

Migrant Representation in UK Local Government Workforces

Advancing Justice and
Participation for Equitable
Governance

Research Report

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Foreword from the CEO

At the Social Equity Centre, we envision a world where first-generation migrants are fairly and proportionately represented across the public sector, and where workforces reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Yet our research shows that, despite progress on workforce diversity, significant data and representation gaps remain when it comes to migrants in Local Government. Of the six Local Government organisations we examined, only one collected any information on the nationality or migration experience of their staff—even though 16% of the UK population, and 40% of Londoners, were born outside the UK.

We believe in multi-dimensional participation – where individuals and communities are not only heard but actively shape the policies that affect their lives. While important progress has been made in supporting migrant participation in other areas, access to employment opportunities in Local Government and the wider public sector remains significantly overlooked.

Our 2025 survey highlights a strong desire among migrants to be better represented by their councils, alongside concerns of tokenism, exclusion, and unequal treatment across migrant communities. These findings underscore what we already know: public institutions cannot deliver truly equitable services without understanding—and reflecting—the communities they serve. This report sets out to address these gaps and amplify the voices of migrants who are too often left out of public sector workforces and decision-making spaces.

Change is possible. Alongside these challenges, we also showcase examples of good practice – Local Government bodies that are taking meaningful steps toward more inclusive representation. At the Social Equity Centre, we are not just focused on increasing numbers—we're committed to building a future where first-generation migrants can lead, shape, and drive change to a more inclusive society for all.

This report is both a call to action and a resource. It challenges Local Government to recognise the value of migrant voices and lived experience in shaping more equitable services and governance. It also offers practical insights and pathways for progress.

As part of this call to action, we invite Local Government authorities to join us in signing the **Migrant Inclusive Local Government Pledge** – a commitment to becoming more inclusive and ensuring that migrants have equal opportunities to join and thrive in the sector.



Teo Benea
CEO and Co-founder,
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We hope the report sparks deeper conversations and bold action toward closing the representation gap and creating a more equitable, responsive and inclusive Local Government.

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1.

Executive summary

It is widely recognised that Local Government authorities and other institutions deliver better and more responsive services when their workforces reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Yet despite the increase in legislation requiring reporting on workforce diversity and pay gap data, there is very little information about the migrant workforce in Local Government in England and Wales. This is despite the existence of large and growing migrant populations in the UK. For example, 16% of the UK population is foreign-born, a rise of 34% between the 2011 and 2021 Census; in London's population, 40% were born outside the UK¹.

Of the six Local Government authorities included in our research, only one collected any data on employees' nationality or migrant experience. This one case example suggested a wide disparity between migrant Local Government workforce representation when compared to the wider borough's migrant population.

Yet migrants themselves, as indicated by a national survey we conducted in 2025, expressed a clear desire to be better represented by their Local Government workforce. Respondents also offered a range of practical suggestions for improvement. On broader issues of engagement of migrant groups, many reported experiences of limited and tokenistic engagement, unequal treatment towards migrant groups over others and a sense of being treated poorly by council structures and staff – all of which reinforce feelings of discrimination and exclusion.

Despite these challenges, the survey highlighted examples of good practice, where authorities had taken positive steps to engage and represent migrant communities effectively.

¹Migration Observatory (2024) *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*.

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

2.

Recommendations

- As evidenced by this research, more policy and community-targeted actions are required to progress towards meaningful migrant inclusion in Local Government workforces.
- The recommendations are proposed in response to the key findings of this study and are intended to inform policy, practice, and future research aimed at improving migrant representation within Local Government workforces in the UK.

National Policy

- Support Local Government organisations with their reporting requirements by producing clearer guidelines on reporting workforce ethnicity and migration related data.
- Encourage accountability by establishing clear guidance on the frequency of workforce diversity reporting, standardising channels for publication, adopting consistent frameworks for measuring ethnicity, and ensuring identified data gaps are acknowledged and addressed.
- Align policy actions with current evidence on the relationship between migration and ethnicity in relation to the accuracy of ethnicity data reporting.

Local Policy

- Local Authorities to improve workforce ethnicity reporting by ensuring their workforce diversity assessments follow government ethnicity standards and best practices for data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Prioritise inclusion of all groups through explaining which frameworks and the methodologies have been used in diversity reports, including explanations of estimates, grouping of ethnic categories (e.g. "White Other") and any inclusion/exclusion criteria applied – while recognising the diverse populations in their area.
- Aim for proportionate and meaningful representation by benchmarking workforce data against local population profiles, with clear representation goals and action plans.
- Enhance engagement policies to include employment in Local Government as an avenue for participation in line with recent research and policy developments.

- Develop meaningful dialogue with diverse communities about participation. This includes capacity-building for community organisations to act as champions promoting local recruitment opportunities, alongside volunteering, democratic engagement, consultation responses, and community organising.
- Advertise employment opportunities more widely – including in community languages and public spaces such as libraries (identified in our research as key access points for migrants). For example, book displays in community languages could double as advertising spaces.
- Tackle migrant under-employment and local skills shortages by providing targeted training programmes aligned with the requirements of Local Government roles.
- Organise consultations on workforce diversity reporting to raise awareness of the data, its importance, and how well residents feel represented or visible in the Local Government workforce.

Research

- Address the significant gaps identified in this report by expanding on current findings to produce more in-depth, nationwide research on migrant participation in Local Government employment.
- Explore migrant diversity, systemic and policy barriers to participation, and issues of intersectionality.

3.

Introduction

This research, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, explores the representation of migrant groups in the UK Local Government workforce, focusing on six local authorities. It aims to identify gaps in migrant workforce representation and use this evidence to coordinate strategies – in partnership with public sector organisations – to increase migrant representation in their workforce as a reflection of the local population diversity.

We use the term “migrant” adopted by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) as someone who ‘crosses State boundaries to live in another country for a minimum length of time’².

We sought to answer the following questions:

Main Research Question

- To what extent are migrant groups represented in the UK Local Government workforce across six selected authorities (five in London and one in Birmingham)?

Sub Questions

- How does the representation of migrant groups in public sector employment compared to their presence in the broader population of each borough?
- What recruitment and retention strategies are employed by Local Government to encourage the inclusion of migrant groups in public sector roles?
- What are the gaps in current data regarding migrant representation, particularly in disaggregating categories like ‘White Other,’ and how do these gaps affect our understanding of migrant employment in the public sector?
- To what extent do migrant communities feel they are represented by their Local Government?

²<https://www.iom.int/fundamentals-migration>

This research is grounded in the Social Equity Centre's mission of breaking down barriers for **first-generation migrants** in the UK. Our work focuses on addressing their underrepresentation in the public sector, with short-term efforts concentrated on closing the representation gap in Local Government.

As this report confirms, the UK public sector does not reflect the diversity of its communities. **First-generation migrants** are significantly underrepresented in decision-making spaces.

Years of experience working with and supporting migrants has taught us that public decision-making processes overlook the needs of first-generation migrants as the system is not designed to accommodate their perspectives. As a result, unintended hierarchies have emerged, where some migrants are included while others are not. New and emerging communities often encounter more obstacles than migrant communities with longstanding ties to the UK.

One of Social Equity Centre's key missions is to research the representation gaps to drive policy change in the public sector to inform recruitment strategies that are also inclusive of migrants.

The research took place from summer 2024 to early 2025 and was conducted in two stages. Initial desk-based stage focused on a literature review of the UK migrant labour force, along with an analysis of how the workforces of six Local Government organisations (the London Boroughs of Camden, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Harrow, Islington and Birmingham City Council) reflect their local migrant populations. This was achieved through analysing workforce data from each of these organisations published under the Public Sector Equality Duty of the 2010 Equality Act³, and drawing comparisons with the 2021 UK Census⁴.

The second stage comprised empirical research operationalised through a survey of migrants focusing on their experiences and perceptions of migrant workforce representation and engagement within their local area.

The six authorities represent some of the most diverse populations in the UK. In line with our funding priorities and our mission to support migrant inclusion in Local Government – particularly in London and the West Midlands – we selected five London boroughs with both new and established migrant communities, along with Birmingham.

We acknowledge the limitations of this scope, and our recommendations lay the ground for more expansive research across all London boroughs and other regions in the UK.

³Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2020) *Specific duties in England and for non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales*. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/specific-duties-england-and-non-devolved-public-authorities>

⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>

4.

Literature review

The extent to which migrant communities are equitably represented within local government employment structures remains underexplored in both scholarly and policy fields despite the large migrant populations living in the UK and particularly in the context of ongoing debates around social inclusion, diversity, and public sector equity. Local government, as the tier of governance closest to communities, plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive employment practices and fostering a representative workforce. This review section seeks to examine existing research, identifying key themes, approaches, and gaps in the literature that inform our understanding of institutional diversity and migrant participation in the public sector.

4.1 Framing migrant participation

Most migrant participation in public life discussion focus on achieving political representation as a success for giving migrants a voice in shaping policies or as the peak of the migratory career⁵, which scholars argue goes beyond job security or immigration status to also include recognition and influence⁶. However, there is limited understanding on migrant access to employment in local government as an area where local policies are shaped and influenced, and where the diversity of perspectives are essential to developing meaningful interventions that benefit all.

The predominant terminology on migrant involvement in most policy spaces⁷ in the UK⁸ and world-wide⁹ is framing their participation as integration, with some recognising the term's complexity and controversy. As scholar Mikkell Rytter notes, '*integration* talk is highly racialised' and "the connections between *integration* = ethnicity = culture = race in public and political discourses are rarely addressed"¹⁰.

⁵ Martiniello, M. (2025). The superdiverse city: a paradise for immigrant integration and harmonious cohabitation? Insights from Belgium*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2025.2461246>

⁶ Martiniello, M., & Rea, A. (2014). The concept of migratory careers: Elements for a new theoretical perspective of contemporary human mobility. *Current Sociology*, 62(7), 1079–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114553386>

⁷ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/policy-primer-integration/>

⁸ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627cc6d3d3bf7f052d33b06e/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf>

⁹ <https://unitedkingdom.iom.int/iom-uk-refugee-and-migrant-integration-hub>

¹⁰ Rytter, M. (2018) 'Writing Against Integration: Danish Imaginaries of Culture, Race and Belonging', *Ethnos*, 84(4), pp. 678–697. doi: 10.1080/00141844.2018.1458745

The use of the contested term integration also strips migrants of agency¹¹, posing them as receivers of support rather than contributors to society despite evidence of their contribution¹². With integration being such a contested term, we at Social Equity Centre align with emerging scholarly research which supports the use of *participation* as an encompassing term when referring to migrant access to public life opportunities. This approach empowers migrants to become active agents in accessing public positions and shape policies.

4.2 UK Migrant Labour force

According to the Migrant Observatory Project, there are approximately six million foreign-born people employed in the UK, making up nearly a fifth of the working population¹³. This has doubled over the past 20 years, with non-EU migrants being the main contributors to recent growth. Migrants are overrepresented in certain sectors, such as hospitality, transport and storage, health and social care, information and communication technologies.¹⁴ Factors that shape employment occupation and career progression include ‘migrants’ varying levels of education and skills, how well they speak English, family and caring responsibilities, social networks, the extent to which UK employers recognise their foreign qualifications, and discrimination¹⁵. In addition, migrants are more likely to work in jobs for which they were overqualified—i.e. their education level is above that typically required for the job. See our *Barriers to Participation* section for a comprehensive exploration of these barriers.

This problem of over qualification is unevenly distributed across migrant groups. For instance, 13% of workers born in “EU-14” countries (EU members before 2004) were over-qualified for their current jobs, this leaps to 39% for workers in “EU-2” countries (Romania and Bulgaria)¹⁶.

Migrant workers were also more likely than workers born in the UK to be employed in non-permanent jobs, work night shifts and have zero-hour contracts. Issues specific to migration in UK Employment include levels of exploitation that recently prompted the Mayor of London to launch a fund to combat these abuses¹⁷.

¹¹ Mainwaring, C (2016) Migrant agency: Negotiating borders and migration controls, *Migration Studies*, Volume 4, Issue 3 pp289–308, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnw013>

¹² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/impact/case-studies/2022/apr/evidence-proves-true-effect-immigration-uk>

¹³ Migration Observatory (2024) *Migrants in the UK Labour Force: An overview*. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/>

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/home-office-world-regions-and-their-constituent-countries/>

¹⁷ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-announces-ps750000-new-funding-support-migrant-workers-report-reveals-shocking-levels>

The representation of migrants in public sector roles—especially within Local Government—is less well-documented. 5% of migrants work in “Public Administration roles” (general administration e.g. executive, legislative, financial administration etc. at all levels of government and supervision in the field of social and economic life’ compared to 10% of those born in the UK which illustrates a 5% representation gap in this employment category; however, this data covers all levels of Government and doesn’t disaggregate to Local Government level¹⁸.

According to the Local Government Association (LGA), councils in England employ around 1.16 million people. Of these, 75% are women—though only 40% of senior roles are held by women, with a 3.5% gender pay gap¹⁹.

Ethnic diversity is also a concern: while 18% of the UK population is from an ethnically diverse background, only 10% of council staff are from ethnic minority groups. This under-representation is even more pronounced at senior levels, with 97% of council chief executives identifying as White²⁰.

There is limited literature exploring participation of migrants as employees of local government organisations with insufficient detail to thoroughly unpack levels of representation.

Why does this matter?

There are several key principles underpinning the workforce diversity agenda, including those specific to Local Government²¹:

- Workforce diversity is fundamental in organisations that deliver services that meet the needs of diverse populations
- A diverse workforce encourages ‘a broader range of skills and experiences, and a wider range of perspectives and viewpoints within an organisation’ and potentially increases the scope for better decision-making
- Recent events such as the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have highlighted structural inequalities in the UK and particular disadvantages faced by ethnic minorities in the UK. To tackle these inequalities at a local and national level requires reflection about public institutions own biases and inequalities
- Representation creates a sense of possibility and empowers people to access opportunities
- It ensures access to job opportunities and career progression within local public institutions for all residents.

¹⁸ https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-industrial-classification/ONS_SIC_hierarchy_view.html

¹⁹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>

²⁰ <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Workforce%20Infographic%20January%202025.pdf>

²¹ Solace (2022) *Understanding and Improving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Local Government Workforce*. <https://8018031.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8018031/Understanding%20and%20Improving%20ED&I%20in%20the%20Local%20Government%20Workforce.pdf>

4.3 Barriers to participation in Local Government

Policy and academia discussions are progressing towards more inclusive actions, aiming for *meaningful participation* as a desired outcome. With over 16% of UK population born abroad²², migrants’ participation is a necessary and timely topic to help overcome systemic inequalities. On the participation principles of “nothing about us without us” and “doing with” rather than “doing for” or “doing to”, we support the case of a holistic participation approach to migrant inclusion. We identified working in Local Government as being one of the areas lacking migrant representation and visibility, with key problems in recognising migrants, collecting data, and reporting, as well as their inclusion in recruitment priorities and beyond. Rooted in participation theory²³, our work focuses on involving migrants, so they can contribute as equals to the policies and programmes that impact them. On the principle of “*Doing with*” (Figure 1), the aim is to achieve levels of participation where migrants can have not just a say in issues that concern them but are actively shaping public agendas.

Figure 1: A depiction of the hierarchy of participatory research



²² Migration Observatory (2024) *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-an-overview/>

²³ den Houting, J., Higgins, J., Isaacs, K., Mahony, J., & Pellicano, E. (2020). ‘I’m not just a guinea pig’: Academic and community perceptions of participatory autism research. *Autism*, 25(1), 148–163 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320951696>

Many of the survey respondents acknowledged the lack of recognition as a key issue. Many communities feel invisible, unheard, and unacknowledged. Examples of civil society advocacy for recognition include the Coalition for Latin Americans in the UK campaigning for the official recognition of Latin American identity as an ethnic minority in the UK²⁴, the initiative of Polish activists to achieve the official recognition of the Polish identity as an ethnic category separate from *White Other or Eastern European*²⁵ which is a struggle shared by other EU/EEA and non-EU migrant groups and communities, including the Roma communities²⁶ with concrete efforts for recognition through campaigning and advocacy²⁷, and Black and Ethnic Minority Europeans in the UK²⁸.

Secondly, many of these groups are invisible in the currently used ethnicity frameworks. For example, Roma and Eastern European (EU/EE and non-EU) communities are mostly grouped under the ethnic category White, alongside White British local council employees despite overwhelming data showing disparities in leadership roles which are mostly held by White British individuals. Other White groups are being racialised²⁹, lacking support for participation, and facing systemic barriers. For example, the 2023 Ethnic Diversity in Politics and Public Life report³⁰ specifically groups all White ethnicities based on the UK Government's recommendation to use the term ethnic minorities to 'refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group. Ethnic minorities include White minorities, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller groups'³¹. However, the same guidance makes the distinction that "For comparisons with the White group as a whole, we use 'all other ethnic groups combined' or 'ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)' 'creating therefore a tool for exclusion of specific groups and communities that are highly racialised. As scholars discussed, Eastern European or other White migrant groups face ambiguity³² and are invisible due to their whiteness. They argued that "the privilege of whiteness disappears once they start speaking" or, in short, "I'm White until I start speaking"³³.

²⁴ <https://clauk.org.uk/recognition/>

²⁵ https://www.change.org/p/make-polish-families-visible-in-data-collection?redirect_reason=guest_user

²⁶ <https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/mishto-campaign.html>

²⁷ <https://eucitizens.uk/2025/03/17/new-euomec-co-chair-puts-the-spotlight-on-european-romas-in-the-uk/#:~:text=The%20European%20minority%20ethnic%20citizens,family%20members%20in%20the%20UK>

²⁸ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-kingdom/euomec-convenes-online-addressing-challenges-faced-minority-ethnic-eu-citizens-uk_en

²⁹ Grill, J. (2017) 'In England, they don't call you black!' Migrating racialisations and the production of Roma difference across Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(7), pp. 1136–1155. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1329007

³⁰ Uberoi, E & Carthew, H (2023) *Ethnic diversity in politics and public life*. House of Commons Library. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01156/>

³¹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/>

³² Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., & Budginaite-Mackine, I. (2022). The ambiguous lives of 'the other whites': Class and racialisation of Eastern European migrants in the UK. *The Sociological Review*, 70(6), 1081–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221121218>

³³ Rzepnikowska, A. (2018) 'Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(1), pp. 61–77. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1451308.

Problematising the same challenge faced by migrants of Latin American ethnicity or the Roma Gypsy categories and in the general view of public and voluntary sector organisations, White Ethnic Minority populations are grouped under White as a generalisation, contrary to the ONS Census ethnic categorisation as summarised below³⁴:

Ethnic group	ONS Ethnicity categories
Latin American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: Hispanic or Latin American • Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Hispanic or Latin American • Other ethnic group: Hispanic or Latin American
Eastern European	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: Other Eastern European • Other ethnic group: Other Eastern European
National groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other ethnic group: Romanian • Other ethnic group: Polish • Other ethnic group: Lithuanian • Other ethnic group: Bulgarian, • White: Romanian • White: Portuguese • White: Polish, etc
Gypsy Roma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: Roma • Other ethnic group: Gypsy/Romany • Other ethnic group: Roma • White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller

Exemplifying the Local Government approach to this categorisation, the 2020 Birmingham City Council Race Equity Workforce Review uses the following classification:

- *“Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Kashmiri, Pakistani, Asian other.*
- *Black or Black British: African, Caribbean, Black other.*
- *Mixed: Black/Asian, White/Asian, White/Black African, White/Black Caribbean, Mixed other.*
- *Other: Arab, Jewish, Sikh, Vietnamese, Other.*
- *White: Albanian, British, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Irish, White other.”* ³⁵

³⁴https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TSO22/editions/2021/versions/2?showAll=ethnic_group_288a#ethnic_group_288a

³⁵https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/18302/bcc_workforce_race_equality_review

This categorisation groups British and non-EU national identities together, does not specify the Roma ethnicity, and omits any Central or Eastern European identities despite Birmingham being home to large Polish and Romanian communities, among other groups traditionally considered Eastern European³⁶. However, it should be noted that, the review was produced before the latest Census 2021 exercise and before the detailed breakdown of ethnicity classifications as presented above.

Other barriers are structural or systemic such as the immigration status restrictions, with some migrants having a right to work in the UK while others do not, depending on the type of visa they hold or the immigration route to the UK³⁷. For example, while migrants on a sponsored visa are conditioned by their employment contract which guarantees their employment in the UK at the sponsor company only; refugees and asylum seekers are conditioned by their application outcome and excluded from paid work³⁸.

These clear links between migration, racialisation, and ethnicity explain why this report looks at ethnic diversity and migrant identity or status interchangeably.

In other cases, qualifications obtained abroad are not automatically recognised in the UK or cannot be transferred into a UK equivalent. This contributes to the under-employment of migrants. A recent study on Migrants in the UK Labour Market showed that migrants were less likely to claim unemployment benefits while also being more likely to work in jobs they are overqualified for³⁹. The example of the Ukrainian refugees highlighted by an article from Transforming Society on the struggles they face in the UK job market shows the scale of this impact concluding Ukrainians are “highly qualified but underemployed”⁴⁰. This is in line with our previous findings from our first Public Sector Leadership Training which was delivered to Romanian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian nationals in the UK where one of the course attendees had over 11 years of experience in the Ukrainian civil service, they were fluent in 4 languages, including professional proficiency in English, had postgraduate qualifications, and our course was the first time when someone spoke to them about working in the Local Government in the UK. Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers are working in roles significantly below their skill level.

However, as previously noted in this report, underemployment and unemployment impact migrant groups in different ways, showing a heterogeneous picture of UK migrant workforce context. In line with our survey findings, access to secure, better-paid employment opportunities that reflect migrants’ experience and qualifications varies significantly depending on their country or region of origin.

³⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000025/>

³⁷ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/right-to-work-in-the-uk/check-if-you-have-the-right-to-work-in-the-uk/>

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handling-applications-for-permission-to-take-employment-instruction/permission-to-work-and-volunteering-for-asylum-seekers-accessible>

³⁹ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-in-the-uk-labour-market-an-overview/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2025/02/21/three-years-of-war-the-struggles-of-ukrainian-refugees-in-the-uk-job-market/>

The Migration Observatory study found that “most non-EU region-of-origin groups had higher earnings than that of the UK-born in 2022” while “Migrants born in new EU member states (EU-8 and EU-2) had the lowest median earnings.”. Furthermore, as scholarly research showed, migrants from Accession countries such as the ones from Eastern Europe nationalities experience lower unemployment rates while earning lower wages compared to migrants from Western Europe and Old Commonwealth states. The same study explains that “groups which have better outcomes on entry also tend to experience higher rates of progress over time in England”⁴¹.

The barriers explored above act in a complex context which is exacerbated by a lack of trust and limited awareness of local government structures. There are key differences between local administrations across the world so that migrants who come to the UK may have little understanding of the structures and practices of UK public life which migrants may not be aware of or may influence their interactions with Local Government structures in the UK.

As highlighted by the scholarly, policy, and advocacy literature referenced in this report, migrants often face discrimination, exclusion, and bias when accessing public services or in their workplace. Navigating dual identities, intersectionality, and intercultural relationships can be challenging, and it can hinder feelings of belonging and inclusion.

These factors combined lead to hesitancy for migrants to access public sector services and opportunities. This is also confirmed by our survey showing that migrants tend to access only a limited number of local council services.

4.4 Workforce Data reporting

Our research reflects on legal protections for migrant identity as migrants are not a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act. Additionally, local authorities do not have a duty to report on migrant representation or measure the nationality or migration background of their workforces despite important campaigns supported by academics, voluntary sector organisations, and politicians asking for a review of the Equality Act to expand protections to other categories. For example, the Equality Act Review campaign from 2022 asks for protections to be expanded to ‘*immigration status*; homelessness; low socio-economic status and/or poverty’; and others as appropriate⁴². The case law supported by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission in 2016 of a domestic worker on a sponsored visa who was abused by their employer argued that “her immigration status as an overseas domestic worker made her more vulnerable to exploitation than a British national would be”⁴³.

⁴¹ Clark, K. et al. (2018) ‘Local deprivation and the labour market integration of new migrants to England’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(17), pp. 3260–3282. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1481000.

⁴² <https://www.equalityactreview.co.uk/our-work?>

⁴³ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/legal-action-search/clarifying-protections-equality-act-migrant-workers>

While the Commission did not specifically ask for a review of the act, they highlighted how migration and immigration status place people at risk and make them vulnerable. However, there has been no change to the Equality Act to date to include migrants or immigration status as a protected characteristic.

The Equality Act 2010 places statutory obligations on public authorities to prohibit discrimination, harassment or victimisation in employment. It also focuses on users of public services, based on nine protected characteristics, including: race, sex, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

The Act requires organisations to collect data on such characteristics of their workforces and local communities and understand how those with lived experience of these characteristics perceive or experience inequality. The Public Sector Equality Duty is section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. It requires councils to tackle discrimination and inequality by embedding equality considerations into the day-to-day work of all public bodies. As part of compliance with the Equality Duty, councils are required to publish 'statistics on the representation of people with different protected characteristics' including the Local Government workforce^{44 45}. Figure 2 outlines who must publish workforce data alongside other Public Sector Equalities Duties. The Government is, at the time of writing, consulting on whether to include ethnicity and disability pay gap data as well gender pay gap data, as part of compliance with the Duty⁴⁶.

Figure 2. Compliance with the Public Sector Equalities Duty

Number of employees	Publish one or more equality objectives at least every 4 years	Publish information on general duty compliance with regard to the people affected by your policies and practices every year	Publish information on general duty compliance with regard to your employees every year	Publish gender pay gap data by 31 March every year
149 or fewer	✓	✓		
150 to 249	✓	✓	✓	
250 or more	✓	✓	✓	✓

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities>

⁴⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-hub/role-councillor/equality-and#:~:text=and%20community%20cohesion-,At%20the%20heart%20of%20the%20Equality%20Act%20is%20the%20Public,unlawful%20discrimination%2C%20harassment%2C%20and%20victimisation>

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/equality-race-and-disability-bill-mandatory-ethnicity-and-disability-pay-gap-reporting/annex-a-full-list-of-consultation-questions>

In 2022 and again in 2023 (using updated 2021 Census data), Solace attempted to map the ethnic diversity of Local Government workforces using council-published data against the ethnic diversity of the local population, to examine how representative Local Government workforces were.

They noted that while very few councils (and only one in London) did not publish workforce diversity data, there were inconsistencies in diversity reporting relating to:

- public availability of data
- ethnicity categories – some councils utilise the term ‘BAME’ to encompass all minority ethnic groups, others opt for census ethnicity categories (e.g., Asian/Asian British)
- dates of the most recent available reports
- length, detail and examination depth of diversity pay data.

The Solace research⁴⁷ found that London Local Government’ workforces were the most representative of their local demographic, with 37% being comprised of ethnic minorities, while the working age ethnic minority population in London was 46%. In their 2022 report, while ethnic minorities were generally underrepresented in the Local Government workforce, one ethnic minority, Black/Black British were overrepresented⁴⁸. The research also highlighted that ‘representation of minority ethnic groups drops significantly at senior or leadership positions, and among the top earners’⁴⁹.

Looking at Local Government roles more broadly, a 2023 House of Commons report⁵⁰ on ethnic minority representation in politics and public life found that 8.3% of all local authority councillors were from minority ethnic backgrounds, the highest figure yet recorded but still below 50% of overall UK minority ethnic population.

A piece of research by POMOC and the Migrant Democracy Project⁵¹ explored this representation gap in the London Borough of Camden, finding that 57% of councillors identified as White British, compared to 35% of the Camden population.

⁴⁷ Solace (2023) *Understanding and improving Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the local government workforce across the UK, 2023*. <https://8018031.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8018031/Campaigns/Summit%2023/Solace%20EDI%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁴⁸ Solace (2022) *Understanding and Improving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Local Government Workforce*. <https://8018031.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8018031/Understanding%20and%20Improving%20ED&I%20in%20the%20Local%20Government%20Workforce.pdf>

⁴⁹ Solace (2023) *Understanding and improving Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the local government workforce across the UK, 2023*. <https://8018031.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/8018031/Campaigns/Summit%2023/Solace%20EDI%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁵⁰ Uberoi, E & Carthew, H (2023) *Ethnic diversity in politics and public life*. House of Commons Library. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01156/>

⁵¹ POMOC & Migrant Democracy Project (2023) *Does your Local Council Reflect the Diversity of its Population?* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6329c5f7da0467742d04b720/t/64886ea8d2bd414949b2049e/1686662845921/GLA_Diversity_Report+Final.pdf

This report also explored Councillors' Citizenship and Migration Background, finding that 84% of councillors were born in England, compared to only 52% of usual Camden residents, and only 5% identified as first-generation migrants (moved to the UK as a child or adult) meaning that councillors with a migration background are significantly under-represented when compared to the local demographic.

Most importantly, in all cases detailed above, the ONS detailed classification provides a population overview and captures diversity in a more comprehensive manner. However, the discrepancy between its classifications and the policy ethnicity frameworks used in Local Government workforce diversity reporting creates caveats which ultimately lead to the exclusion of many ethnically diverse groups and communities. We, therefore, propose a more harmonised approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting which is detailed in our recommendations section.

5.

Research into migrant workforce of six Local Government organisations

5.1 Local Government Workforce Diversity reports

Our research explores how representative Local Government migrant workforces are of their local population, by comparing workforce data to the wider population demographics recorded in the 2021 Census. In addition, local authority data sets which include the ONS published census data and additional local demographic information were consulted for further insight. This involved desk-based research using the latest published and publicly available Local Government workforce reports and web-based ONS 2021 Census data⁵².

All six boroughs – Camden⁵³, Islington⁵⁴, Westminster⁵⁵, Harrow⁵⁶, Kensington and Chelsea⁵⁷ and Birmingham City Council⁵⁸ – published workforce reports in the last 4 years; four cover 2023–24, one covers 2022–23 and one as far back as 2020–21 (although this local authority did have a gender, race and disability pay gap document covering 2022–23⁵⁹). This research echoes the findings of the Solace research that highlighted inconsistent publishing dates of workforce data. Like Solace, we also found it difficult to access these reports. There is not an obvious pathway through any of the local authority websites to these documents. They were located via a Google search and trusted either because they were linked to the council's URL, or they were data sets published on UK Government sources (data.gov.uk).

⁵² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>

There were other large inconsistencies. These included disparities in the length of the document (the longest was 70 pages, the shortest 7) and most significantly the scope of the data. Four of the six reports had ethnicity pay data relating to mean and median pay gaps, as well as inequalities across pay grades and leadership positions (however, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, did publish this information in a separate document). Four of the six reports also explored average length of employment, recent recruitment and the rate of grievances and dismissals mediated through ethnicity. Five followed a basic BAME ethnicity categorisation methodology (*Black, Asian, Mixed, Other*) but one local authority (the one that in all other respects published the least data) disaggregated these categories further e.g., “*White*” to *White British, White Irish, White Eastern European and white other*). Echoing the Solace research, in some local authorities, minority ethnic groups were overrepresented in the overall workforce, although one consistent finding across the authorities that published ethnicity pay data was that white groups were overrepresented in the highest pay grade categories.

In terms of exploring migrant representation in Local Government workforce, there is a lack of available data. Most local authorities do not measure the nationality or migration background of their employees. Only one borough (Camden) provides data on the nationality of their workforce. However, as this only records current nationality and not the country where employees were born, we couldn’t map the workforce data directly against the census data, which records where residents were born. For example, a first-generation Eastern European migrant who moved to the UK and subsequently attained British citizenship would have recorded their nationality as being “British” on the council form – subsequently their migrant background is obscured. Nonetheless, we were able to make some rough approximations.

In Camden, non-British nationals make up only 12% of the council workforce but 45% of the population was born outside of the UK⁶⁰.

⁵³ Camden Council Employment Profile 2022–23

<https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/4e6f3330-b812-444f-b750-7eb13a61fd9c/employment-profile-2022-2023>

⁵⁴ Islington Council Workforce Profile April 2023 to March 2024

<https://islington.moderngov.co.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=38539>

⁵⁵ Westminster City Council Workforce Profile Report 2024

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/workforce-profile-report-2024>

⁵⁶ London Borough of Harrow Annual Workforce Profile 2023–24

<https://moderngov.harrow.gov.uk/documents/s189500/Appendix%201%20-%20Workforce%20Profile%202023-24.pdf>

⁵⁷ Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea People Profile 2020–21

https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/People_Profile_2020_-_2021_1.pdf

⁵⁸ Birmingham City Council Equality in Employment Monitoring Report 2022–23

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/17001/equality_in_employment_monitoring_report_2022_to_2023

⁵⁹ Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Gender Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Report 2022–23. <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/media/document/gender-ethnicity-and-disability-pay-gap-report-2022-23pdf>

⁶⁰ Camden Council Employment Profile 2022–23

<https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/4e6f3330-b812-444f-b750-7eb13a61fd9c/employment-profile-2022-2023>

To reiterate, the datasets are not equivalent, though would nonetheless indicate that migrants are significantly under-represented in the workforce, although some of this discrepancy will probably be due to the numbers of school-age residents born outside the UK. There is also a statistically significant percentage of “unknowns” (7%) in the Camden workforce nationality dataset.

Figure 3 outlines the migrant demographic according to the 2021 Census in each of the six boroughs of study. This is based on four data categories measured in the Census: the percentage of residents born outside the UK, the percentage rise in non-UK born residents since the last census, the top 4 countries outside the UK where residents were born, and the percentage of residents who hold non-UK passports. A fifth category measured by the census which can indicate the extent of migrant population in each borough (but not presented in Figure 2) are the results of a question which asks respondents to select their national identity from the following options:

- *British only identity*
- *Welsh only identity*
- *Welsh and British only identity*
- *English only identity*
- *English and British only identity*
- *Any other combination of only UK identities*
- *Non-UK identity only*
- *UK identity and non-UK identity*

The benefit of the last item, “UK identity and non-UK identity” is that it allows respondents to identify dual nationality and heritage instead of being presented with a binary choice between a national identity confined to the UK or non-UK national identity. This question is subjective, revealing how individuals feel about their nationality and so provides added nuance to purely objective data related to place of birth and passports.

In Camden, 32.7% of residents identified as either ‘Non-UK identity’ or ‘UK identity and Non-UK identity’ when asked about their national identity. This fitted into a wider pattern of the 5 London boroughs. They all have ethnically diverse populations with large numbers of residents born outside the UK and a significant minority of residents who feel they belong to another national identity either separate from or in addition to the UK. In these 5 London boroughs, the percentage range of those who selected either a non-UK identity only or a UK and non-UK identity ranged from 29% to 40%. As can be seen in Figure 2, the percentage range of the population born outside the UK in the 5 London boroughs was 40–55%, including 2 of the 20 Local Authorities in England and Wales with the largest foreign-born populations.

Figure 3. Migrant demographics and trends in 6 Local Authorities in England

Borough	Non-UK Born Population	Change since 2011	Top 4 countries residents born in outside UK	Percentage who hold a Non-UK passport
Camden	45.4%	+ 2.9%	1. Europe (other than UK, Turkey and EU countries) ⁶¹ 2. United States 3. Bangladesh 4. France	26.7%
Harrow	51.1%	+ 6.4%	1. India: 10.1% 2. Romania: 8.1% 3. Kenya: 4.2% 4. Sri Lanka: 4.1%	25.2%
Islington	39.9%	+ 4.5%	1. Italy 2.3% 2. South American countries 2.2% 3. 2001EU member states (other than Ireland, France, Germany, Italy and Portugal) 2.1% 4. France 2.0%	24%
Kensington & Chelsea	53.9%	+ 2.3%	1. USA 4% 2. Europe (other than UK, Turkey and EU) 4% 3. Italy 3.8% 4. France: 3.7%	32.8%
Westminster	55.6%	+ 2.3%	1. USA 2. Italy 3. France 4. India	33.6%
Birmingham	26.7%	+ 4.5%	1. Pakistan 2. India 3. Bangladesh 4. Romania	13.1%

Birmingham is different in having a similarly diverse population, but a much smaller percentage of residents born outside the UK (27%) than the London boroughs. Birmingham residents are also much more likely to select their national identity as UK-only (84%).

⁶¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/internationalmigrationvariables/census2021/countryofbirth>

5.2 Local Government workforce strategies

In addition, workforce strategies produced by each Local Government organisation were consulted. These were again inconsistent. Two (see quotes below) were documented as “workforce strategies”; one was located on a non-council website⁶² and two were referenced by other council literature^{63 64}. For one council, no information was available. None of these workforce documents contained any information about efforts to recruit and retain employees with migrant backgrounds, despite the significant percentage of foreign-born residents in each of the boroughs:



*To be a modern council our aim is to have a workforce that reflects the lived experience of the people it serves.*⁶⁵

(Birmingham City Council)



*To have a diverse workforce who understand the inequality and disproportionality experienced by our residents and can act to improve their outcomes.*⁶⁶

(Islington Council)

In addition, a couple of the workforce data reports reflect on the council’s progress in recruiting and supporting a diverse workforce. Camden Council for example, reflects on a range of DEI schemes the council is delivering to support staff, and reiterate their commitment to a representative workforce: ‘Camden Council challenges itself to achieve a representative workforce at all levels’⁶⁷. But there is nothing specific about migrants in these documents.

⁶² https://www.joinharrow.co.uk/media/11738/workforce_strategy_-_january_2024pdf.pdf

⁶³ <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/council-councillors-and-democracy/how-council-works/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2021-2023/our-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-objectives#:~:text=We%20will%20recruit%2C%20develop%20and,an%20transparent%20equal%20pay%20policy.>

⁶⁴ <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/westminster-city-council-productivity-plan>

⁶⁵ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11548/bcc_workforce_strategy_november_2018.pdf

⁶⁶ <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/documents/s33077/PP%20Report%20Workforce%20Strategy%208%20June%2023%20-%20updated.pdf>

⁶⁷ Camden Council Employment Profile 2022–23

<https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/4e6f3330-b812-444f-b750-7eb13a61fd9c/employment-profile-2022-2023>

5.3 Survey

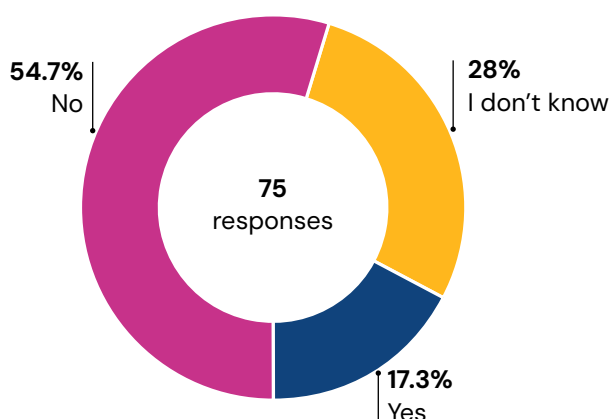
5.3.1 Quantitative analysis

Because of the dearth of information about migrant workforce representation elicited from desk-based research, the second stage of our research involved a written survey aimed at first-generation migrants in the UK. The questions were developed to elicit data about the extent to which migrants feel represented by the council and its workforce. The 10-question survey, with closed and open question to provide patterned data as well as insights into how migrants perceive their local authority, was disseminated via online networks and social media in early 2025. Social media platforms included LinkedIn and BlueSky. The survey was also disseminated through newsletters and existing networks of migrant organisations including IMIX refugees and asylum emailing list that have a UK-wide reach. While these platforms and networks helped disseminate our survey to reach diverse migrant groups, we acknowledge their limited access to certain migrant communities.

The survey elicited 75 responses, the vast majority of whom (88%) were first-generation migrants. The respondents were predominantly female (81%) and 93.3% lived in England. The majority of respondents (83%) were between 26 and 55 years of age. The respondents were also asked to write their ethnic, cultural and national heritage in the way they chose to describe it, which elicited more nuanced data than most official ethnicity datasets. Just over half of the respondents were from an Eastern European background (52%), 19% Asian, 12% Western European, 8% Latin American and 5% African. Whilst this survey is not statistically representative of the wider UK migrant populations, it does encompass a broad range of migrant identities and provides some lessons and conclusions to use in our work to engage Local Government about improving the ways particular migrant groups are engaged and represented in the Public Sector workforce.

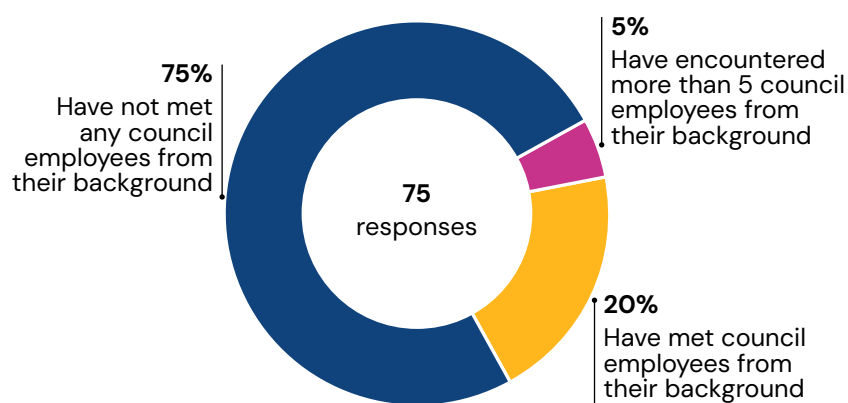
Respondents were asked: 'Do you think council employees are representative of your community?'. The responses can be seen in Figure 4. The results indicate that the majority of respondents (54%) did not think the council workforce were representative of their community, while only 17% thought that they were. Over a quarter indicated that they didn't know.

Figure 4.
Do you think council employees are representative of your community?



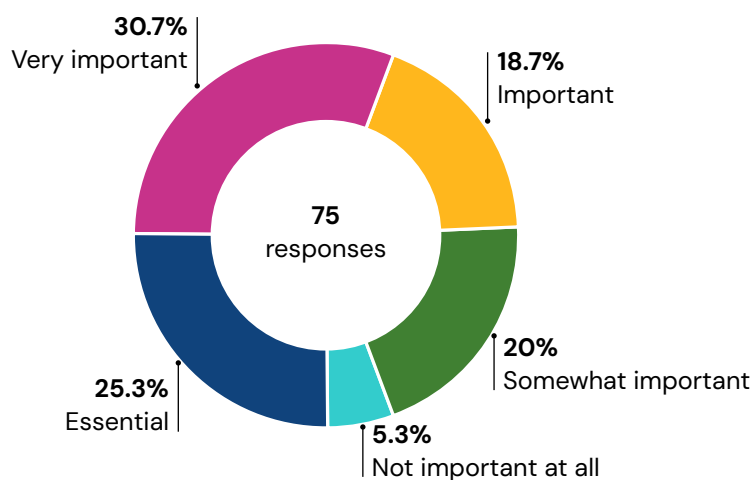
To further explore this issue of migrant representation in the Local Government workforce, respondents were asked 'How many council employees from your same ethnic, national background or heritage have you met while accessing services?'. Figure 5 shows the results of responses to this question. 75% of respondents indicated that they had not met any council employees from their background. Only 5% of respondents had encountered more than 5. In addition, 70% of respondents (responding to a separate question) that they had either never or very rarely engaged with their council in any way in the last 5 years, illustrating that there are broader issues of engagement and systemic barriers faced by migrants that go beyond workforce representation. Another point that emerged from the survey was the importance of libraries as the point of entry for contact with the local council, with almost half of the respondents indicating they used their local library.

Figure 5.
How many council employees from your same ethnic, national background or heritage have you met while accessing services?



We were interested to discover how much value respondents gave to the proposition that their community ought to be represented by their local authority workforce. The results can be seen in Figure 6. This shows that 56% consider it "essential" or "very important" to see people from a similar background working in local council or other public sector organisations; 38.7% considered it "important or "somewhat important". Only around 5% thought that this was "not important at all".

Figure 6.
How important is it for you to see people from a similar background as yours working in the local council or other public sector organisations?



5.3.2. Views on migrant workforce representation

These preferences were elaborated on in response to the question “Do you have any other comments or suggestions on migrant representation within local councils’ workforce?” which allowed respondents to comment freely. 47 respondents commented, with two thirds of these comments illustrating the desire to see more migrant representation in the council workforce and more migrant influence in the council more generally. These included statements presented below, some in relation to specific migrant communities (e.g. Ukrainian). (Excerpts presented also contain information regarding gender, age and their chosen ethnic/national/cultural identity).



A more fair and proportionate representation is needed to better reflect the community.

(F 35–55, White–British Romanian)



I would love to have local council employees from my same ethnic/national background or heritage when accessing services.

(F 18–25, Ukrainian)

Another respondent, while focusing on elected councillors rather than paid workforce, illustrates what is at stake in debates about representation: a belief in democratic structures.



When I will see more elected councillors from EE [n.b. Eastern Europe], I believe in fair and democratic diversity.

(F 46–55 Lithuanian)

Key to restoring faith in democratic structures is higher trust in public authorities– and this is something that one Romanian respondent believed was lacking within her community:



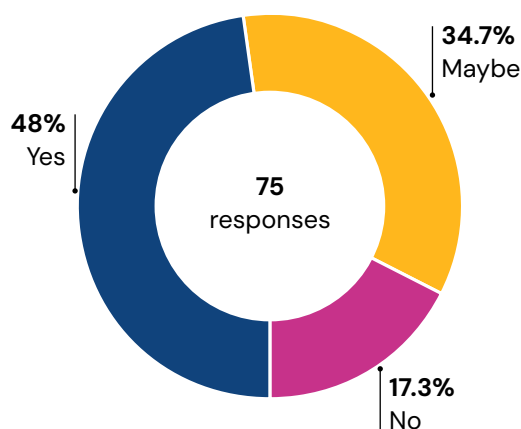
They should employ people from our background, so that the community could trust the local authority, because at the moment, they do not!

(F 56–65 Romanian)

Amongst the respondents themselves, there were a large minority who showed interest in applying for a job with their local council, as Figure 7 indicates. Only 17.3% would not consider applying for a job in a local council.

This indicates not only that migrants who responded to our survey believe that the council workforce should be more representative generally, there is also a desire amongst many individuals to work for their local authority.

Figure 7.
Would you consider applying for a job at a local council?



There were a number of comments which focused on ways in which councils could work to increase migrant representation, offering practical suggestions ranging from training programmes, graduate open days, work experience opportunities, better and more targeted advertisement and recruitment campaigns. There were also calls to increase the amount of resources and support to local migrant organisations to help recruit migrants to the local authority, and more generally, to help migrants adapt to life in the UK.

Some of the most interesting and insightful comments were those which, while stressing the significance of workforce representation, didn't see it as the most significant or only priority to ensure that migrant communities are effectively represented by their Local Government. Two comments illustrate how the root causes of exclusion and underrepresentation also need to be addressed:



Representation is important and should definitely be improved. However, it is the structures and systems that require more resourcing, sustainability, and cultural resetting, combined with a diversified workforce, to make sure the council truly works and serves local populations.

(F 36–55, British Chinese)



We need to talk about mindsets and not behaviours, as the latter are superficial. The whole DEI initiative as far as I encountered, is a fabricated action of the establishment to silence criticism and keep the power.

(F 46–55 Romanian-born Hungarian minority)

The latter comments can be reflected in participation theory⁶⁸ where efforts by public institutions to include and engage marginalised groups are often viewed as tokenistic and cosmetic; a more radical interpretation is that they are designed to suppress dissent and deflect dissatisfaction with public institutions while doing little or nothing to tackle the root causes of inequality and discrimination⁶⁹. There were also specific pleas for more concerted efforts to be more representative of Latin American and Eastern European communities. One issue here, as alluded to by the Romanian respondent quoted below, is that their ethnic status as “white”, the privileged, majority group, may obscure the marginalisation and discrimination encountered by these communities.



There needs to be an association of EU or Eastern European workforce. Eastern Europeans are ‘third race’, the ‘new Windrush’. Even though our Western peers are also treated unfairly, we are pressed beyond imaginable. I encountered many who do not even know their rights... – our situation is constantly abused. Racism, colonialism is still here, only the victimised group changes from time to time... we need to educate ourselves, each other, and representatives of the dominant culture. We need to find a way to join forces with historic BAME communities, who often see in us the white oppressors.

(F 46–55 Romanian born Hungarian Minority)

5.3.3. How Local Government organisations engage with migrant groups

A second open question in the survey asked respondents: ‘Please share your thoughts on how your local council engages with the migrant groups living in their area’. This provided valuable insight into how well migrants feel they are engaged and included in council initiatives that go beyond public sector employment and into broader issues of community empowerment. Around 10% of these 73 comments about engagement were positive about their council, as the following comments illustrate:



They support migrant homeless people, they engage with our organization if they need support with language barrier. I am aware they support migrant people with housing.

(F 25–35 Lithuanian)

⁶⁸ Taylor, M (2011) Public Policy in the Community. 2nd ed London Palgrave MacMillan.

⁶⁹ Cooke et al., (2001) Participation: The New Tyranny? London: Zed Books.



Help with adaptation and support migrants integration into the UK society.

(F 36–45 Ukrainian)

Other respondents commented positively about how well supported particular migrant groups were. One migrant from Hong Kong was particularly happy about the council's engagement with her community:



I now live under South Gloucestershire council and there's job search support specifically for Hongkongers which I find it very reassuring and helpful – as I feel like respected and valued in the local community.

(F 36–45 HongKonger)

Ukrainian and Somali communities were other migrant groups mentioned when praising the efficacy of support and engagement offered of the council.

The flipside to this is a perception that migrant groups are treated unequally by their local authority. This emerged through general comments like they have preferences on certain migrant groups, to more specific issues of bias raised by two Eastern European and Latin American migrants:



As a Latin american, I think we dont have good representation, we are invisible in the community, other communities have bigger opportunities, or representation. Today I went to the NHS and there was a lot of flyers with information in different languages, nothing in Spanish. We are not even in the census, or in the ethnicity forms, we have to tick the "other" box, to identify ourselves.

(F 36–45 Latin American Argentinian)



Our borough is the most diverse borough but seems that diversity represents one or two major ethnicities and the rest is somehow not acknowledged on the same level. Europeans or especially EE seems functioning on their own and not engaged with the council at all. Especially after the Brexit.

(F 36–45 Lithuanian)

Around 30 comments (41%) were critical of Local Government engagement, ranging from milder comments about limited and low-quality engagement to more serious criticisms of feeling completely ignored (including when migrants attempt to engage council staff) and discriminatory practices.

There was a patterned sense of feeling uncared for or treated with disdain. One even called the council's Head of Migration "a nightmare". There were other, more mixed views, where councils were commended for their efforts to engage although this raised broader issues of methodology and practice:

“

I don't find issue with the will of these local councils in wanting to engage with migrant groups. What I would question sometimes is the method, assessment of issues, and the lack of interest in addressing root problems.

(M 26–35 Polish–British)

Two respondents also made critical comments about assuming that council employees with a migrant background would necessarily be more responsive and effective when engaging with these communities. For one respondent, their experience had led them to believe the opposite was true:

“

Honestly, the ethnic background of people who work in the local council is less important to me until they do their job properly. Previously I saw how people from my country who worked in the local council demonstrated their superiority and power towards their countrymates. There were instances when they neglected cases of people from their own country and they knew that no one would complain due to limited English, lack of awareness on how to complain and fear that complaining could make their situation even worse. I have never seen such an attitude from British staff.

(F 36–45 Ukrainian)

This comment shows how important it is to recruit council employees with the right skills, aptitudes and values in community-facing roles.

6.

Conclusion

This research explored how representative of their migrant population local council's workforces are, focusing on six Local Government bodies. The data to make an effective assessment on this issue is, at present, unavailable. The workforce data that is currently available is restricted to the protected characteristics outlined in the UK Equality Act, which does not include migrants. In one case, an authority measured the nationality of its workforce. This provides some insight but does not correlate with migration as we have defined it, as someone who has crossed international borders to live in a different country. Thanks to the 2021 census, migration data of the populations at Local Government level is extensive. In the 5 London boroughs we researched, the percentages of residents born in a different country than the UK was high, in 2 instances more than 50%. To recruit a workforce representative of their local population, which all six Local Government organisations say they are committed to achieve, there was no information pertaining to recruitment from migrant backgrounds in the limited evidence available about their workforce strategies. However, these strategies do show plenty of commitment to diverse recruitment, in areas of diversity distinct from migration.

Do migrants themselves want to see a Local Government workforce that represents them? Our survey showed that they do, with 75% indicating that they believe it is either essential, very important or important for workforces to be representative of local migrant groups. There was also a significant degree of interest in applying for council roles. However, other survey data showed limited engagement with migrant groups, with interaction levels low and very few instances of meeting council staff who were representative of their community. The most frequent entry point for migrant respondents engaging with their local authority was the library, which almost half of the respondents used, highlighting the significance of libraries as community spaces. Commentary from respondents also indicated a largely negative perception of the efforts made by local councils to engage and represent them effectively, although there were positive examples of councils doing good work to engage and support migrant populations.

Lastly, comments elicited in the survey from Latin American and Eastern European respondents revealed that these groups feel that because they are defined as "White" or "White Other" in ethnicity surveys, they are not portrayed as or treated as marginalised, furthering a sense that they are being discriminated against while facing similar barriers of accessing and engaging Local Government as other migrant groups.

With migrant representation in Local Government being an under-researched area despite its complex implications, our efforts will continue to focus on research, discussions, and interventions around this topic.

7.

Call to Action

Local Government plays a key role in creating a cohesive society that is inclusive and representative of their diverse communities. We value the work already done by so many Local Government organisations despite the challenges they face due to austerity, the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the increased cost of living, and the geopolitical tensions that impact governments and communities alike.

Migrant communities faced distinct challenges and experienced significant setbacks, many of which had a wider impact across all communities.

In line with our values and informed by the evidence in this report, we propose a collaborative approach to addressing migrant under-representation in their workforces.

Sign our Pledge

To assist Local Government in progressing their migrant inclusion work, we have developed the **Migrant Inclusive Local Government pledge**.

Their commitment to the pledge means that signatory authorities will:

- Take steps towards improving collecting, analysing, and reporting on their workforce diversity to include migration and ethnicity more comprehensively and to reflect their local populations.
- Develop specific recruitment strategies or enhance their existing ones to highlight the need for migrant inclusion.
- Create and implement action plans to engage with the local migrant groups and community organisations to promote recruitment opportunities in their organisation.

Social Equity Centre can support Local Government organisations by assisting them in developing their migrant-inclusive recruitment strategies, contributing to research, and providing our bespoke *Local Government Training programme* to migrant residents to enhance their skills and employability in Local Government.

To discuss this report, you can contact our Research Lead and Executive Director Adina Maglan at adina.maglan@socialequity.org.uk.

To find out more about our work and the pledge, you can contact our CEO Teo Benea at teo.benea@socialequity.org.uk.

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