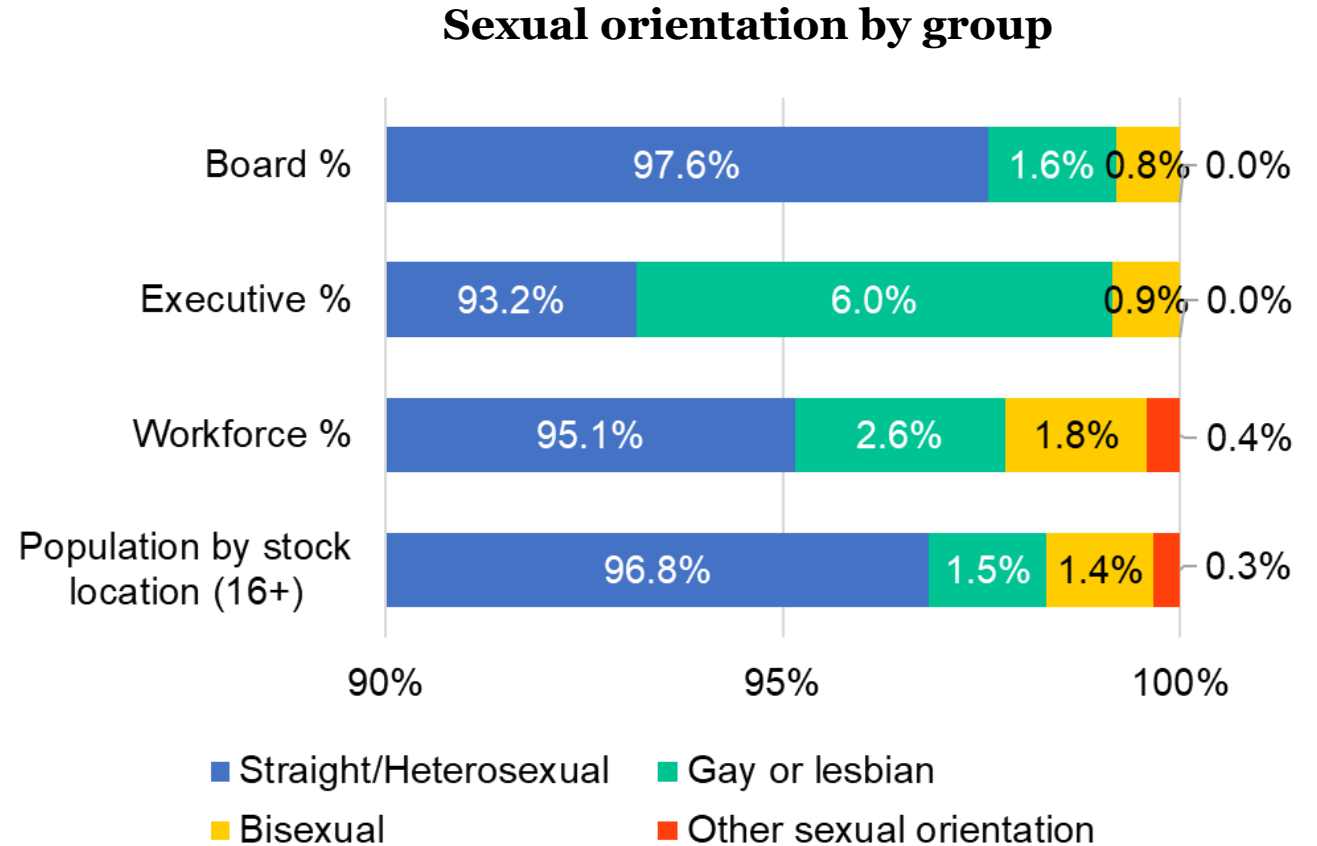
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Age

- As with the national data, people in leadership positions are more likely to be older compared to the workforce.

- For example, 66% of boards are aged 55 and over, compared to 25% of the workforce

- Reflecting the national data, executives are younger than they were in 2021 – for example, 23% of executives are now aged 35-44, compared to 15% in 2021.
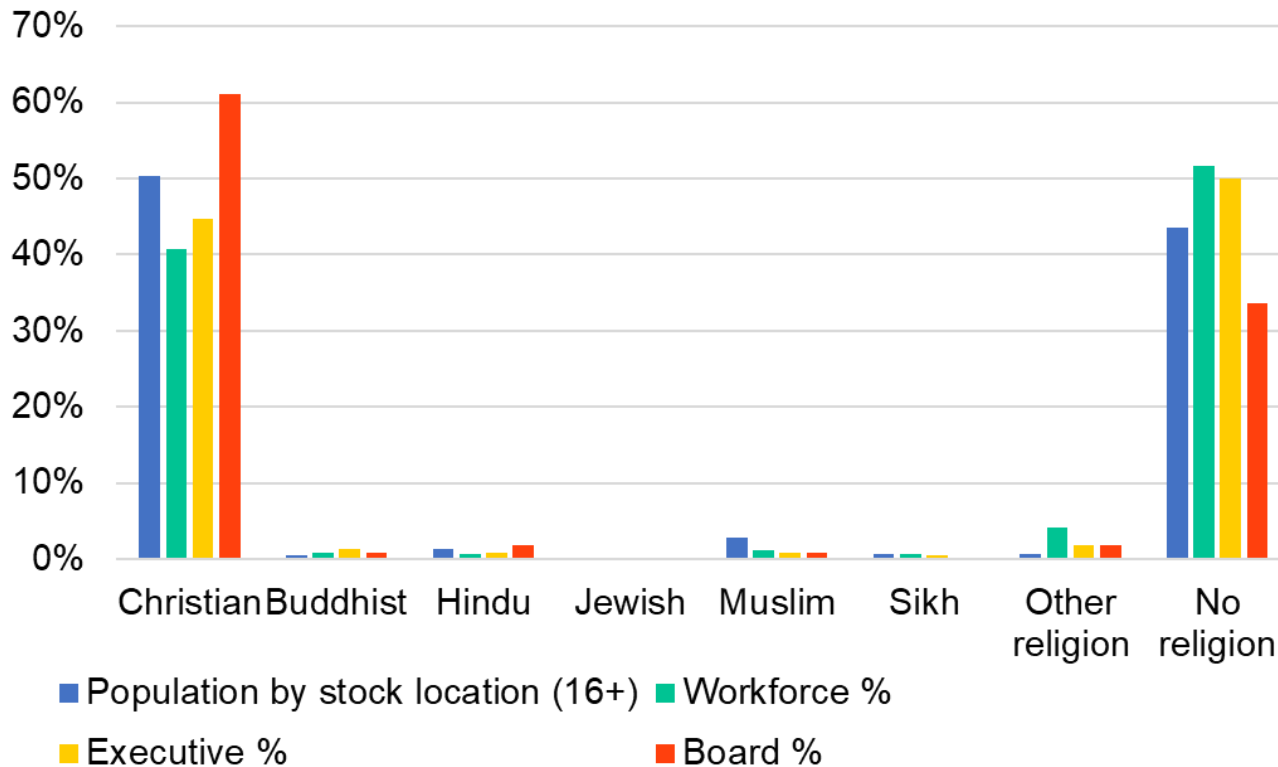
Age by group
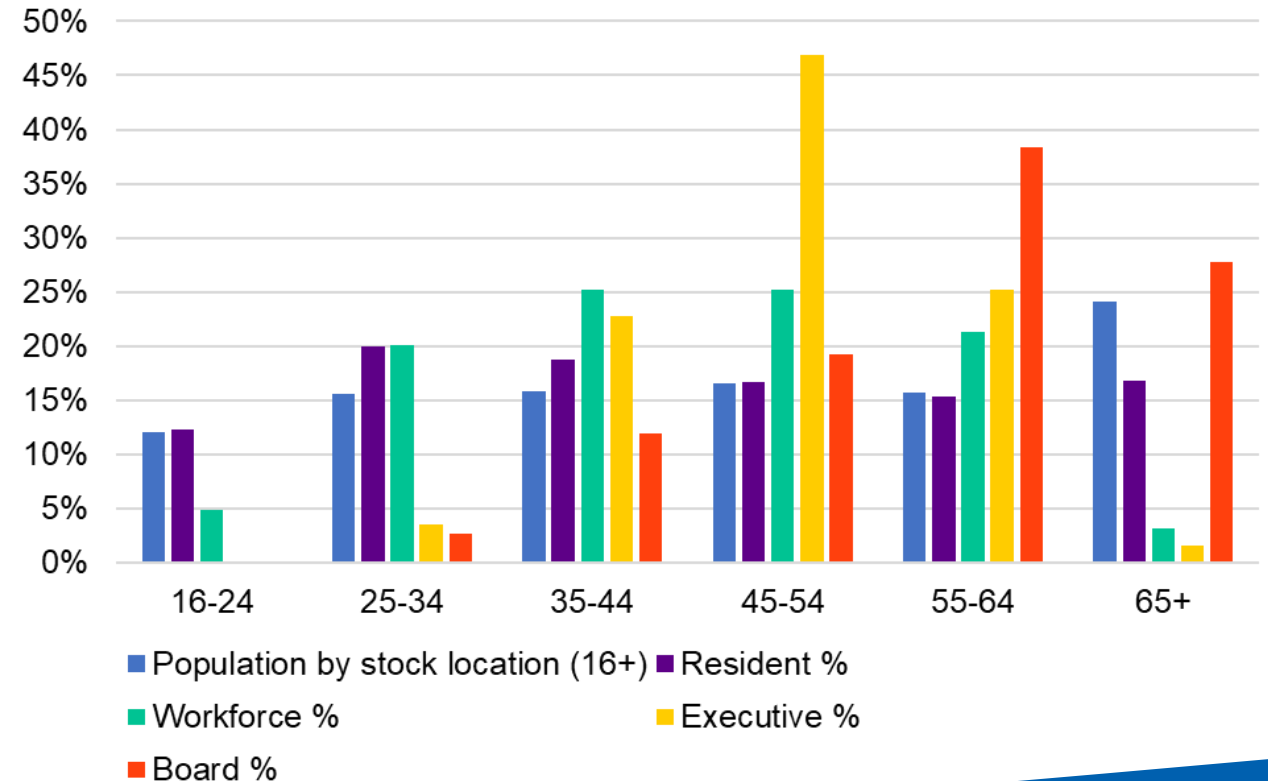
Sexual orientation

- People who are gay or lesbian are represented across all workforce groups – 6.0% of executives are gay or lesbian, compared to 2.6% of the workforce.

- Within leadership positions, people who are bisexual or other sexual orientations are underrepresented. Although there is a small increase compared to 2021, when there was no representation.

Sexual orientation by group

	Straight/Heterosexual	Gay or lesbian	Bisexual	Other sexual orientation
Board %	97.6%	1.6%	0.8%	0.0%
Executive %	93.2%	6.0%	0.9%	0.0%
Workforce %	95.1%	2.6%	1.8%	0.4%
Population by stock location (16+)	96.8%	1.5%	1.4%	0.3%

■ Straight/Heterosexual ■ Gay or lesbian
■ Bisexual ■ Other sexual orientation

Please note, axis starts at 90%

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Religion

Religion by group

- The workforce are more likely to have no religion and less likely to be Christian compared to the population – e.g. 52% of the workforce reported that they don't have a religion, compared to 44% of the population.

- Board members are more likely to be Christian and less likely to have no religion – 61% of board members are Christian, compared to 41% of the workforce.

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Marital and civil partnership status

Marital and civil partnership status by group
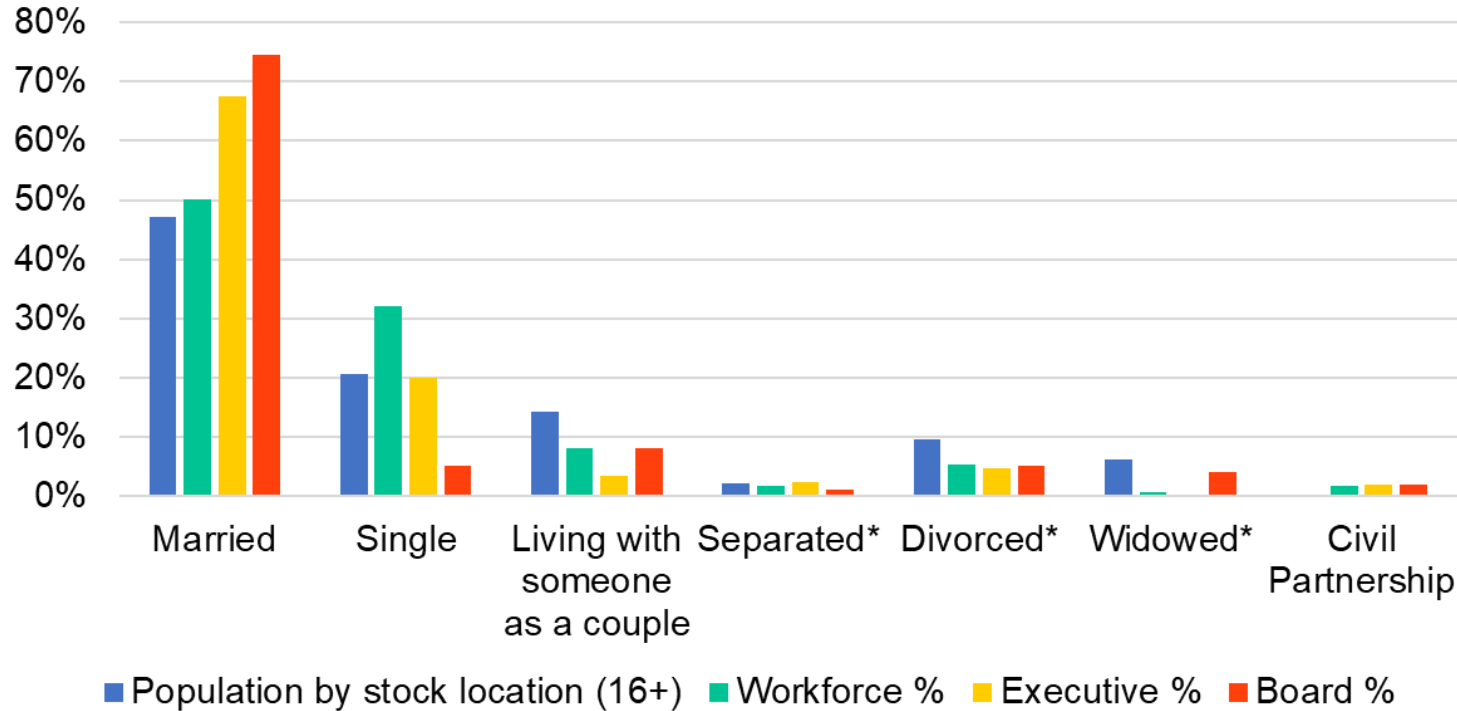
- The workforce are more likely to be single - 32% compared to 21% of the population.

- Those in leadership positions are more likely to be married – 67% of executives and 74% of board members, compared to 50% of the workforce.

*Includes (former) civil partnerships

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Key areas for improvement

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

- Increase the representation of Disabled people across all workforce groups.

- Increase the representation of people who identify as trans across all workforce groups.

- Increase female representation across leadership positions, particularly on boards.

- Increase ethnic diversity across executive positions.

- Close gaps in data by collecting more complete data from staff, particularly on socioeconomic characteristics.

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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.

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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

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