building inclusive housing support
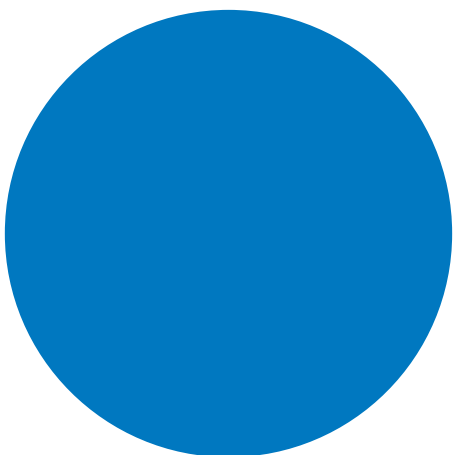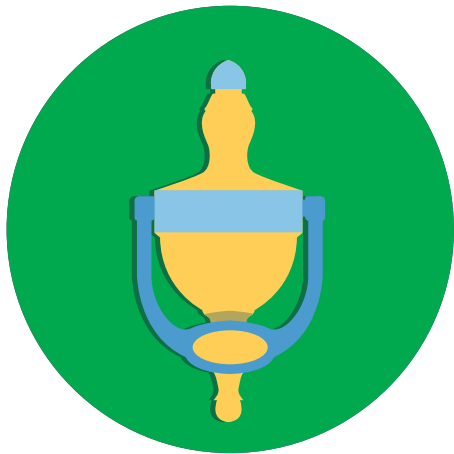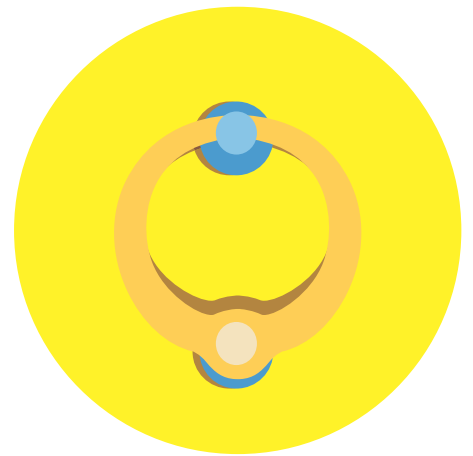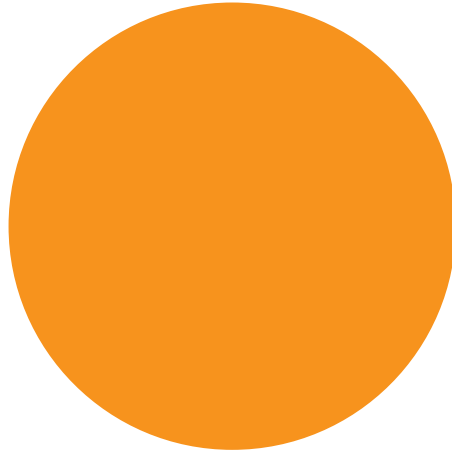## for lgbtq+ communities

akt

2022

building inclusive
housing support
for lgbtq+ communities

jo bhandal
akt

contents

foreword

The National Housing Federation (NHF) is proud to support the work akt does to support young people experiencing homelessness. This important report should be essential reading for providers of social housing and homelessness services.

It's really positive that housing associations contributed to and helped define the scope of the research for this report. The findings provide valuable suggestions for how housing associations can equip staff to support LGBTQ+ people and improve services for LGBTQ+ residents. The NHF will work with our members to continue to drive forward these recommendations and support a culture of inclusion that properly supports LGBTQ+ residents.

It's great to see that this report by akt goes some way to exploring the obstacles to delivering consistent inclusive services for LGBTQ+ people and recommends practical ways that our sector can overcome them. I'm also pleased to see a focus on data in this report. At the NHF we know that being open with our data is critical to progressing equality, diversity, and inclusion. In line with recommendations from the akt report, the NHF is calling on housing associations to engage their staff on equality, diversity, and inclusion; communicating clear targets on both improving representation; and addressing data gaps.

Housing associations are rooted in tackling injustice and inequality. We want to be a beacon for equality, diversity, and inclusion, upholding the values of social housing and creating a genuinely equal, diverse, and inclusive workforce.

**Kate Henderson
Chief Executive
National Housing Federation**

NATIONAL HOUSING FEDERATION

introduction

The LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Report 2021 **explored the hidden issue of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness. It detailed the accounts of abuse and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ young people and highlighted the challenges they face when engaging with support services, including housing services.**

Although the report focused on the experiences of young people, homelessness and insecure housing disproportionately affects all LGBTQ+ people, irrespective of age. Despite this, increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ people in housing services remains a challenge.

This report aims to respond to that challenge. We heard directly from local authorities and housing associations, examining how we can develop a more responsive and inclusive housing sector.

Cognisant of differing needs and experiences, this research identifies how and where LGBTQ+ people are considered in the design and delivery of services.

We assess core elements to designing and delivering LGBTQ+ inclusive services:

- **Data collection and monitoring practises**

- **Ability to support different groups**

- **Operational policies, procedures, and strategies**

- **Communication and outreach**

We also outline areas where further support may be needed.

Building an inclusive housing sector will not happen overnight; it requires a commitment to reflection, learning and collaboration. We hope that this report will help focus minds to ensure that all LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can access safe, inclusive, and supportive housing and homelessness services.

the research

A selection of housing associations and local authorities took part in short conversations to help define the scope of the research. 89 organisations completed the online survey designed by akt and administered by YouGov, this included 60 local authorities and 27 housing associations. The research was completed between 20th September 2021 to 8th December 2021 and focused on all LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

An anonymous link to the online survey was sent to one representative from each organisation to avoid duplicate responses[1].

11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with housing associations and local authorities, during August–September 2021, by Tasmin Maitland of Teasle Consulting.

We want to thank all organisations who took part in this research.

[1] All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 89 adults from AKT's own database. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th September - 25th November 2021. The survey was carried out online.

key findings

Most organisations surveyed feel that their understanding of the proportion of people who use their service who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual is more accurate (55 per cent) than trans and non-binary people (45 per cent).

Interviewees identified issues relating to individual disclosure of sexual orientation and gender identity as the main barriers to improving data collection on LGBTQ+ homelessness.
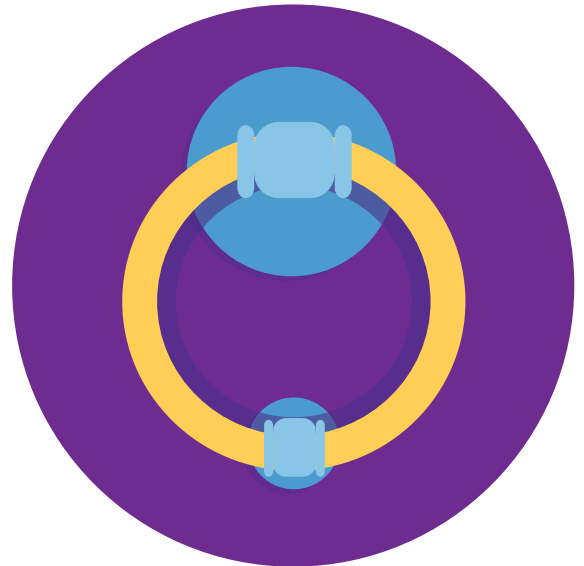
More than eight out of ten (85 per cent) organisations surveyed say that their data capture could be improved to be more inclusive of a range of gender identities.

Interviewees felt existing data categories on gender identity are restrictive.

Perceptions in confidence to support LGBTQ+ people are high.

Net confidence ratings for supporting lesbian people (93 per cent), gay (93 per cent), bisexual (94 per cent), trans (90 per cent) and non-binary (84 per cent) people.

More than two fifths (44 per cent) of of those surveyed have not received training on LGBTQ+ inclusion or LGBTQ+ homelessness.

Nearly one fifth (19 per cent) of organisations do not reference LGBTQ+ homelessness or LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in any of their policies, procedures and strategies and 18% were not aware.

Interviewees highlighted gaps in staff knowledge of LGBTQ+ homelessness and LGBTQ+ identities as obstacles to delivering consistent inclusive services.

Just 15 per cent of the organisations surveyed tailor their communications to reach LGBTQ+ communities.

Areas where further support is needed:

Improving referral pathways to LGBTQ+ specialist organisations.

Increased knowledge of how to support LGBTQ+ people, including those who face further marginalisation (e.g., people of colour, people with disabilities).

Support around improving data collection practises and categories.

the visibility of lgbtq+ people

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017, data on statutory homelessness has been recorded by local authorities in H-CLIC. Prior to sexual orientation becoming a mandatory H-CLIC field, data on the number of LGBTQ+ people experiencing statutory homelessness was limited'. One year later, data can still be patchy with high returns of 'Prefer not to say' and 'Unknown'.

Respondents from both the online survey and interviews were asked to consider their organisations' understanding of the proportion of the people they see who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or any other sexual orientation
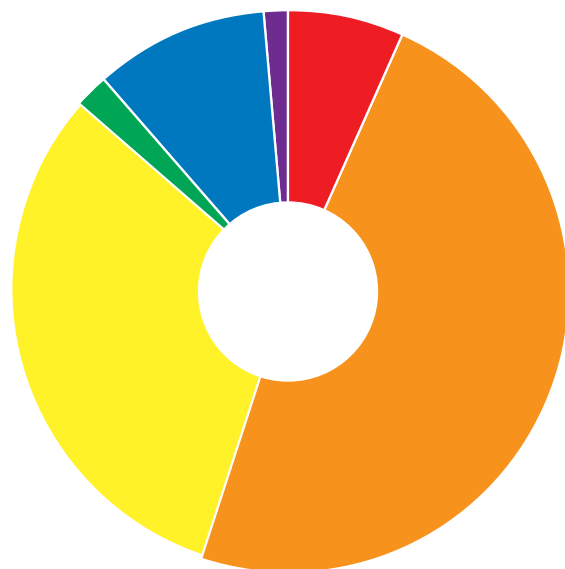
and trans, non-binary or any other gender identity. Local authorities may have reflected on both internal data collection practises and data capture related explicitly to H-CLIC. For housing associations, internal data capture and data provided by local authorities may have been considered.

Results from the online survey show that organisations tended to have a more accurate understanding of the proportion of people they see in their service who identify as gay, lesbian or any other sexual orientation compared to gender identity (55% versus 45% respectively).
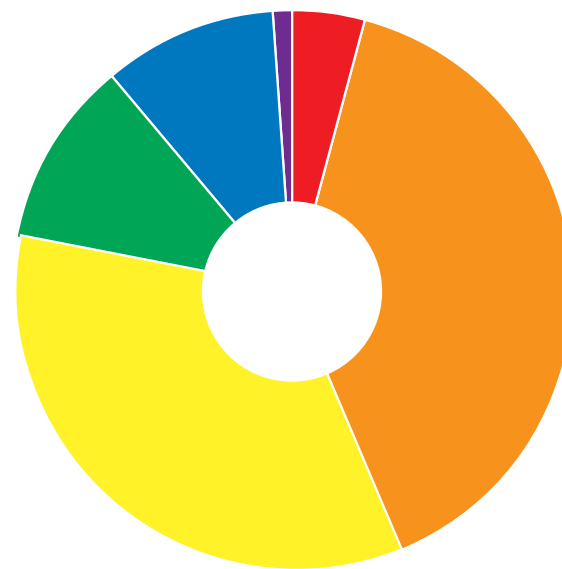
H-CLIC sexual orientation and gender fields

sexual orientation	gender
Prefer not to say	Female
Gay/Lesbian	Male
Heterosexual/Straight	Transgender
Other sexual orientation	Prefer not to say
Bisexual	Not known/Other

sexual orientation

gender identity

sexual orientation legend:
- ● Very accurate 7%
- ● Fairly accurate 48%
- ● Not very accurate 31%
- ● Not at all accurate 2%
- ● Don't know 10%
- ● Prefer not to say 1%

gender identity legend:
- ● Very accurate 3%
- ● Fairly accurate 40%
- ● Not very accurate 33%
- ● Not at all accurate 11%
- ● Don't know 10%
- ● Prefer not to say 1%

More than half (55 per cent) of organisations surveyed stated that their understanding of the proportion of people they see in their service who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual was accurate, compared to the proportion of people they see in their service who identify as trans, non-binary or any other gender identity (45 per cent)[2].

44 per cent felt their understanding of the gender identity of people who use their service was inaccurate, compared to 34 per cent who stated the same for their understanding of the sexual orientation of people who use their service.

More than eight out of ten organisations surveyed (85 per cent) felt that their data capture of gender identity could be improved.

"[data capture of gender identity] Absolutely not inclusive. Too broad and pigeon-holey."
– local authority

Several themes emerged from the scoping conversations and interviews, including thoughts on existing data categories and barriers to improving data collection. LGBTQ+ homelessness was seen as 'hidden' within official statistics, with references to high returns in both the 'Prefer not to say' and 'Unknown' fields. Existing data fields were viewed as out of step with the many ways people may choose to identify.

"I don't see why you wouldn't [extend the categories]. Even if it's a small group [in one borough], if they're unable to access an appropriate service, that is a lot of people nationally so we need to know [about] vulnerable people who can't use a service." – local authority

"Not known or other is a blunt tool and pigeonholes people. I would not like to be known as not known or other if I was struggling with my identity." – local authority.

It was felt that the onus is on individuals to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity, and this was the main barrier to improving data capture. Fewer references were made to how questions were asked by staff or the possibility of conscious or unconscious bias.

Some interviewees critically reflected on whether they created environments where LGBTQ+ people felt safe and comfortable to disclose. For these interviewees, fear of getting things wrong, gaps in staff knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities, particularly trans and non-binary identities, were raised as barriers to improving data collection. Further training on language use (mostly around pronoun usage) was considered helpful, but a cultural shift in organisations was deemed necessary.

"How you approach this question, how you communicate, the message you give non-verbally could be life-changing."
– local authority.

Where interviewees were more confident in their organisation's skills and comfort in data collection, this was sometimes associated with having younger staff members and staff members who identify as LGBTQ+. These staff members were seen to drive forward a culture of openness, leading informal conversations within teams to increase understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and making colleagues feel more comfortable with areas like language use.

Also discussed was the need to convey the value of collecting this data. Some organisations have already started this process by engaging with staff and people who use their service around data collection of all protected characteristics.

"Until people feel safe to disclose, you can ask the questions in whatever way you like but it won't necessarily make a difference. You need those service users to think that they will be included and respected no matter what". - housing association

supporting lgbtq+ people

Confidence to support

The online survey explored perceptions of confidence to support different groups within the LGBTQ+ community- with most organisations feeling confident in their ability to support all groups[3].

Net confidence ratings

sexual orientation	gender identity
Lesbian **(93 per cent)** Gay **(93 per cent)** Bisexual **(94 per cent)**	Trans **(90 per cent)** Non-binary **(84 per cent)**

Net not confident ratings

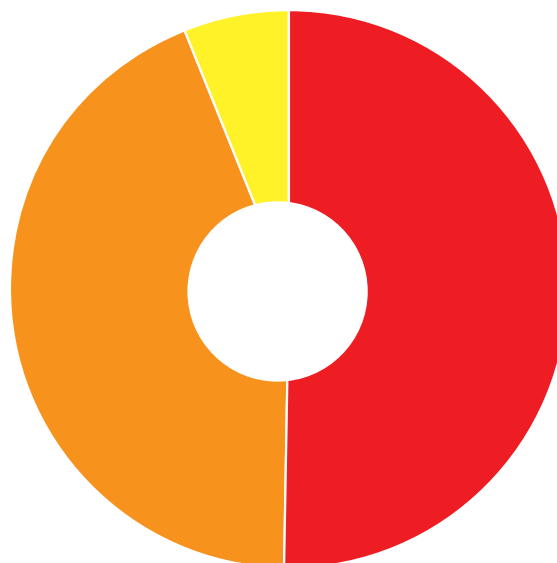| sexual orientation	gender identity
Lesbian **(7 per cent)** Gay **(7 per cent)** Bisexual **(6 per cent)**	Trans **(10 per cent)** Non-binary **(16 per cent)**

Perceptions of confidence to support trans people slightly decreased with a more substantial decrease in the ability to support non-binary people- this is also true of the net 'not confident' ratings.

These figures are encouraging; nevertheless, two factors should be considered when interpreting this data. Firstly, most respondents came from more 'strategic' roles within their organisation, so may have less of a live 'operational' understanding. Secondly, despite the survey being anonymous to avoid as much bias as possible, the nature of the question could elicit a response bias.

- 🔴 **Yes, I have (51%)**
- 🟠 **No, I haven't (44%)**
- 🟡 **Don't know/ can't recall (6%)**
- **Prefer not to say (0%)**

Training

Across all sectors and organisations, regular training plays a pivotal role in improving staff members' knowledge and supporting them to carry out their roles. Training on LGBTQ+ inclusion and homelessness help housing professionals fill any existing knowledge gaps on LGBTQ+ identities and the distinct ways that LGBTQ+ people experience homelessness. The online survey shows that many organisations surveyed have not received training on either LGBTQ+ inclusion or homelessness.

Only 45 organisations (51 per cent) have received training on LGBTQ+ inclusion and homelessness, with 39 (44 per cent) stating that they have not.

[3] 'Net confident' and net 'not confident' scores have been determined by combining 'very confident' and 'fairly confident' and 'not very confident' and 'not at all confident' responses, respectively.
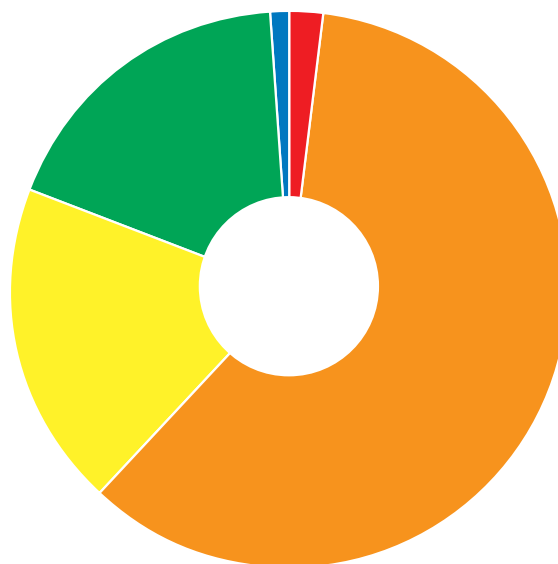
Policies, procedures, and strategies

Incorporating LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ homelessness in policies, procedures and strategies is essential to delivering inclusive services.
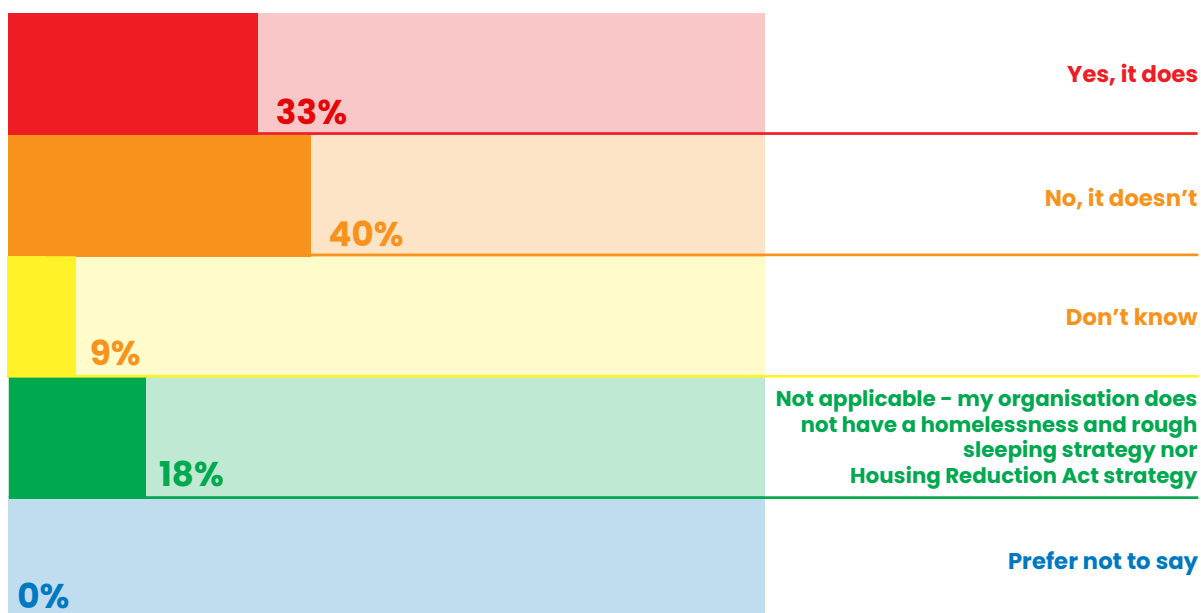
Six out of ten (60 per cent) organisations surveyed only feature LGBTQ+ homelessness or LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in some of their policies, procedures, and strategies.

More than a third (37 per cent) do not reference LGBTQ+ homelessness or LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in their policies, procedures and strategies or were not aware.

33 per cent of local authorities include LGBTQ+ homelessness or LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in their rough sleeping or homelessness reduction act strategies. Four out of ten (40 per cent) local authorities do not reference either in these strategies.

- 🔴 All of them **(2%)**
- 🟠 Some of them **(60%)**
- 🟡 None of them **(19%)**
- 🟢 Don't know **(18%)**
- 🔵 Prefer not to say **(1%)**

33%	Yes, it does
40%	No, it doesn't
9%	Don't know
18%	Not applicable - my organisation does not have a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy nor Housing Reduction Act strategy
0%	Prefer not to say

Only 15 per cent of organisations surveyed tailor their communications specifically to reach LGBTQ+ communities experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Without specific policies, procedures, and strategies, it can become difficult to establish consistent service levels for LGBTQ+ people. Several interviewees felt that much of the progress on operational awareness and inclusion was primarily headed by a diverse team comprised of younger and LGBTQ+ staff members.

"On inclusive services '99/100 [times] that would happen by virtue of staff awareness and sensitivity rather than a specific process for all trans people." – local authority

Interviewees typically described their organisational approach to EDI, often focusing on the workforce, although some had plans to extend this work to reach people who interact with their services. Some interviewees described extensive workforce development around LGBTQ+ representation and involvement in, or sponsorship of, Pride. There

was no apparent correlation between the extent of EDI work described with staff teams and the level of awareness and inclusion described in work on making services more inclusive for LGBTQ+ people.

Very few interviewees gave examples of corporate visuals (online or building based)

that promote inclusivity and awareness- most were not aware of any visual representation such as same-sex couples/families in corporate material. Most interviewees considered the interviews to be a prompt to look at how some of the work on workplace inclusion could be translated to assess operational LGBTQ+ inclusion.

improving support for lgbtq+ people

Respondents from the online survey were asked to consider five areas that would be the most helpful to improve the services they provide to LGBTQ+ people. These areas and the overall 'net would help' ratings are outlined below[4].

net would help rating	area
96%	**Increased knowledge of referral pathways to LGBTQ+ specialist organisations**
96%	**Increased knowledge of how to support trans and non-binary people experiencing or at risk of homelessness**
94%	**Increased knowledge of how to support LGB people experiencing or at risk of homelessness**
92%	**Increased knowledge of how to support LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness***
84%	**Improved knowledge of how to improve data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity**

The findings show marginal differences between the five areas. Increased knowledge of referral pathways to LGBTQ+ specialist organisations and increased knowledge of how to support trans and non-binary were the most selected areas, with net 'would help' ratings of 96 per cent. Improving data collection has the lowest net help rating (84 per cent), reflecting the restrictions that housing associations and local authorities face to improving data collection. For local authorities, the categories for sexual orientation and gender identity will be defined by the central government within H-CLIC and housing associations may be limited to the data that local authorities provide.

These results and interview data also point to the need to increase understanding of the distinct experiences of homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ communities. For instance, there was no reference to intersectionality or the additional intersectional discrimination that different groups within the LGBTQ+ community face. Other areas identified by interviewees included audits, support with benchmarking data and creating LGBTQ+ specialist roles, engaging with LGBTQ+ people around disclosure and training on asking people about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

[4] 'Net helpful' scores have been determined by combining 'very helpful' and 'fairly helpful' responses
* who may face further marginalisation, e.g. people of colour, people with disabilities etc.

moving forward
delivering inclusive services for LGBTQ+ people

We hope these findings will enable local authorities and housing associations to identify areas where they can provide more inclusive services for LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The findings point to where additional action is needed:

> **Improving data collection practices, with a particular focus on gender identity**

> **Adopting an intersectional approach, increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ identities and LGBTQ+ homelessness**

> **Developing LGBTQ+ inclusive operational policies, strategies, and procedures, including trans inclusive policies, strategies, and procedures**

Our recommendations to local authorities and housing associations reflect these action areas.

local authorities and housing associations should

1. Carry out a general audit to identify which service areas could be improved to more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people and where specific training and development may be needed.

2. Review existing data on LGBTQ+ people engaging with services and assess for inclusivity. Attention should be paid to any incomplete data or 'Prefer not to say' or 'Not known' fields for sexual orientation and gender identity. Commission training if necessary, so that staff feel able to ask questions on the sexual orientation and gender identity of people who engage with their services. The value of collecting this data should be communicated to all staff and LGBTQ+ people using services. Attention should be paid to whether a welcoming and inclusive environment is being created where LGBTQ+ people feel safe to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity.

3. Ensure that LGBTQ+ homelessness is a strategic priority. Review all operational or service-focused policies, procedures, and strategies for LGBTQ+ inclusivity and reference to LGBTQ+ homelessness. Local authorities should reference LGBTQ+ people or LGBTQ+ homelessness in rough sleeping and homelessness reduction act strategies.
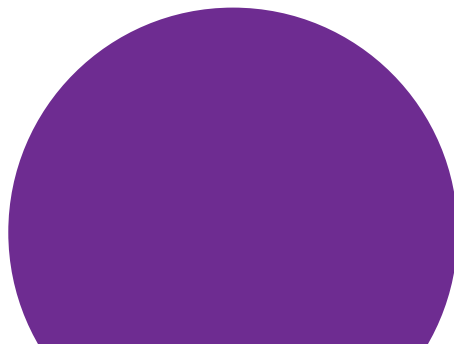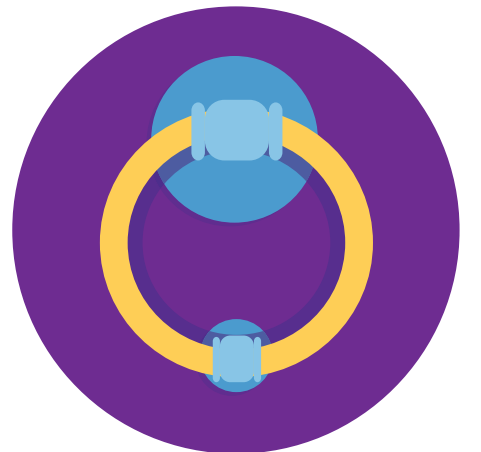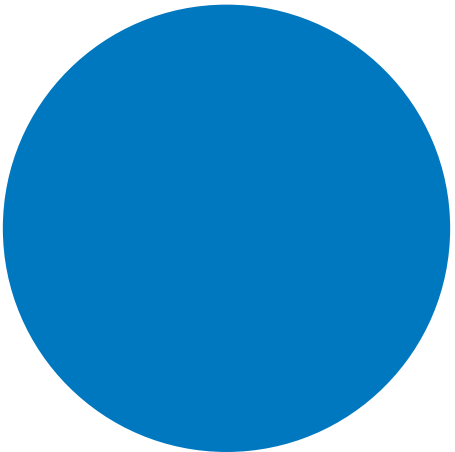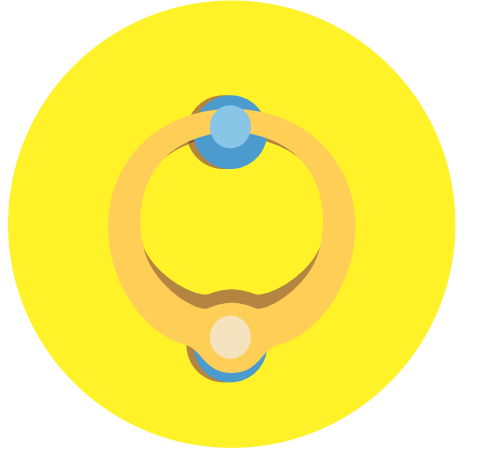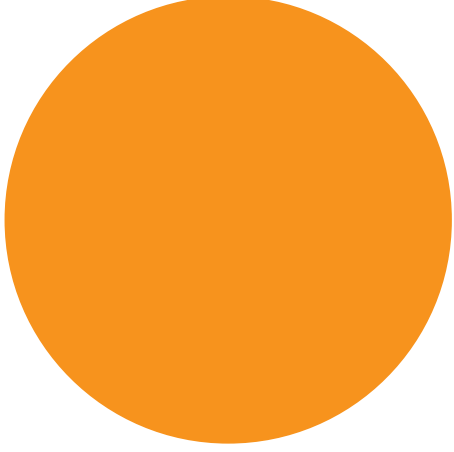
4. Increase awareness of LGBTQ+ homelessness, recognising that LGBTQ+ people's experiences of homelessness are not uniform. Housing staff should be aware of the needs and experiences of different groups within the LGBTQ+ community who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including groups who face intersectional discrimination such as people of colour, trans and disabled LGBTQ+ young people.

5. Develop pathways into specialist provision. Signpost staff to organisations that support LGBTQ+ people. Make a referral/information request on behalf of LGBTQ+ people using services, to LGBTQ+ specific services, providing them with specialist support if needed. Examples of specialist services include akt, LGBT Switchboard, Terrance Higgins Trust, Stonewall and Galop.
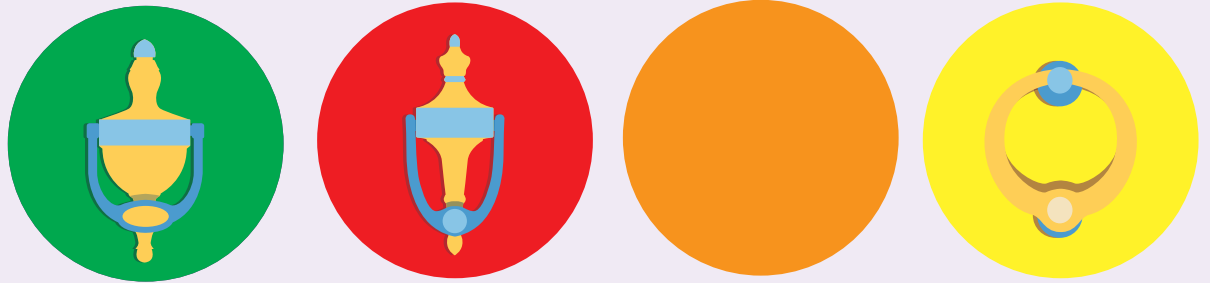
6. When commissioning services ensure that organisations can evidence the actions they are taking to support LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
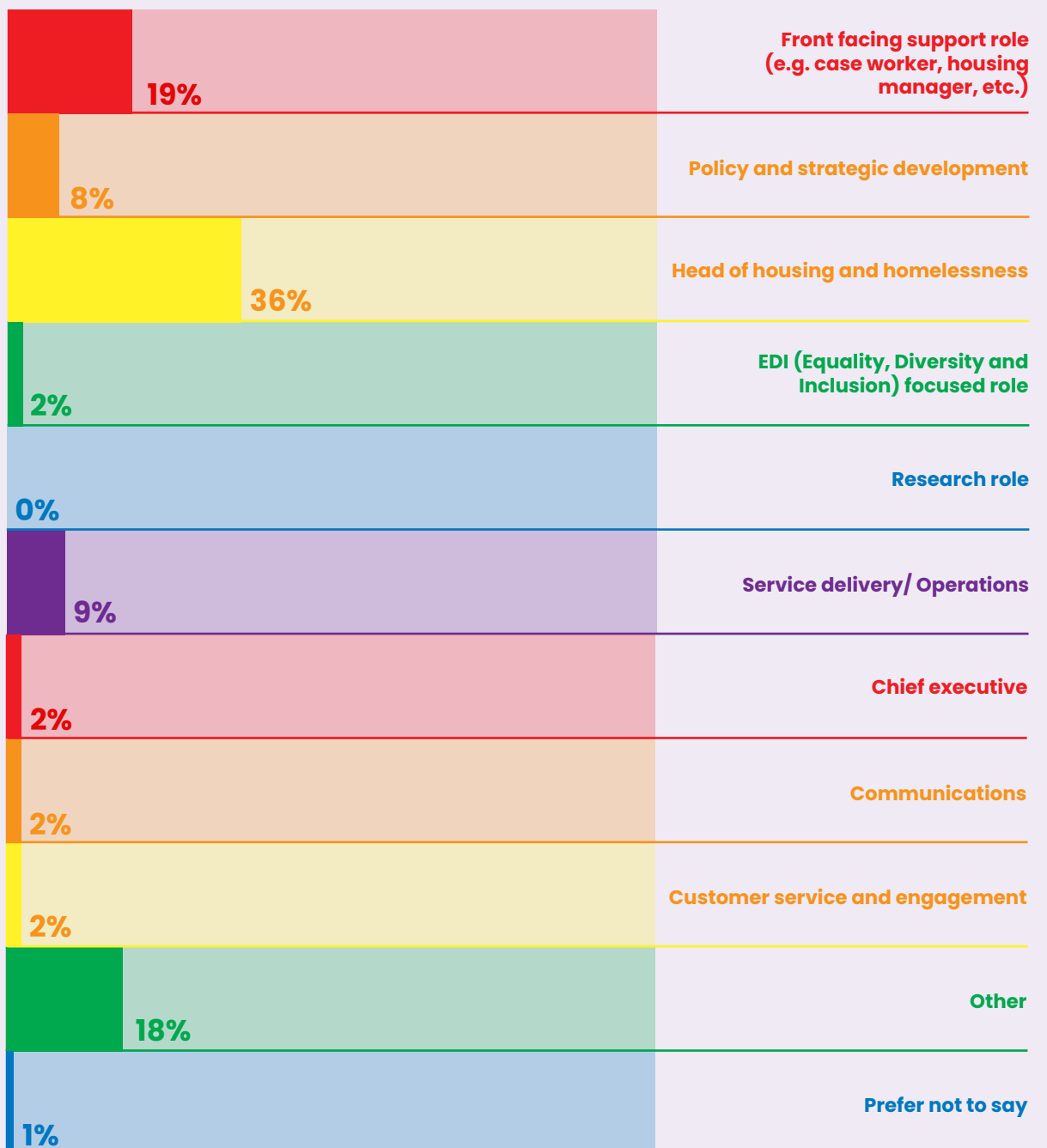
the government should

1. Require organisations working within the housing and homelessness sector, to clearly illustrate how they are meeting the needs of all LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in any commissioning arrangements.

2. Make a commitment to addressing homelessness experienced by all LGBTQ+ people. All government strategies focused on homelessness should reference LGBTQ+ homelessness and recognise the needs and experiences of groups who face intersectional discrimination such as LGBTQ+ people of colour, trans and disabled LGBTQ+ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
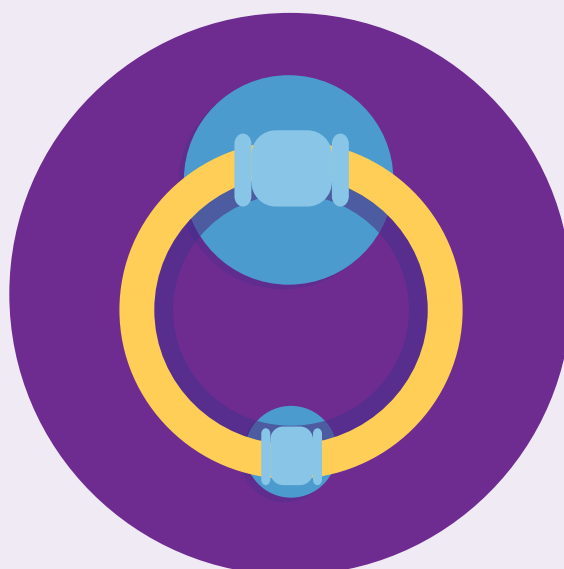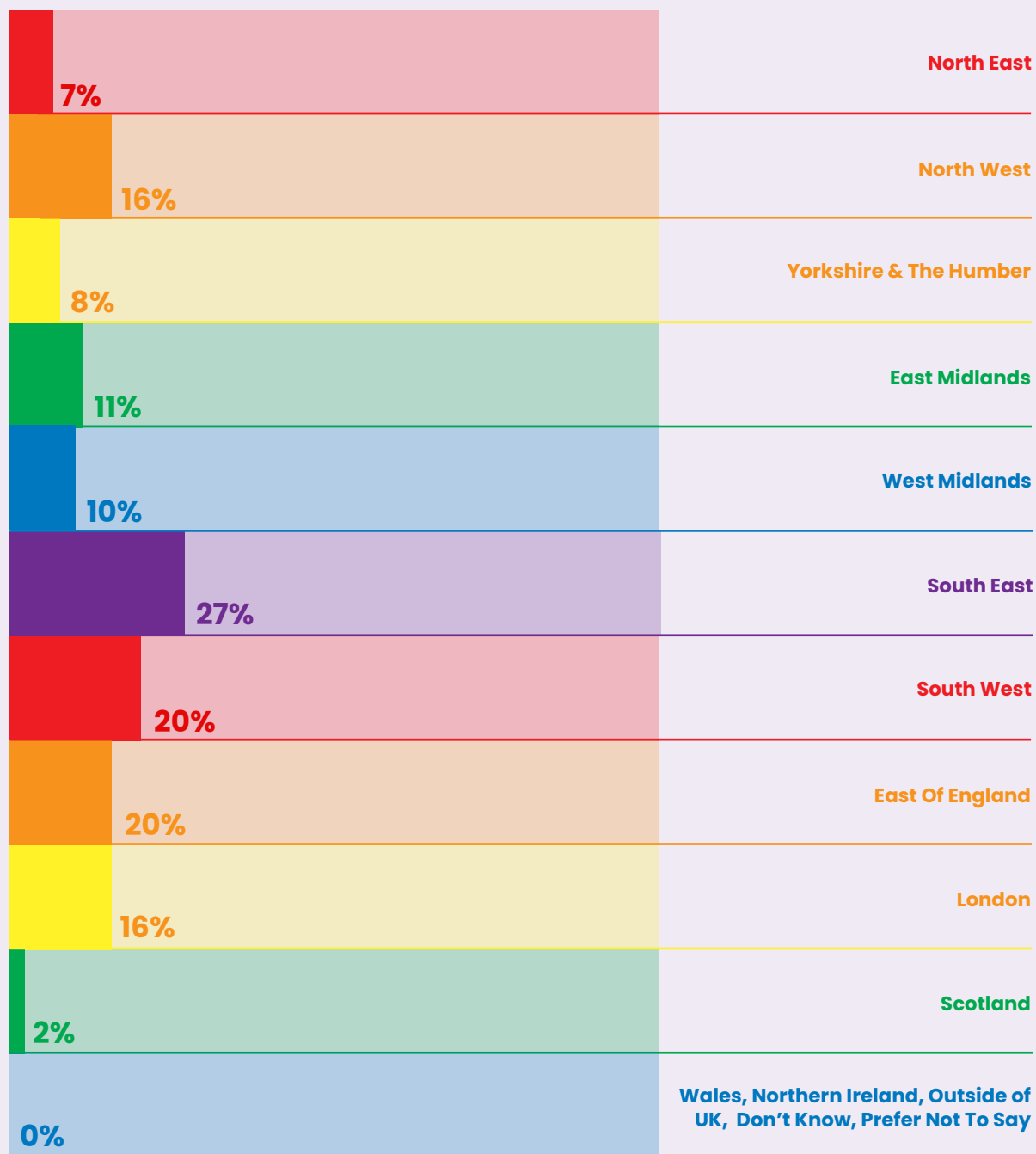
survey breakdown

job roles of respondents

19% Front facing support role (e.g. case worker, housing manager, etc.)

8% Policy and strategic development

36% Head of housing and homelessness

2% EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) focused role

0% Research role

9% Service delivery/ Operations

2% Chief executive

2% Communications

2% Customer service and engagement

18% Other

1% Prefer not to say

location of respondents

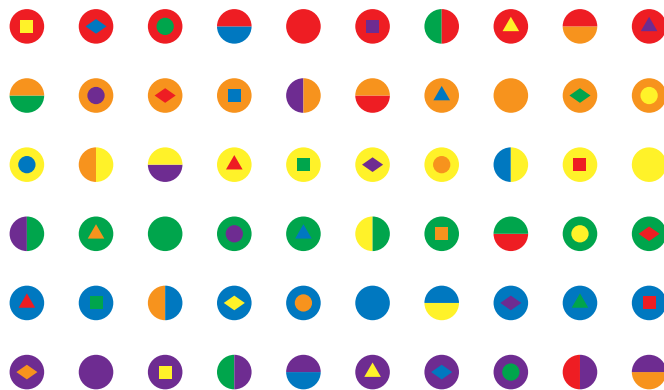| Region	Percentage
North East	7%
North West	16%
Yorkshire & The Humber	8%
East Midlands	11%
West Midlands	10%
South East	27%
South West	20%
East Of England	20%
London	16%
Scotland	2%
Wales, Northern Ireland, Outside of UK, Don't Know, Prefer Not To Say	0%

scan here to find out more

akt

safe homes and better futures for lgbtq+ young people

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akt • 19-20 parr street, london n1 7gw • 020 7831 6562 • **akt.org.uk**

report design: grahame robertson (akt)