Research with East London communities

Place-based guidance and resources

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Acknowledgements

Available to download at qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london/place-based-resources

Find out more about Queen Mary's civic work at qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london

Citation:

Contents

1. Aims and scope

Research with East London communities is designed to support equitable place-based research. Produced in collaboration by Queen Mary University of London (Queen Mary), voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners across East London, and Neighbourly Lab, it provides guidance and resources for research within and across the seven East London boroughs: Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest. In contrast to more generic guides to place-based research, we focus on research with communities in East London, recognizing the diversity within and between places and communities across the seven boroughs.

The guidance and resources are intended to provide practical support for researchers and research support staff at Queen Mary and other universities, and people involved in research in community, voluntary and civic organisations across East London. We hope that its contents are helpful for people at all career stages and different levels of research experience and for those who already work with East London communities and those who would like to do so.

This guide is part of a broader programme to further enhance civic research culture at Queen Mary:

research that is inclusive, engaged and interdisciplinary and addresses key priorities across East London by working in equitable partnership with civic and community organisations (see Box 1 on working in equitable partnership). Equitable place-based research involves a move away from carrying out research about the local area or population to research which addresses key priorities in East London in collaboration with communities and organisations with lived experience and expertise. Working together helps to develop the positive impact of research for residents, communities and places.

The guide is aligned with Queen Mary's Civic University Agreement (see Box 2), which was launched in 2022 to formalize Queen Mary's longstanding commitment to work in, with and for East London in our research, teaching, and other core business. The guide is also closely aligned with the aims of Queen Mary's East London Research Network (see Box 3) and East London Civic Action Network (see Box 4).

1. Working in equitable partnership

When universities, local councils, NHS Trusts, schools, charities, businesses and community groups work together, they can achieve far more than they could alone. Queen Mary's Civic team worked with 50 civic, community and university partners across England to develop a toolkit on equitable partnerships as part of the National Civic Impact Accelerator programme (funded by Research England and led by Sheffield Hallam University). Launched in 2025, the toolkit outlines Queen Mary's values-led principles for working in equitable partnership and provides practical guidance to help make partnerships fairer, longer-lasting and more impactful.

To access the toolkit, scan or visit
qmul.ac.uk/media/qmul/civic-website/1-partnerships

2. Queen Mary's Civic University Agreement

Queen Mary's CUA was launched in 2022 after a two-year listening campaign and collaborative prioritisation with civic and community partners across East London, supported by East London Citizens and the Institute for Community Studies. Its five priority themes are: inclusive place-making; healthy and sustainable futures; pathways for life; a cultural hub for East London; and enabling civic practice. Queen Mary's strategic civic partners – who are represented on our Civic Advisory Board – are London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Barts Health NHS Trust, East London Business Alliance, Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, Citizens UK, Women's Inclusive Team, Ocean Regeneration Trust, Drapers' Multi-Academy Trust, University Schools' Trust, and Newham FE College.

To learn more, scan or visit
qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london

3. East London Research Network

Queen Mary's East London Research Network brings together over 350 researchers and research support roles across all three Faculties at Queen Mary to share best practice, build connections and discuss opportunities and challenges for research in, with and for East London. The Network meets 3-4 times a year, including an annual workshop with East London Citizens. Recent meetings have focused on research with the voluntary and community sector and with children and young people in East London. Network members have been involved in the workshops developing the content for this guide.

To learn more and join the Network, scan or visit qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london/research/elrn

4. East London Civic Action Network

The East London Civic Action Network (ELCAN) brings together stakeholders to strategise action around shared challenges and objectives in, with and for East London linked to Queen Mary's Civic University Agreement priority areas. The network connects Queen Mary researchers, professional services staff, students and alumni with organisations, institutions, networks, leaders and residents across East London. Key areas of focus include building health equity in East London (2024) and growth, skills and innovation (2026).

To learn more and join ELCAN, scan or visit qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london/east-london-civic-action-network

Researchers at Queen Mary work closely with community and civic partners across East London, and many VCS organisations lead their own research, often with peer and/or community co-researchers. A range of examples across all three Faculties at Queen Mary are available are available on Queen Mary's 'For East London' webpages, including short films about the following partnerships between Queen Mary and VCS organisations in East London: Kathleen McCarthy from Queen Mary's Language Acquisition Lab with Alison Gawthrope from Tower Hamlets Education Partnership; Sara Paparini from the SHARE Collaborative with Renee West from Positive East; and Devan Mair from the N20 Know the Risks campaign with Abdallah Ali from Osmani Trust.

All university researchers working with community members and VCS organisations will need to adhere to all the relevant organisational requirements, including obtaining ethics approval, where required. In addition, safeguarding policies that apply to research, as well as those of any organisations involved, will need to be applied to the practices outlined in this guide. Further information and resources about responsible research and innovation are available on Queen Mary's Joint Research Management Office webpages.

Research takes place over different timescales and with different levels of funding (see section 8 on funding for place-based research). Research doesn't always go as planned, and researchers often need to respond to changing contexts and be flexible in their approach. We hope that this guide, alongside Equitable Partnerships for Civic Engagement: a toolkit for civic, community and university partners (see Box 1), provides practical guidance for research with communities in East London.

The guidance and resources are relevant for activities involved in all stages of research with East London communities, across different disciplines and approaches, and from initial ideas and research design to analysis, feeding back research findings and embedding impact and engagement.

The impact of community-engaged research spans social, cultural, economic, health and environmental benefits, as well as impact on public policy, services, skills, innovation and quality of life. In addition to engaging with VCS organisations and community members at an early stage to develop research priorities together, it is also important to engage with other organisations and decision-makers too, whether in local and national government, the NHS and/or the commercial sector. Working together helps to develop the positive impact of research including via development of knowledge which sheds light on socio-economic and health inequalities that are detrimental to communities in East London; or via evidence for effective interventions or innovations to address these inequalities or otherwise support local people and places. Benefits may also result from the varied professional skills, expert knowledge and deeper understanding and impact which can be gained by academic researchers, VCS organisations and peer and community co-researchers when they work together.

Development of the guidance and resources

The guidance and resources were developed from 2023 to 2025 by Queen Mary's Civic Research Culture team in collaboration with:
• East London VCS organisations
• Queen Mary researchers and research support staff, including members of Queen Mary's East London Research Network
• Neighbourly Lab.

The guidance draws on the collective expertise of community members and organisations, and Queen Mary researchers, research support staff and civic engagement staff. Many took part in workshops at Toynbee Hall, Queen Mary and online. Representatives from eight East London VCS organisations also took part in interviews and co-produced case studies about their research with East London communities, including on collaborative projects with researchers

at Queen Mary (see Sections 4 and 5). We thank colleagues from the following organisations for their invaluable contributions.
• account3
• Blooming Parenting
• Da'watul Islam
• Coffee Afrik
• East London Citizens
• East London Out Project (ELOP)
• Muslim Community Association – Muslimaat UK
• Newham Community Project
• Real Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO)
• Social Action for Health (SAfH)
• Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS)
• Tower Hamlets Parent and Carer Forum
• Toynbee Hall
• Women's Environmental Network (Wen)
• Women's Inclusive Team (WIT).

Values-led research in, with and for East London

These are core values as outlined in the Queen Mary Strategy 2030.

Inclusive
Embedding opportunities throughout the research process which enable communities, organisations, and residents to engage meaningfully as partners in research design, delivery, and dissemination.

Proud
Celebrating Queen Mary's heritage and place in East London by championing research that reflects the area's diversity, creativity, and

social contribution, demonstrating the collective impact of collaboration.

Ambitious
Strengthening and expanding Queen Mary's research engagement with East London by responding to local priorities, supporting innovation, and developing new models of equitable partnership working that can inform practice more widely.

Collegial
Promoting a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange by sharing

East London research and insights across internal, local, national, and international platforms, positioning East London as a driver of research excellence, local growth and civic innovation.

Ethical
Upholding high standards of integrity and accountability in research with East London communities by recognising and valuing community knowledge and lived experience as integral to the research process, ensuring contributions are acknowledged and benefits are shared equitably.

2. An introduction to East London

Originally developing eastwards from the medieval City of London and now spanning seven boroughs and 142 square miles, East London is home to more than two million people. Places and communities across East London have been shaped by long histories of migration, working class culture, reformer heritage and political activism (see the borough profiles in Section 3 for demographic and other data and the East London place navigator in Section 8 for links to archives, museums and other heritage organisations in and about East London).

A series of panoramic photographs taken looking East and West from the top of the same building on Queen Mary's Mile End campus in 1964, c.2000 and 2023 show significant change across East London over the past 60 years.

Looking east, the cranes and industrial buildings visible in the 1964 panorama show the significance of the docks along the River Thames, where trade, industry and warehouses had connected East London to the wider world since the 17th century. The two

more recent panoramas reveal how East London's industrial base and built environment have changed since the 1960s, including through the redevelopment of the declining docks into the Canary Wharf financial district from the 1980s; the commercial and residential redevelopment of Stratford following the London 2012 Olympics; and the proliferation of high-rise office buildings that have changed the landscape looking west to the City of London (also see Box 5 on the East London Atlas).

View east
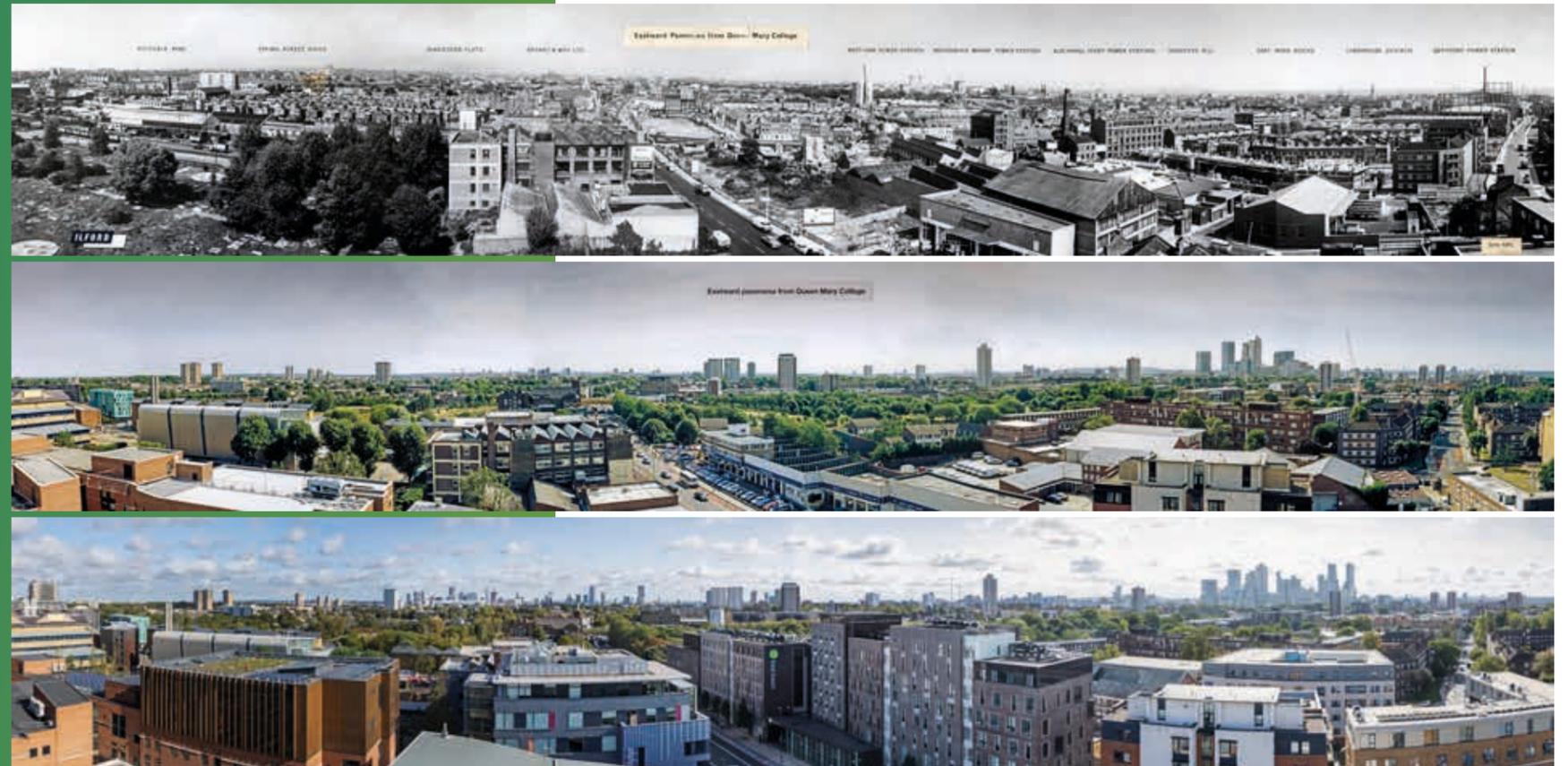
View west

5. East London Atlas

The East London Atlas is a collection of maps, resources and stories compiled by staff and students in Geography and Environmental Science at Queen Mary. It celebrates creative and critical ways of mapping East London.

The website includes Student StoryMaps, which are digital research stories incorporating text, interactive maps and images produced by first year undergraduate students in Geography and Environmental Science at Queen Mary. The Research Resource Map is a curated list of archives, museums, data sets, websites and research centres on East London.

Scan or visit
eastlondonatlas.qmul.ac.uk

The River Thames continues to play a key role in the growth and development of East London, connecting its inner boroughs to the City of London, Canary Wharf and the Royal Docks Enterprise Zone, and extending its connections eastwards along the Thames Estuary Production Corridor towards Essex and Kent. Key sectors prioritised in the UK's Industrial Strategy and the London Growth Plan provide employment, investment and innovation, including in financial services, life sciences, the creative industries, further and higher education, and the green economy. But alongside growth in these and other sectors in some parts of East London, many challenges remain, including socio-economic and health inequalities, poverty and deprivation, and overcrowded and unaffordable housing.

East London's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity reflects its long history of migration from different parts of the world as well as from elsewhere in the UK. Many people have come to East London in search of work and to escape persecution and poverty, including Huguenot refugees from France who settled in Spitalfields in the 17th century; Irish migrants during and after the Famine in the 1840s who lived in Whitechapel, Spitalfields and Bethnal Green; and Ashkenazi Jews fleeing persecution in eastern and central Europe from the 1870s, who settled in Whitechapel, Spitalfields and Stepney. From the 19th century, Chinese sailors lived in Limehouse, and other seafarers including Yemenis, Somalis and lascars from South Asia lived close to the docks, while a home for ayahs – female servants from India who looked after British children, and were often left destitute after the sea voyage to London – opened in Hackney in 1900. Many other people migrated to East London after the Second World War, including from the West Indies since the 1940s, and from Bangladesh, particularly Sylhet, from the 1950s to the 1970s, with the latter often living and working around Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets. Somali, Turkish and Vietnamese communities also grew during the post-war period in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham, particularly following the Vietnam War in the 1970s and the civil war in Somalia in the 1990s. Migration from Eastern Europe increased across East London following the 2004 expansion of the European Union.

East London has also been shaped by internal migration by working-class families, including many second- and third-generation migrants, from the inner city to outer suburbs and to Essex, Hertfordshire and Kent. East London's docks and industry made it a target for extensive bombing during the Second World War. Up to 200,000 people were rehoused from inner East London boroughs from 1945 to the early 1970s, including through slum clearance and bomb-damage rehousing (late 1940s-50s); rehousing to London County Council 'out-county estates' (1950s-60s), including Harold Hill in Havering (where Queen Mary co-sponsors Drapers' Multi-Academy Trust with the Drapers' Company); and migration to New Towns further afield (1950s-70s), such as Basildon, Harlow and Thurrock/ South Ockendon in Essex, Hemel Hempstead and Stevenage in Hertfordshire, and to Milton Keynes. Many people continue to move from inner to outer East London and beyond, often because of increased housing costs due to gentrification and regeneration in more centrally located boroughs.

Closely connected to its working class and migration history, East London is also notable for its reformer heritage and political activism, both of which have had a significant impact elsewhere in the UK and beyond. In East London in the 19th century, for example, William and Catherine Booth founded the Christian Mission in 1865, which was renamed the Salvation Army in 1878; Thomas Barnardo opened London's largest Ragged School in 1877 (now the Ragged School Museum) to provide free education for poor children; and Samuel and Henrietta Barnett founded Toynbee Hall in 1884, which was the first of several settlement houses in East London and inspired the worldwide settlement movement. In 1887, the Drapers' Company supported the founding of The People's Palace Technical Schools in East London and funded its work to provide educational opportunities for people from all backgrounds. The

People's Palace later became East London College and then Queen Mary College, one of Queen Mary's four founding institutions, alongside the London Hospital Medical College, St Bartholomew's Medical College and Westfield College, and continues to inspire our work in East London and beyond.

Queen Mary University of London Archives: The People's Palace c1900s; Aimg-0014-2.

Political activism also has strong roots in East London and has focused on workers' rights, women's suffrage, anti-fascism, anti-racism and housing justice. Examples include the 1888 Matchgirls' Strike for better working conditions at the Bryant and May factory in Bow; the London Dock Strike of 1889, which led to a national movement for the unionisation of casual workers; the East London Federation of Suffragettes, founded by Sylvia Pankhurst in 1912; the Poplar Rates Rebellion in 1921 led by George Lansbury, which prioritised welfare spending for the poor even in defiance of the law; and industrial action by women at the Ford plant in Dagenham in 1968 to be paid the same wages as male staff, which led to the Equal Pay Act of 1970.

East London was the frontline against Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, most famously in the Battle of Cable Street in 1936 when Jewish, Irish and socialist residents united to block a fascist march. East London's migrant communities have continued to face and resist racist violence since then, including from the National Front in the 1970s and 1980s against Bengali migrants in Brick Lane. In 1978, Altab Ali, a young Bengali factory worker, was murdered in a racist attack. 7000 people marched to Downing Street behind his coffin to demand police protection and an end to racist violence. In 1989, a memorial arch was installed in the park where Ali was murdered, and the park was renamed Altab Ali Park in 1998. Since 2015, Tower Hamlets has hosted an annual Altab Ali Commemoration. Oral history projects on anti-racist activism in East London include 'Brick Lane 1978: the Turning Point,' led by Four Corners and Swadhinata Trust, and 'In living memory: archiving, learning and mobilising against racism in East London,' led by Queen Mary and Rich Mix (see the East London place navigator in section 8 for links to other heritage organisations).

The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) and community organizing are also well established in East London (see the East London place navigator in Section 8). As the 2025 State of the Sector Report published by the North East London VCFSE Collaborative shows, the sector 'plays a vital role in supporting one of the most diverse and deprived regions in the country' (see **State of Sector Report**). There are 5534 VCFSE organisations operating locally and regionally across North East London, employing 22,626 people and engaging 98,247 volunteers. But while the work of these organizations is vital in supporting residents and communities, they face significant financial and operational challenges. The sector is primarily small-scale and grassroots, with the annual incomes of 61% of organisations under £100,000, including 30% with an annual income under £10,000. Only 20% of organisations report secure funding and Global Majority-led organisations face disproportionate financial challenges. While 43% of organisations receive NHS referrals, only 13% receive health-related funding, demonstrating limited integration with NHS systems. The East London place navigator in Section 8 includes a range of infrastructural and other VCFSE organisations with links to research at Queen Mary. We are very grateful for the VCFSE organisations that have been involved in developing the guidance and resources, including through workshops, interviews, case studies and feedback on drafts (see p.8).
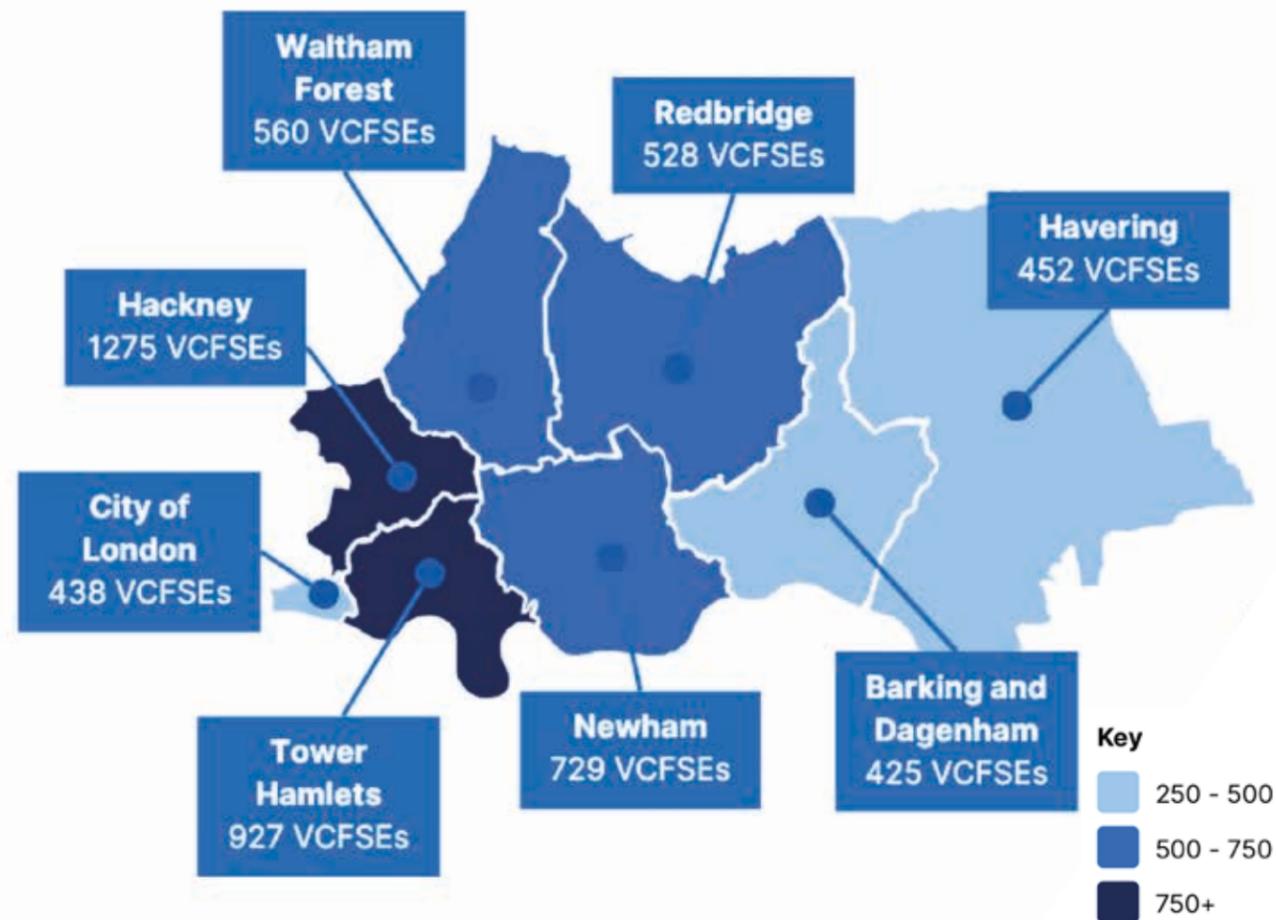
This map shows the distribution of 5,534 local and regional Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations based in North East London in July 2025. This figure is based on Charity Commission and Companies House data and excludes national and international charities (as well as 206 with unknown scale of operations). It also excludes small, unconstituted community groups. Recent research from NAVCA has put this figure at up to 68% of the sector.

Used with permission from State of the Sector Report 2025, NEL VCFSE Collaborative. https://thcvs.org.uk/north-east-london-state-of-the-sector/

East London Citizens (TELCO – The East London Citizens Organisation) is the founding chapter of Citizens UK. Starting in 1996, its alliance includes over 50,000 people from schools, universities – including Queen Mary – churches, mosques, migrant groups and other community organizations, with alliances based in most of the boroughs across East London. East London Citizens works to overcome injustice and win change on the priorities identified by local communities, including on housing and homelessness; work and wages; migration; health; and youth safety. Queen Mary has worked with East London Citizens for many years, including with researchers and students in Geography building the evidence base to underpin the Living Wage campaign, and Queen Mary becoming the first university in the UK to be a Living Wage employer in 2006; the Health Equity Action Leadership (HEAL) project, a partnership between TELCO and Barts Health NHS Trust; and research on addressing housing distress to improve health and well-being in UK inner cities.

This section has introduced East London and its communities, past and present. The next section focuses on demographic data and other information about East London's seven boroughs.

3. East London borough profiles

East London is a vibrant and diverse region, centred around Barking & Dagenham, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

The data by borough below highlights both the vibrancy and the complexity of East London's communities. With high diversity, significant youth populations, and strong local networks and community-led initiatives, the region offers many opportunities for growth and partnership. At the same time, the relatively lower employment rate, high rates of poverty and overcrowded housing indicate that research collaborations must be designed with sensitivity to local challenges, and grounded in long-term, equitable engagement.

This section includes data from Census 2021, Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025, and Local Authorities in East London. Such data is helpful in building our understanding of the areas and communities within East London. However, this data does not capture intersectionalities, communities that are under-represented in the data, significant differences between neighbourhoods within the same borough, or similarities and differences across boroughs.

Census data, for example, captures a moment in time, but doesn't reflect the pace of demographic, economic, or cultural change. It can miss emerging trends such as gentrification, community displacement, or the effects of regeneration. Data is usually presented at ward or borough level which may hide variation within neighbourhoods or mask smaller but significant communities. Some populations are under-represented in data or may underreport (for example, people experiencing homelessness, recent migrants, undocumented residents, students, or those with language barriers). This can lead to gaps or misrepresentation, particularly in diverse urban areas like East London.

The borough profiles in this section include data on age, country of birth, languages spoken, ethnicity, faith and deprivation. Data on sexual orientation, gender identity and disability has not been included in the borough profiles due to limitations in census data, which stem from the voluntary nature of these questions and the associated data collection methods. While the census provides an illustrative overview to convey a sense of place, population, and relative diversity, we recommend drawing on alternative sources to develop a more accurate and nuanced understanding of these characteristics within specific boroughs.

Scan or visit **stonewall.org.uk/ resources**

Scan or visit **rand.org/ content/dam/rand/pubs/ perspectives/PEA2800/ PEA2830-1**

Scan or visit **scope.org.uk/ campaigns**

In addition, Trust for London provides data about London's poverty profile by topic, demographics and borough. It also provides a series of interactive maps from Census 2021 data on ethnic diversity and deprivation; London's disabled population and deprivation; gender identity and deprivation; children, young people and older people and deprivation. This data is provided by borough and on neighbourhood levels.

To see London's Poverty Profile, scan or visit **trustforlondon.org.uk/ data**

To see Census 2021, scan or visit **trustforlondon. uk/data/census-2021**

	Barking and Dagenham	Hackney	Havering	Newham	Redbridge	Tower Hamlets	Waltham Forest	London	England and Wales
Population	232,747	266,758	276,274	374,523	321,231	331,886	279, 737	8,945,000	59,597,542
Median Age	32	32	38	31	35	30	36	36	40
Main spoken language	1. English (75.95%) 2. Romanian (4.78%) 3. Bengali (3.1%) 4. Lithuanian (2.12%)	1. English (80.13%) 2. Turkish (3.21%) 3. Spanish (2%) 4. French (1.33%)	1. English (90.12%) 2. Romanian (2.28%) 3. Lithuanian (0.87%) 4. Panjabi (0.55%)	1. English (65.37%) 2. Bengali (6.36%) 3. Romanian (5.26%) 4. Urdu (2.21%)	1. English (73.55%) 2. Romanian (4.31%) 3. Bengali (3.26%) 4. Panjabi (2.85%)	1. English (73.01%) 2. Bengali (10.97%) 3. Italian (2.22%) 4. Spanish (1.68%)	1. English (77.58%) 2. Romanian (3.97%) 3. Urdu (1.79%) 4. Bulgarian (1.65%)	1. English (78.4%) 2. Romanian (1.9%) 3. Spanish (1.4%) 4. Polish (1.3%)	1. English (91.1%) 2. Polish (1.1%) 3. Romanian (0.8%) 4. Panjabi (0.5%)
Ethnicity	1. White: British (30.9%) 2. Black African (16%) 3. White: Other White (13%) 4. Asian: Bangladeshi (10.2%)	1. White British (33.9%) 2. White: Other White (16.6%) 3. Black: African (6.9%) 4. Other ethnic group (4.9%)	1. White British (66.5%) 2. White: Other White (7.4%) 3. Black: African (5.4%) 4. Asian: Indian (4.3%)	1. Asian: Bangladeshi (15.9%) 2. White British (14.8%) 3. White: Other White (14.6%) 4. Black: African (11.6%)	1. White: British (23.2%) 2. Asian: Indian (16.5%) 3. Asian: Pakistani (14.2%) 4. Asian: Bangladeshi (10.3%)	1. Asian: Bangladeshi (34.6%) 2. White: British (22.9%) 3. White: Other White (14.6%) 4. Black: African (5%)	1. White: British (34%) 2. White: Other White (16.7%) 3. Asian: Pakistani (10.3%) 4. Black: African (6.7%)	1. White: British (36.8%) 2. White: Other White (17%) 3. Black: African (7.9%) 4. Asian: Indian (7.5%)	1. White: British (74.4%) 2. White: White other (6.2%) 3. Asian: Indian (3.1%) 4. Black: African (2.5%)
Key town centres and high streets	Chadwell Heath Barking Town Centre Dagenham Heathway Green Lane	Hackney central Dalston Hoxton Haggerston Clapton London Fields	Romford Upminster Hornchurch Elm Park Harold Hill Collier Row Rainham	Stratford East Ham Green Street Canning Town Manor Park	Ilford Wanstead Woodford and South Woodford Barkingside	Whitechapel Aldgate East Bethnal Green Canary Wharf Chrisp Street Roman Road Brick Lane	Walthamstow Leyton/Leytonstone Chingford Blackhorse Lane Wood Street		

Data source: ONS Census 2021 data and London Data Store: https://data.london.gov.uk/demography/

Barking and Dagenham

Barking and Dagenham came together and became part of Greater London in 1965 after previously existing as separate areas in the county of Essex[1]. The borough has a fast-growing population recorded at 232,747 in 2024 (ONS 2024) following an increase of 17.7% between 2011 and 2021 (ONS 2021), the 3rd largest population increase of all local authority areas in England and Wales during this decade (after Tower Hamlets and Dartford). The population density in 2021 was 43.3 people per football pitch sized area of land (ONS 2021).

[1] The borough's name changed from "Barking" to "Barking and Dagenham" in 1980.

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000002-barking-and-dagenham/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000002/

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/barking-and-dagenham-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/

About the borough:
https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/statistics-and-data/about-borough

Strategies, policies and plans:
https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/plans-and-priorities

Age

Barking and Dagenham has a population with a median age of 32, lower than the median age of 40 across England and Wales and the London median age of 36 (ONS 2024). The borough has the highest proportion of residents aged under 16 (25.3%) of all local authority areas in England and Wales, and the 4th lowest proportion of residents over 65 (8.6%) (ONS 2024). In 2023, the area also has the 2nd highest birthrate in the country with 66.7 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (ONS 2023).

Languages spoken

75.95% of residents reported English as their main language in 2021. 4.78% of residents reported Romanian as their main language, making it the next most spoken main language after English. This was followed by Bengali, which was spoken as the main language by 3.1% of residents (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

58.2% of Barking and Dagenham residents were born in England (ONS 2021). Residents whose country of birth was Romania increased from 0.7 % in 2011 to 4.3% in 2021. This is now the joint second most represented group for country of birth after England alongside Nigeria, followed by Bangladesh (4.2%) and Pakistan (3.3%) (ONS 2021).

Faith

The proportion of residents in Barking and Dagenham who describe themselves as Muslim increased from 13.7% in 2011 to 24.4% in 2021 (ONS 2021), compared to a smaller increase from 12.6% to 15% across all of London. Residents who identified as Christian dropped from 56% in 2011 to 45.4% in 2021 (ONS 2021). 3% of the population identified as Hindu and 2% as Sikh in the last Census (ONS 2021).

Ethnicity

In 2021, 44.9% of residents in Barking and Dagenham identified their ethnicity as White, compared to 58.3% in 2021. 30.9% specified their ethnicity as White British, while 13% specified that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 25.9% of residents identified themselves as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" in 2021 (ONS 2021), reflecting an increase from 15.9% in 2011. 10.2% of residents in 2021 reported their ethnicity specifically as Bangladeshi, 7.2% as Pakistani and 5.3% as Indian (ONS 2021). 21.4% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category, compared to 20% in 2021(ONS 2021).16% of residents specified their ethnicity as African and 2.7% as Caribbean (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in 2025, Barking and Dagenham is more deprived than 97% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). 32 of Barking and Dagenham's 115 neighbourhoods[2] are in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England while none were in the 20% least deprived (ONS 2025). In 2024, the unemployment rate was 6.7%, higher than the national average of 3.5%, but lower than the 5.1% across London boroughs (Trust for London 2025). 38.4% of the population live in income deprived households (MHCLG 2025), the fifth highest proportion of any local authority district in England (after Birmingham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham). Barking and Dagenham also ranked tenth out of all local authority districts in for proportion of older people (aged over 60) living in income deprived households (36.4%). The average gross disposable household income (GDHI) per head in 2023 was £21,179, which was lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year and the lowest of any London borough (ONS 2023).

[2] Neighbourhood refers here to Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA), a geographic area containing 1000-3000 people.

Hackney

The London Borough of Hackney was created in 1965, combining the three previous metropolitan boroughs of Hackney, Shoreditch[3] and Stoke Newington. It is an inner-city borough, bridging East, North and Central London. Despite being a densely built-up urban area, it is also characterised by its many parks and green spaces. Hackney has a population of 266,758 (ONS 2024). Between 2011 and 2021, the population of Hackney increased by 5.2%, a slightly smaller population increase than that of London as a whole (7.7%) and that of the England (6.6%) (ONS 2021). In 2021, Hackney was home to 97.1 residents per football pitch-sized piece of land, making it the third-most densely populated local authority area in England after the neighbouring boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Islington (ONS 2021).

[3] Shoreditch, as we know it today, overlaps both Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000012-hackney/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000012

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/hackney-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/?tab=poverty-and-living-standards

Communities:
https://hackney.gov.uk/knowing-our-communities

Strategic plan 2022-2026:
https://hackney.gov.uk/strategic-plan

Population data:
https://hackney.gov.uk/population

Age

The median age of residents in Hackney is 32, lower than the median age of 40 across England and Wales, and the London median age of 36 (ONS 2024). Hackney has the joint-second lowest median age of any London borough, alongside Newham and after Tower Hamlets (ONS 2021). The proportion of residents who are children under the age of 16 is 18.1% (similar to the national average of 17.8%). The proportion of residents aged over 65 is much lower than the national average (8.5% compared to 20.1%).

Languages spoken

In 2021, 80.13% of residents reported English as their main language. The next most represented language was Turkish, reported as the main language of 3.21% of residents. This was followed by Spanish, spoken as main language of 2% of people in Hackney, and French, the main language of 1.33% of people in Hackney (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

In 2021, 58.2% reported that they were born in England, reflecting very little change since 2011 (58.4%). The next most represented country of birth was Turkey, where 3.3% of residents said they were born. This was followed by South American countries (2.1% up from 1.7%) and Nigeria (2% down from 2.7%) (ONS 2021).

Faith

In 2021, 30.7% of residents identified their religion as Christian (down from 38.6% in 2011), 13.3% identified their religion as Muslim (down from 14.1% in 2011) and 6.7% of people identified their religion as Jewish (down from 7.3%). Notably, Hackney is home to one of the largest Charedi Jewish communities in Europe, mostly living in the Northeast of the Borough (Hackney Council 2025). 36.3% of people in Hackney reported having no religion.

Ethnicity

In 2021, 53.1% of Hackney residents identified their ethnic group as "White" (ONS 2021). 33.9% specified their ethnicity as White British, while 16.6% specified that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 23.1% of Hackney residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category, compared with 21.1% in 2011 (ONS 2021). 11.4% specified that they were African and 6.9% specified that they were Caribbean (ONS 2021). Residents who identified their ethnicity as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" made up 10.4% of the population (ONS 2021). 3.4% of residents specified their ethnicity as Indian, 2.5% as Bangladeshi and 1.3% as Chinese (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Hackney is more deprived than 97% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). 60 of Hackney's 149 neighbourhoods are among the 20% most deprived in England while only one is in the 20% least deprived (ONS 2025). In 2024, the unemployment rate was 5.2%, which was close to the London average of 5.1% (Trust for London 2025). 40% of the population live in income deprived households (MHCLG 2025), the third highest proportion of any local authority district in England (after Birmingham and Tower Hamlets). Hackney has the second highest proportion of children living in income deprived households (64.1%) and the second proportion of older people living in income deprived households (54.7%) of all local authority districts in England. In 2023, the average gross household disposable income (GDHI) per head was £34,013, close to the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023).

Havering

Havering was part of Essex until 1965, at which point it became part of Greater London with the Municipal Borough of Romford and Hornchurch Urban District combining. It is the third largest London borough, covering 43 square miles, and is characterised by its suburban areas and extensive and diverse natural landscape (Havering Character Study 2024). Its main town is Romford. Havering has an estimated population of 276,274 (ONS 2024). It is the 2nd least densely populated area in London (after Bromley) and is home to 16.7 residents per football pitch sized piece of land (ONS 2021).

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000016-havering/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000016

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/havering-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/?tab=poverty-and-living-standards

Character study:
https://www.havering.gov.uk/downloads/file/6745/havering-character-study-final-report

Local plan 2016-2031:
https://www.havering.gov.uk/downloads/file/5300/havering_local_plan_2016_-_2031.pdf

Age
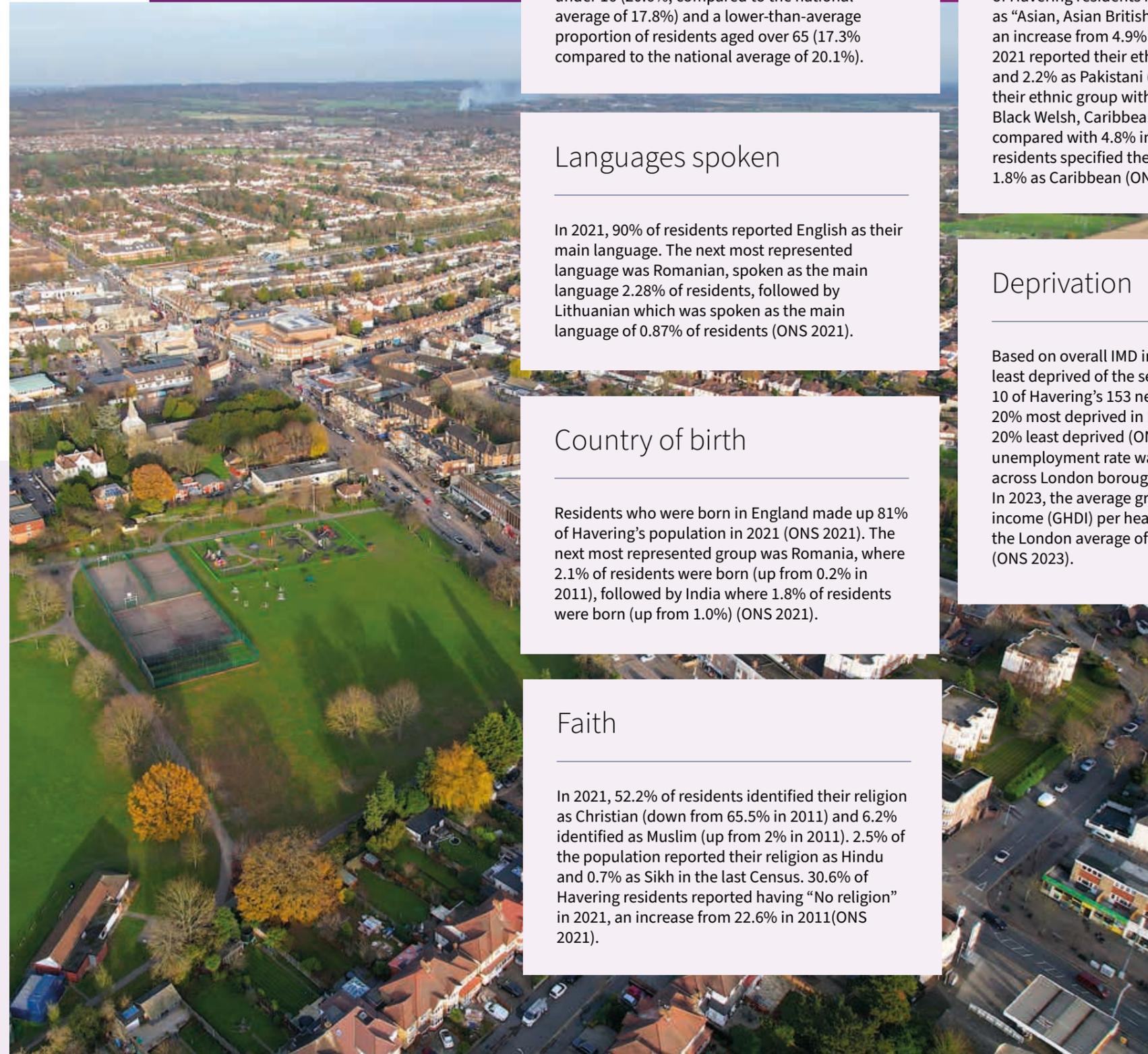
The median age of residents in Havering is 38, which is lower than the median age of 40 across England and Wales, but higher than the London median age of 36 (ONS 2024). The borough has a higher-than-average population of children aged under 16 (20.6%, compared to the national average of 17.8%) and a lower-than-average proportion of residents aged over 65 (17.3% compared to the national average of 20.1%).

Languages spoken

In 2021, 90% of residents reported English as their main language. The next most represented language was Romanian, spoken as the main language 2.28% of residents, followed by Lithuanian which was spoken as the main language of 0.87% of residents (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

Residents who were born in England made up 81% of Havering's population in 2021 (ONS 2021). The next most represented group was Romania, where 2.1% of residents were born (up from 0.2% in 2011), followed by India where 1.8% of residents were born (up from 1.0%) (ONS 2021).

Faith

In 2021, 52.2% of residents identified their religion as Christian (down from 65.5% in 2011) and 6.2% identified as Muslim (up from 2% in 2011). 2.5% of the population reported their religion as Hindu and 0.7% as Sikh in the last Census. 30.6% of Havering residents reported having "No religion" in 2021, an increase from 22.6% in 2011(ONS 2021).

Ethnicity

In 2021, 75.3% of residents identified their ethnic group as "White" compared to a higher 87.7% in 2011. 66.5% specified their ethnicity as White British, while 7.4% specified that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 10.7% of Havering residents identified their ethnic group as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh", reflecting an increase from 4.9% in 2011. 4.3% of residents in 2021 reported their ethnicity specifically as Indian, and 2.2% as Pakistani (ONS 2021). 8.2% identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category, compared with 4.8% in 2011 (ONS 2021). 5.4% of residents specified their ethnicity as African and 1.8% as Caribbean (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Havering was the least deprived of the seven East London boroughs. 10 of Havering's 153 neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived in England and 42 were in the 20% least deprived (ONS 2025). In 2024, the unemployment rate was 3.8%, lower than 5.1% across London boroughs (Trust for London 2025). In 2023, the average gross household disposable income (GHDI) per head was £27,088, lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023).

Newham

The London borough of Newham was formed in 1965, combining the previous Essex County boroughs of East Ham and West Ham. Newham is a densely-built-up borough containing regenerated areas such as Stratford and the Royal Docks. Parts of Newham, particularly Stratford, experienced large-scale transformation and redevelopment in connection to the London 2012 Olympic Games. In 2024, Newham had a population recorded at 374,523 (ONS 2024). In 2021, Newham was home to 69.2 residents per football pitch sized piece of land, putting it in the top 3% of most densely populated areas in England.

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000025-newham/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000025

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/newham-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/?tab=poverty-and-living-standards

About the borough:
https://www.newham.gov.uk/jobs-training/borough-like-no

Stratford & West Ham Community Neighbourhood:
https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6010/stratford-community-neighbourhood-online

Age

In 2024, the median age of residents in Newham was 31 (ONS 2024). This is the second lowest median age of any local authority area in England (after Tower Hamlets). Newham has a higher-than-average population of children aged under 16 (20.1%, compared to the national average of 17.8%) and has the second lowest population over the age of 65 of any London Borough (7.5%, after Tower Hamlets) (ONS 2024).

Languages spoken

In 2021, English was reported as the main language of 65.37% of Newham residents. 6.36% of residents reported Bengali as their main language, 5.25% reported Romanian as their main language and 2.21% reported Urdu as their main language (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

45.5% of Newham residents reported that they were born in England at the last Census (ONS 2021). The second most represented country was Bangladesh, where 7.7% of the population were born (up from 6.8%), followed by India which was the birthplace of 6.2% of residents (down from 8.7%) and Pakistan which was the birthplace of 3.9% of residents (down from 5.3%). Newham also has a population of residents born in Romania that grew from 1.6% to 5% between 2011 and 2021 (ONS 2021).

Faith

The proportion of Newham residents who identified as Christian in 2021 was 35.3% (down from 40%) and the proportion of residents who identified as Muslim was 34.8% (up from 32%). 6.1% of residents reported their religion as Hindu and 1.6% as Sikh. 14.5% of residents reported that they had no religion (ONS 2021).

Ethnicity

Newham is the most ethnically diverse of all local authorities in England and Wales.

In 2021, 43.5% of Newham residents identified their ethnic group as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" (ONS 2021). 15.9% of residents reported their ethnicity specifically as Bangladeshi, 11% as Indian and 8.9% as Pakistani (ONS 2021). 30.8% of residents identified their ethnic group as "White" (up from 29% in 2011) (ONS 2021). 14.8% specified their ethnicity as White British, while 14.6% specified that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 17.5% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category (ONS 2021). 11.6% of residents specified their ethnicity as African, 3.9% as Caribbean and 1.9% as "Other Black" (ONS 2021). 4.9% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Other" category (containing "Arab" or "Any other ethnic group") (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Newham is more deprived than 98% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). By this measure, it is the most deprived of all London boroughs. 84 of Newham's 185 neighbourhoods are among the 20% most deprived in England and 3 are among the 20% least deprived in England (ONS 2025). In 2024, the unemployment rate in Newham was 7.9%; this was the highest unemployment rate of any London borough (Trust for London 2025). 39% of the population live in income deprived households (MHCLG 2025), the fourth highest proportion of any local authority district in England. Newham has the fourth highest proportion of children living income deprived households (59.7%) and the third highest proportion of older people living in income deprived households (46.7%) of all local authority districts in England. In 2023, the average gross household disposable income (GHDI) per head was £24,233, lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023).

Redbridge

The London Borough of Redbridge was created in 1965 with the former municipal boroughs of Ilford, Wanstead and Woodford (plus some other smaller areas) coming together. The area was previously part of Essex. The largest town in Redbridge is Ilford. In 2024, the population of Redbridge was 321,231(ONS 2024). In 2021, Redbridge was in the top 10% most densely populated local authority areas in England and was home to 39.3 people per football pitch-sized piece of land (ONS 2021).

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000026-redbridge/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000026

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/redbridge-poverty-and-inequality-indicators

The Redbridge Plan 2022-2026::
https://www.redbridge.gov.uk/media/f4ojbh0u/the-redbridge-plan-july25.pdf

Age

The median age of residents in Redbridge is 35, which is lower than both the median age of 40 across England and Wales but around average for London (ONS 2024). The borough has a higher-than-average population of children aged under 16 (21.6%, compared to the national average of 17.8%) and a lower-than-average proportion of residents aged over 65 (12.6% compared to the national average of 20.1%) (ONS 2024).

Languages spoken

In 2021, English was the main language of 73.55% of Redbridge residents. Romanian was reported as the main language of 4.31% of residents followed by Bengali, spoken as the main language of 3.29% of residents, and Panjabi, spoken as the main language of 2.85% of residents (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

In 2021, residents who were born in England made up 55.5% of the population of Redbridge. The second most represented country was India, where 7.6% of the population were born, followed by Pakistan which was the birthplace of 5.3% of residents (ONS 2021).

Faith

31.3% of residents identified as Muslim in 2021, reflecting an increase from 23.3% in 2011. 30.4% of residents identified as Christian, reflecting a decrease from 36.8% in 2011. 12.6% of residents reported having no religion, 11.1% identified as Hindu and 5.7% identified as Sikh (ONS 2021).

Ethnicity

In 2021, 47.3% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, reflecting an increase from 41.8% in 2011 (ONS 2021). 16.5% of residents specified their ethnicity as Indian, 14.2% of residents were Pakistani and 10.3% were Bangladeshi (ONS 2021). 34.8% of residents identified their ethnic group as White (ONS 2021). 23.2% of residents specified that they were White British, while 10.2% specified that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 8.4% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category (ONS 2021). 4.6% of residents specified their ethnicity as African, 2.7% as Caribbean and 1% as "Other Black" (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Redbridge is more deprived than 57% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). By this measure, it was the second least deprived of the seven East London boroughs after Havering. 15 of Redbridge's 164 neighbourhoods were in the 20% most deprived in England, while 24 out of 164 were in the 20% least deprived (ONS 2025). In 2024, the unemployment rate was 5.6%, slightly higher than the London average of 5.1% (Trust for London 2025). In 2023, the average gross household disposable income (GHDI) was £27,443, lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023).

Tower Hamlets

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets was formed in 1965, combining the former Metropolitan Boroughs of Bethnal Green, Poplar, and Stepney. In 2024, Tower Hamlets had a population of 331,886 (ONS, 2024). Located just east of City of London, it is a highly urbanised inner-city borough, however it also contains some large green spaces. In 2021, the population density was recorded as around 112.1 people per football pitch-sized piece of land (compared with 91.8 in 2011), making it the most densely populated of any English local authority area (ONS 2021).

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000030-tower-hamlets/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000030-tower-hamlets/indicators

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/tower-hamlets-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/?tab=poverty-and-living-standards

About the borough:
https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/jobs_and_careers/working_for_tower_hamlets_coun/about_the_borough.aspx

Borough profile:
https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Tower-Hamlets-Borough-Profile-2024.pdf

Strategic Plan 2022-2026:
https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Strategy-and-performance/Tower-Hamlets-Council-Strategic-Plan-2022-2026.pdf

Age

In 2024, Tower Hamlets had a median age of 30, the lowest median age of any local authority area in England (ONS 2024). The borough has the second highest population aged between 16 and 64 of any local authority area in England (77.2%; after City of London). In 2023, there was a lower-than-average population of children aged under 16 (16.9%, compared to the national average of 17.8%) and the lowest proportion of residents aged over 65 (5.9% compared to the national average of 20.1%) (ONS 2024).

Languages spoken

In 2021, English was reported as the main language of 73.01% of Tower Hamlets residents. Bengali was next biggest main language, spoken as the main language of 10.97% of residents. This was followed by Italian, spoken as the main language of 2.22% of residents and Spanish, spoken as the main language of 1.68% of residents (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

In 2021, residents who were born in England made up 51.5% of the population in Tower Hamlets. The next most represented group was Bangladesh where 14% of residents were born, followed by Italy where 3.4% of residents were born (up from 1.2%) (ONS 2021).

Faith

In 2021, 39.9% of Tower Hamlets residents described themselves as Muslim, making it the area with the largest Muslim population in England. 22.3% described themselves as Christian (down from 29.8% in 2011), and 2% of residents described themselves as Hindu. Residents who reported having no religion made up 26.6% of the population (up from 21% in 2011) (ONS 2021).

Ethnicity

In 2021, 44.4% of Tower Hamlets residents identified their ethnic group as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" (up from 41.1% in 2011) (ONS 2021). 34.6% of residents reported their ethnicity specifically as Bangladeshi, making it the area with by far the largest proportion of Bangladeshi residents in England. 3.3% of residents specified their ethnicity as Indian and 3.3% as Chinese (ONS 2021). 39.4% of residents identified their ethnicity within the "White" category at the last census (down from 45.2% in 2011). 22.9% of all residents identified specifically as White British while 14.6% reported that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). The proportion of residents that identified their ethnicity within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category was 7.3% (unchanged from 2011) (ONS 2021). 5% of residents specified their ethnicity as African and 1.6% as Caribbean (ONS 2021). 3.9% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Other" category (which is made up of "Arab" and "Any other ethnic group") (ONS 2021).

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Tower Hamlets is more deprived than 93% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). 73 out of the 169 neighbourhoods in Tower Hamlets are among the 20% most deprived in England, while eight are among the 20% least deprived (ONS 2021). Much of the borough's wealth is clustered around the Canary Wharf area. The borough's unemployment rate in 2024 was 6.1%, which was slightly higher than the London average of 5.1% (Trust for London 2025). 40.1% of the population live in income deprived households (MHCLG 2025), the second highest proportion of any local authority district in England. Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion of children living in income deprived households (71.3%) and the also the highest proportion of older people living in income deprived households (61.1%) of all local authority districts in England. In 2023, the gross average household disposable income (GDHI) per head was £31,111, lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023). In Tower Hamlets 12.2% of households have 5 or more people per household.

Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest became a London borough in 1965, combining the former municipal boroughs of Chingford, Leyton, and Walthamstow. In 2024, the population of Waltham Forest was 279, 737 (ONS, 2024). In 2021, the population density was reported as around 51.2 people per football pitch-sized piece of land (compared with 47.5 in 2011), placing the borough among the top 5% most densely populated English local authority areas (ONS 2021).

Find out more

Local indicators:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E09000031-waltham-forest/indicators

Census Changes:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000031

Poverty and inequality data:
https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/waltham-forest-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/?tab=poverty-and-living-standards

About the borough:
https://www.missionwalthamforest.com/about-us/#:~:text=Waltham%20Forest%20is%20one%20of,Leyton%2C%20Leytonstone%2C%20and%20Walthamstow

Explore Census 2021 data:
https://census-2021-lbwfinsights.hub.arcgis.com

Local Plan 2020-2035:
https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/LBWF_LocalPlan_LP1_Feb2024_compressed.pdf
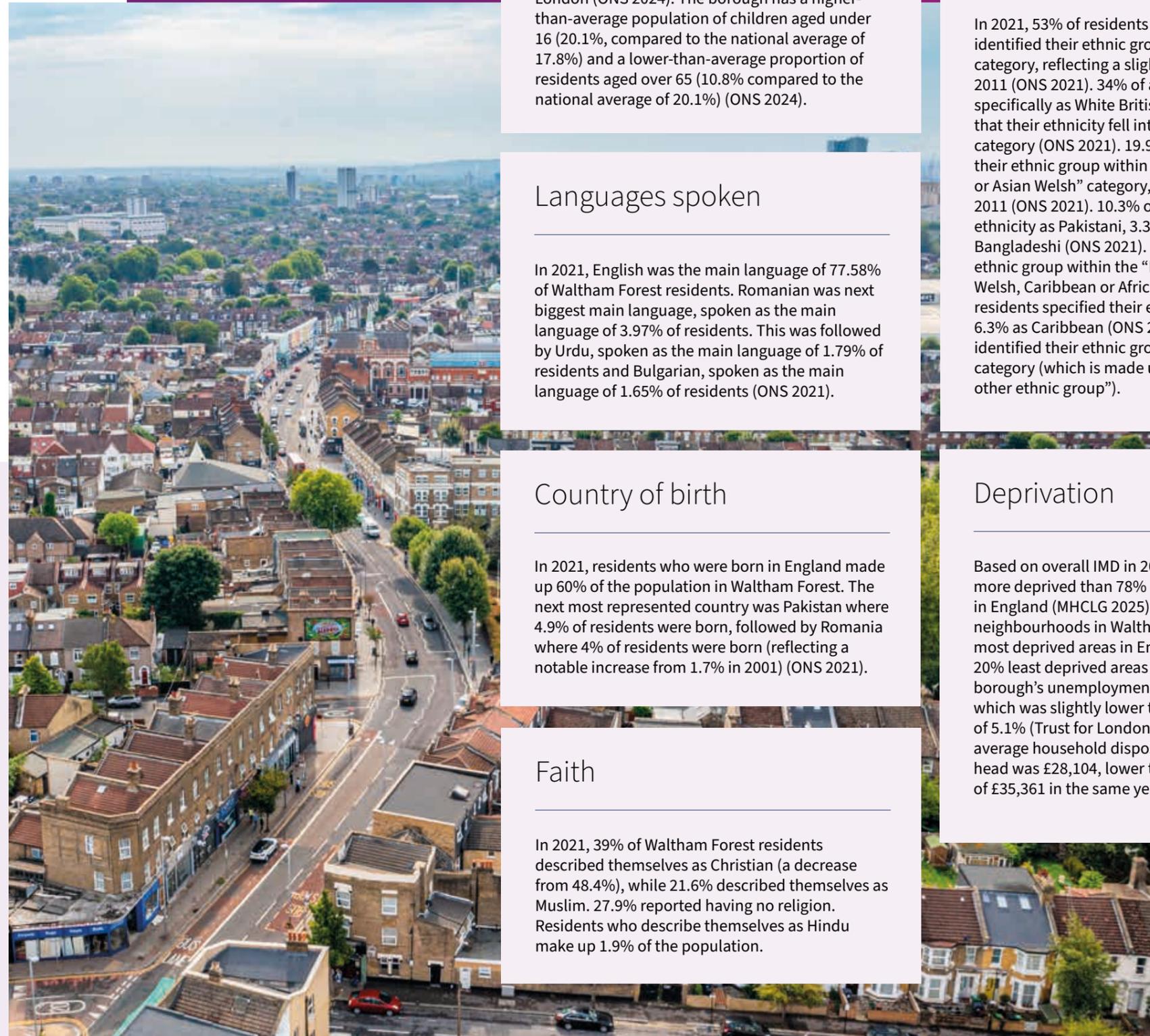
Age

Waltham Forest residents have a median age of 36, which is lower than both the median age of 40 across England and Wales but around average for London (ONS 2024). The borough has a higher-than-average population of children aged under 16 (20.1%, compared to the national average of 17.8%) and a lower-than-average proportion of residents aged over 65 (10.8% compared to the national average of 20.1%) (ONS 2024).

Languages spoken

In 2021, English was the main language of 77.58% of Waltham Forest residents. Romanian was next biggest main language, spoken as the main language of 3.97% of residents. This was followed by Urdu, spoken as the main language of 1.79% of residents and Bulgarian, spoken as the main language of 1.65% of residents (ONS 2021).

Country of birth

In 2021, residents who were born in England made up 60% of the population in Waltham Forest. The next most represented country was Pakistan where 4.9% of residents were born, followed by Romania where 4% of residents were born (reflecting a notable increase from 1.7% in 2001) (ONS 2021).

Faith

In 2021, 39% of Waltham Forest residents described themselves as Christian (a decrease from 48.4%), while 21.6% described themselves as Muslim. 27.9% reported having no religion. Residents who describe themselves as Hindu make up 1.9% of the population.

Ethnicity

In 2021, 53% of residents in Waltham Forest identified their ethnic group within the "White" category, reflecting a slight increase from 52% in 2011 (ONS 2021). 34% of all residents identified specifically as White British while 16.7% reported that their ethnicity fell into the "White Other" category (ONS 2021). 19.9% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, down from 21.1% in 2011 (ONS 2021). 10.3% of residents specified their ethnicity as Pakistani, 3.3% as Indian and 1.9% as Bangladeshi (ONS 2021). 15% identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" (ONS 2021). 6.7% of residents specified their ethnicity as African and 6.3% as Caribbean (ONS 2021). 5.8% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Other" category (which is made up of "Arab" and "Any other ethnic group").

Deprivation

Based on overall IMD in 2025, Waltham Forest is more deprived than 78% of local authority districts in England (MHCLG 2025). 19 out of the 146 neighbourhoods in Waltham Forest are in the 20% most deprived areas in England, while 4 are in the 20% least deprived areas (ONS 2025). The borough's unemployment rate in 2024 was 4.2%, which was slightly lower than the London average of 5.1% (Trust for London 2025). In 2023, the gross average household disposable income (GDHI) per head was £28,104, lower than the London average of £35,361 in the same year (ONS 2023).

4. Guidance for research with East London communities

This section provides insights into equitable research with East London communities and is organised into six themes:

1 Take time to build equal, trusting relationships and question power imbalances.

2 Get to know the East London communities you are planning to work with.

3 Respect and value people's time and contributions.

4 Commit and plan to create positive impact for East London communities.

5 Make research opportunities accessible, inclusive and safe.

6 Celebrate and learn.

The guidance and examples draw on the experiences and expertise of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and Queen Mary researchers and research support staff who have been involved in research collaborations and partnerships in East London. This section includes material from:

- Interviews with eight VCS organisations that have been involved in research based in East London, including with researchers at Queen Mary. These organisations are:
  - account3
  - Citizens UK
  - Coffee Afrik CIC
  - Social Action for Health
  - Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS)

- Toynbee Hall
- Women's Environmental Network
- Women's Inclusive Team.

These organisations produced the case studies in Section 5, which provide examples of equitable research practice with East London communities.

- Advice shared by these and other VCS organisations (see p.8) and Queen Mary researchers and research support staff at five workshops held during 2024 – 2025:
  - Queen Mary East London Research Network workshop (online) with THCVS and Toynbee Hall (21st February 2024)
  - VCS partner workshop at Toynbee Hall (4th July 2024)

- Queen Mary East London Research Network workshop (online) (27th November 2024)
- Citizens-Queen Mary workshop held at Queen Mary (4th June 2025)
- VCS partner-Queen Mary workshop held at Queen Mary with support from Neighbourly Lab (3rd July 2025)

We are also grateful for feedback on this section from East London Out Project (ELOP), Real Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO), and Queen Mary PhD student, Matilda Vokes. Quotations and points from VCS partners have been anonymised throughout this section.

Theme 1: Take time to build equal, trusting relationships and question power imbalances

It is important to build time into the research process to develop trust and relationships between researchers, partner organisations and members of the community. To build trust with community members, researchers need to better understand their diverse lived experiences. One way to improve attitudes towards different communities and to be equipped with the right tools to build inclusive and genuine relationships is to be trained in Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Relationship building and collaboration can take place over the entire research process from developing the research focus and questions and applying for funding, to collecting and analysing data, to sharing findings and achieving impact. VCS partners and Queen Mary staff emphasised the need to have conversations with organisations early in the planning stages of a project, long before any planned data collection. They also highlighted the importance of maintaining contact and relationships after a specific research activity has been completed, for example to share research findings and impacts (see below), or to share opportunities that may be of interest to organisations or community members. Ideally, long-term relationships can be established which go beyond the research activity and beyond the lifetime of a single research project, allowing deep mutual understanding to be developed. One VCS partner said:

> " Too often, research can become overly focused on extracting data, overlooking the importance of genuine connection and relationship-building. Researchers should prioritise presence over agenda, listening with curiosity and care.'

Although it is important to compensate people and organisations for their time and expertise (see Theme 3 in this section), this VCS partner also explained that:

> ‘Vouchers and payments cannot replace relationship-building.’

VCS partners and Queen Mary staff raised the importance of reflecting on power imbalances between partners from the outset to identify barriers to developing more equal relationships and to support joint work to overcome them. For example, one VCS partner noted that as young people reach adulthood, gaps in education between themselves and a researcher may become an issue. These barriers may be reduced by taking time to establish common ground and empowering young people by co-producing sessions and agreeing roles and responsibilities within a project. Different educational attainments are not only based on age and can also underpin power imbalances between other people too.

Connecting with communities and local organisations from the early stages of a research project, including

writing proposals and applying for grants, can support the identification of meaningful priority areas for research. Establishing relationships early on can help researchers to consider the potential benefits of their work for the community as well as how VCS organisations can feasibly support and contribute to the research, identifying and removing barriers to these contributions wherever possible.

Relationships may be supported by practices highlighted in the following sections, which aim to establish equity between university researchers and VCS organisations in East London and fully recognise the value of partner contributions to research activity.

Theme 2: Get to know the East London communities you are planning to work with

A first step is to get to know the communities that you want to work with. While existing survey/census data can act as a starting point for learning about East London demographics more broadly (see the borough profiles in Section 3), time spent forming in-person relationships with community members and learning about people's lived experiences is crucial to producing research built on understanding and respect for the communities involved.

Learn about the diversity within communities

It is important to understand that communities are not homogenous or monocultural. While community members may share characteristics, individuals have their own, intersectional experiences, opinions, motivations, and challenges. It is vital to listen to people speak about their own experiences and perspectives and to avoid assumptions and generalisations.

For example, one VCS partner noted the importance of recognising the diversity of Muslim communities:

> " Muslim communities in Tower Hamlets [and across East London] are rich in diversity, shaped by many cultures, languages, histories, and generations. There is no single Muslim identity. Approaching research with a restorative and community-centred mindset means recognising and honouring these differences, listening without assumption, and creating space for people to define their own experiences. By valuing plurality as a strength, researchers help nurture respectful relationships and produce work that reflects the real complexity of community life.’

Another VCS partner stressed the importance of understanding differences within the LGBTQ+ community, including in relation to gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and also potentially due to generational differences, including the changing use of language such as ‘queer’. Researchers should be prepared to be appropriately flexible with their language and understand the breadth and context of terms they use.

It is also important to understand potential divisions and tensions within communities and their implications for research. For example, one VCS partner suggested that when bringing a group together, it is important to include community members with shared goals or common experiences and that difficulties can arise if group members have conflicting experiences or come from different neighbourhoods or backgrounds. Conversely, and depending on the nature of the research, another VCS partner noted that a diverse group with different experiences can be equally productive and engaged.

Learn about differences between neighbourhoods

There are many differences between areas and neighbourhoods across East London that should be acknowledged when considering how particular issues may be experienced within a specific community. For example, while Section 3 provides an overview of the seven East London boroughs, stark differences in deprivation levels and demographic make-up can exist between neighbouring wards or estates within the same borough. In addition to understanding the wider borough context, Council and other data dashboards also provide demographic and other data for each ward.

Acknowledge complex histories and community challenges and successes

It is important for researchers to develop an understanding of the complex and nuanced history that many East Londoners have experienced (see Section 2 for an overview).

One VCS partner cautioned against asking questions or raising specific topics during research interviews or focus groups without fully understanding issues which may be at the heart of community members' lived experience.

Another VCS partner also emphasised the dangers of taking a deficit approach and that,

> " It is important not to frame entire communities solely through the lens of struggle.'

VCS partners noted that East Londoners are often very proud of their area and have many positive views, experiences and achievements to share. While research often focuses on challenges and how to overcome them, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate the history of successes and strengths that local communities have contributed to and benefitted from.

In addition, VCS partners also advised that a researcher who is new to working with a community should carry out groundwork to inform themselves about the lives and history of specific groups they hope to engage with, and to find out about research those groups have already been involved in, before asking community members to spend time sharing their knowledge.

Workshop participants also suggested that it may subsequently be valuable for researchers to spend time building understanding, as well as personal relationships, by volunteering in community groups and visiting everyday spaces ahead of the research itself.

Understand faith and cultural practices and beliefs

VCS partners and Queen Mary staff emphasised the importance of learning about the faith and cultural practices and beliefs within different communities and building on this knowledge to create research environments where people feel comfortable and respected. Examples include recognising prayer times and providing prayer facilities (see Box 6); scheduling activities to fit around religious and cultural festivals and events that might be taking place; and making sure that any food offered meets dietary requirements. VCS partners emphasised that small adjustments could make a big difference to how comfortable community members might feel in a space. One VCS partner raised that, for many Muslim women, it would not be appropriate to shake hands with a man (and, in the context of this guide, a male researcher), stating that "those are the kind of little things that can make such a difference."

Food is an important element of many religious faiths and cultural practices. Religious dietary laws are spiritual rules that dictate which foods are permissible, often involving what to avoid, how certain foods must be prepared, and specific eating practices. The role of food and drink can vary among individuals and communities. Seeking the guidance of people in the community is strongly recommended. Be mindful that food practices and preferences are individual choices that can vary between people of the same faith.

Fasting is common in many religions, although younger children tend to be exempt. For example, during the holy month of Ramadan people of the Islamic faith fast from dawn to sunset each day as one of the Five Pillars of Islam. This fasting involves abstaining from all food and drink to promote spiritual discipline, self-reflection, and closeness to God. Muslims break their fast at sunset with a meal called Iftar. This meal marks the end of the daily fast and is a time for reflection, gratitude, and community, often starting with dates and milk before a fuller meal. The end of Ramadan is then celebrated with Eid al-Fitr, a three-day festival of breaking the fast.

The dates for Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr change each calendar year, as do the dates of Jewish festivals, Easter for Christians, and significant dates for other religions. Also be aware of key times each week, including Friday prayer time in the Islamic faith, usually from 12-1.30pm (see Box 6) and the observance of Shabbat, the Jewish sabbath or day of rest, from sunset on Fridays to sunset on Saturdays.

The Queen Mary Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Calendar is updated each academic year with key celebrations, awareness days/weeks and religious holidays. **qmul.ac.uk/human-resources/equality/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-calendar**

For more information on different faiths and a faith calendar - **qmul.ac.uk/faith/faiths**

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6. Multi-faith spaces at Queen Mary

If you're a Queen Mary researcher and the most appropriate space to engage with community members and organisations is on campus, consider booking an additional room to use as prayer or contemplation space if your activity falls over an important prayer time.

When working with people who follow the Islamic faith, protecting the weekly Friday prayer time (usually 12-1.30pm), is important.

If you're holding an activity on Queen Mary's Mile End or Whitechapel campus, multi-faith spaces for students and staff are available. Please get in touch with the Students' Union team to arrange visitor access for events or activities on a case-by-case basis.

For more details, opening times and contact details, visit **qmsu.org/multifaith/** or **qmul.ac.uk/faith/prayer-contemplation-rooms/**

Theme 3: Respect and value people's time and contributions

Organisations

There are many well-established VCS organisations and networks in East London (see the place navigator in Section 8), many of which have considerable experience of research collaboration and partnership. They can act as an important bridge between researchers and communities and often have longstanding and trusted relationships with community members. VCS organisations can sometimes help to put researchers in touch with communities who can act as facilitators, interpreters or community co-researchers, but do not assume that this will be the case. They can also advise on how to organise research in a sensitive way. VCS organisations and community leaders can also act as advocates for community members who may experience barriers engaging with the research. It is important to 'go to' communities rather than expect them to come 'to you'. It will facilitate the engagement if community members feel comfortable and confident in a familiar environment. You can connect with relevant local places where you might meet potential participants, such as local libraries or community centres, and also with specific charities or organisations that work with particular groups of people, including Disability organisations and LGBTQ+ charities. Ultimately, collaborations between VCS organisations, community members and researchers can enhance efforts to bring about sustainable, positive social change that 'gives a platform to the ideas and solutions of people with lived experience' and that 'amplifies marginalised, gendered and racialised voices to inform strategy.'

As one VCS partner stressed, recognizing the importance of people's lived experiences also means engaging with 'minority' as well as 'majority' perspectives in research, ensuring that people's voices are heard and valued even if they differ from a broader consensus.

While these partnerships can be hugely beneficial to research, engagement in this way can place significant demands on staff, resources and time for VCS organisations that often have limited capacity and operate under financial constraints (see the VCSFE Collaborative State of the Sector report discussed in Section 2). Some organisations receive approaches and requests from many researchers and only have capacity to work with those whose research aligns most directly with their own priorities and promises to offer meaningful benefits for the East London communities they support.

Collaborators need to be mindful and respectful of both the value and demands inherent in research partnerships (see Box 1 on working in equitable partnership). Researchers should work in ways that recognise and respect the expertise of all staff, foster mutual learning, and remain flexible to the time pressures and priorities of partner organisations.

Community members

The time and contributions of individual community members should also be valued, acknowledged and remunerated appropriately.

Organisations highlighted the benefits of working with someone with a relevant cultural background and lived experience in the borough where the research is taking place. Community members can support and enrich research as interpreters, local experts and peer or community co-researchers. Co-research could include co-designing methods and collecting data in a way that ensures meaningful engagement and participation. Co-researchers from the local community often have insights and experience that allow them to identify inclusive and impactful ways of working. One organisation also mentioned the potential role of peer researchers from the local community in engaging friends, family or other community members in research activities or suggesting appropriate engagement approaches.

Community members and co-researchers can also support the analysis and interpretation of findings and help relate results back to the local context, as well as engaging in the dissemination of research findings and supporting pathways to impact to embed change locally.

In relation to data collection, it is important to value the knowledge and contributions of those with lived experience who take time to complete surveys, take part in interviews, focus groups or workshops, or participate in other research activities. One VCS partner said that university researchers should

> " ...approach their work with cultural sensitivity, openness, and humility. One of the most effective approaches we found was using open-ended questions that allowed people to speak freely, without steering or influencing their responses.'

They valued their university research partner who

It is good practice to have staff from partner organisations designated as co-researchers on a project and to include funding for their time in grant applications. For researchers based at Queen Mary, the Pre-Costing Questionnaire for grant applications includes a prompt to ensure that you include full costings for impact and engagement activities. Also ensure that you allow sufficient time to work with VCS and other partners to develop the application and agree costings to be included. Several workshop participants emphasised that VCS organisations should be remunerated for time spent developing research ideas and proposals, as well as for their involvement in the research itself. Funding should account for both direct and indirect costs (see Section 8 for possible sources of funding). Early agreement and periodic review of contributions is likely to be important in establishing effective collaboration and building longer-term trust. One VCS partner set out key areas for such agreement between university researchers and community organisations:

- Clarify the purpose and scope of an organisation's involvement.
- Be clear on their capacity to be involved.
- Agree expectations, timelines and responsibilities.
- Explore their understanding of data collection and research approaches.
- Agree the nature and extent of involvement in research activities and research outputs, including co-authorship.
- Be clear about the benefits of being involved e.g. evaluation report or skills to run consultations.

> ...exemplified this well. Her follow-up questions were respectful and culturally appropriate, which helped build trust and made participants feel heard and valued.'

It is also important to recognise that research can place demands on communities and individuals. Running a workshop or event at more than one time may allow a wider range of community members to attend and for more voices to be heard. For example, one VCS partner highlighted that working hours can impact participation, noting that community members who work in care, cleaning or hospitality may have different working hours to others, including evening and shift work. Many community members will also have family/caring responsibilities, or fluctuating health conditions. For example, caregivers may need to be available at school drop-off and pick-up times, and some people may be more likely to attend if they can bring their children with them or if

childcare can be funded. Some people might not be able to attend an event early in the morning because of their health condition.

As with VCS partners, community members should be remunerated appropriately for their contributions to the research as well as any training and support to develop research skills (see Box 7). This may be through making a one-off payment or offering vouchers to research participants. When planning your project, work with the partner organisation in advance to find out what is most appropriate renumeration method for the people you will be working with – one method may not be suitable for all members supporting the project.

7. Remunerating community members for their time and contributions

Remunerating participants fairly for their time is important. University researchers should talk to their finance leads or engagement/research support teams about the amount and type of payment to be made. The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) provides **guidance** for different levels of remuneration according to different types of activity, but note that this does not include levels of remuneration to cover the time of people in leadership roles in VCS organizations. It helps to be upfront when communicating with people you wish to engage on how they will be reimbursed for their time and expertise, and how they will be paid and when. It is worth agreeing the payment process with finance teams early before you engage with VCS organisations and community members so that you can establish the correct process and timelines.

It is also important that financial or other incentives should be carefully designed to avoid being perceived as coercive or creating an undue inducement for potential research participants. Also note that payments are not always possible and that offering payment can be at odds with the approach of some community organisations that do not offer such payments to community members for their time. Note that payments can have an impact on those who are in receipt of benefits. There are also other ways for valuing the time and contributions of community members, e.g. by covering travel or childcare costs, buying roaming data for those joining online and/or offering refreshments. Some community members won't be able to take part without this contribution being covered in advance. Language can be very important with regards to community stakeholders and financial remuneration. For example, use 'thank' rather than 'reward' when sharing vouchers. Take time with community members and organisations to agree on the best approach and try to be flexible around individual requirements.

Theme 4: Commit and plan to create positive impact for East London communities

Equitable research practice involves creating benefits for the East London organisations and communities involved. Too often, residents and community members have taken part in research and seen no change, or not been communicated with since, which can be demoralising and makes future participation less likely.

The following are examples of important actions or approaches that VCS partners and Queen Mary staff suggested are important for achieving positive impacts.

- Develop the research topic and questions with community members so that the issues being addressed are ones that are important to them.
- Ensure that researchers ask the right questions to understand the diversity and intersectionality of people's lived experience. For example, one VCS partner explained:

"
Where general questions are used, for example when doing research into GP practices, often the specific concerns of LGBTQ+ people are missed. Questions about access are often framed in relation to when appointments are or how easy it is to get an appointment, while access issues for LGBTQ+ people may be about if they feel welcome in the practice, or if the GP has understanding about their lived experience, or being misgendered by reception staff. So questions need to be widened to include 'as a LGBTQ+ community member, do you face any additional barriers in seeking health care?', which then allows people to talk about their experience.'

- Forms and surveys have the potential to miss or overlook different family structures. Be aware of the difference between biological parents / donors and caregivers / legal parents, but don't imply that a non-biologically related parent is of 'lesser' importance.
- One VCS partner stressed the importance of partnering with groups that are already active and functioning well, so that your work supports and invests in existing VCS organisations. Support and invest in the development of skills and capabilities of peer and community co-researchers. This may require thoughtful and sustained relationship building and effort. For example, one VCS partner noted: 'Young people from racialised and working-class backgrounds have often experienced institutional neglect or surveillance.' To empower them through co-researching it is necessary to 'commit to long-term relationship-building rooted in transparency, consistency and care. Young people should be positioned as collaborators, not merely subjects. This means involving them in shaping the research agenda, methodology, analysis and dissemination. Power must be shared meaningfully.'

- VCS partners stressed the importance of:
  – Creating a plan for research delivery and meaningful impact with organisations, participants and the wider community.
  – Ensuring follow-through with this and communicating on an ongoing basis about progress, findings, impact and next steps.
  – Events for sharing findings and impact that can also provide opportunities to celebrate the skills and contributions of peer and community co-researchers.

8. Working with peer and community co-researchers: exploring how to do this fairly and equitably

Peer and community co-researchers can add rich depth and insight to community-based research and can be essential to a research project's success. However, it is important that their involvement is accurately budgeted for, to include all their time, training and support, any set up, research activity and analysis.

Aim to involve peer and community co-researchers at all stages of a project, including:
• research design, evidence gathering and analysis
• decision-making with how to proceed forward with the outcomes of the research
• the design and development of further activities
• training development and delivery
• outcomes and report writing
• pathways to impact.

Ensure you have a clear plan for personal development for peer and community co-researchers within a project, while understanding that not everyone will necessarily want this.

Many organisations across East London support peer and community co-researchers including Toynbee Hall, Social Action for Health, Citizens and Coffee Afrik. Queen Mary is a partner on the NIHR-funded

Tower Hamlets Health Determinants Research Collaboration (led by Tower Hamlets Council, also in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, London Metropolitan University and University of East London), which is developing infrastructure to support community research in the borough (see **qmul.ac.uk/about/for-east-london/ research/east-london-research-case-studies/ harnessing-collective-power-peer-and-community- research-in-tower-hamlets**)

Other resources include a toolkit on participatory research with children and young people, including as peer researchers, which is funded by the Research England Participatory Research Fund and led by Queen Mary's Centre for Creative Collaboration, which will be launched in 2026 (see **qmul.ac.uk/ centre-creative-collaboration/projects/young- researchers**).

Also see the UKRI Community Research Network programme, which funds nine networks across the UK, including one in Newham led by Compost London in partnership with Newham Council and UCL (see **compostlondon.org.uk/projects/ukri-community- research-networks**).

Theme 5: Make research opportunities accessible, inclusive and safe

When involving peer or community co-researchers or participants, it is important to recognise that no single individual can be taken as representative of a wider community.

Researchers should therefore avoid assuming that characteristics such as age, faith, or place of residence, disability (apparent and non-apparent), gender, sexuality, and all other protected characteristics automatically reflect the perspectives or experiences of a broader community. Instead, care should be taken to ensure that opportunities to take part in the research are accessible and inclusive of the diversity that exists within the group or community. Beyond participation and collaboration during data collection, other research activities and the communication of findings should also be made as open and accessible as possible.

A number of actions and considerations are important in this context.

Language and communication

• Community members may have different levels of English and literacy skills and often may have English as a second or third language. Use accessible language, and, where appropriate, translate research materials, including participation information sheets and consent forms, into community languages (see Section 3 for more details about the main languages in different boroughs).
• Where there are different English language levels, it may also be necessary to work with researchers or community members who speak the heritage languages. Work with community members to find the most suitable communication methods.
• Community members might also need an interpreter for British Sign Language, Makaton or PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).
• In some research settings, bringing in interpreters from outside the community may create communication barriers because of a lack of trust in the interpreter or the fact that the interpreter speaks a 'higher status' standard version of the language. On the other hand,

community members may be reluctant to share information with an interpreter from their immediate community. These issues may sometimes be avoided by working with multilingual community co-researchers or co-facilitators who speak relevant local languages. It is important to work with VCS organisations and community members to establish which approach works best for them and for their communities.
• Use appropriate channels of communication, for example, specific social media platforms for a given group, newspaper advertising, word of mouth, or neighbourhood WhatsApp groups. Don't presume you know what these appropriate channels are yourself, ask VCS organisations and community members how they would like to communicate. Remember to include non-digital platforms to avoid digital exclusion.
• It is important for some people, including some Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, to have enough time to prepare. People might need additional time to access

information, especially if the information is not entirely accessible (for example a screen reader not being able to read out the information to someone who is visually impaired; someone with a learning disability might need the information in Easy Read format). People might also need time if their health or the fluctuation of their health is preventing them from understanding or doing a task.
• Give people different options to communicate with you. People with disabilities or long-term health conditions, for example, might prefer to communicate on the phone, in person, or by video call. Offer to use the caption facility on video calls to support clear communication.
• Consider the language used to recruit peer and community co-researchers or research participants. One VCS partner stressed the importance of communicating clearly that people who might be underrepresented in different communities and organisations (for example, LGBTQ+ people) are welcome to be involved.
• Particularly if accessing participants via an institution (e.g. a school), be

aware that trans participants might have a different name / gender marker on documents like a school register. Researchers should act with sensitivity and discretion if this arises, for example not using an incorrect name or asking for clarification in front of a group of people.

- Prepare clear, accessible documents and be careful about using technical language and acronyms. Work with organisations or key members or leaders of a community to establish the most appropriate research methods for engagement. Share findings and impact in accessible ways, for example, in community languages, via infographics or via visual outcomes and displays from workshops. See the Accessible Written Communications Best Practice guide from **Real**, which provides guidance on written format.

9. Working with Interpreters or multilingual co-facilitators: Setting everyone up for success from the outset

Meeting with interpreters or multilingual co-facilitators in advance and sharing any relevant materials will help with the smooth running of your sessions. It gives them a chance to become familiar with the topic area and nuances between the languages.

It is always helpful to ask interpreters how they would like to work in the session, so that you feel comfortable with each other and so that participants will be at ease and represented appropriately.

Location and organisation of space

- Ensure that the spaces where research activity takes place are comfortable and accessible. Accessibility should be based on the specific needs of participants, rather than a generic model. Check, for example, the accessibility of signage; that there is enough space and no barriers for wheelchair users and people with mobility issues; and that the room is well-lit.
- Community members may feel less comfortable going to an unknown space such as a university, which might be unfamiliar and difficult to navigate. Hold activities where the communities you wish to engage are located rather than expect members to come to the university or the lead organisation site – but equally

recognise that sometimes VCS organisations and community members welcome the opportunity to meet in university spaces.
- Community members may not be able to travel far from home or their local area. If travel is required, there needs to be a cheap, ideally free, and safe way to do so.
- Spaces will need to be organised in an appropriate way. For example, having separate spaces or tables for men and women is important for some Muslim communities.
- One-to-one calls or meetings may be needed ahead of a research activity to discuss necessary adjustments, including for those with access requirements.

10. Disability inclusion: Asking *"What works best for you?"*

Making activities accessible to people with a range of needs, apparent and non-apparent, is essential to equitable research. Planning for any required accommodations, whether it is extra time, booking the right spaces or ensuring appropriate adjustments can be made is essential. The best way to ensure this is to ask community members and peer or community co-researchers in advance about their access needs and what adjustments would enable their involvement. Ensure that this information can be shared on a confidential basis and in good time. Try as far as possible to collaborate with peer and community co-researchers from different impairment groups to help maximise the accessibility of the research.

Research materials, methods and outputs

- Involve community members in the design of research materials, methods and outputs to ensure they are engaging and accessible for different audiences, including community members and VCS organisations.
- Co-design methods for working with communities and consider participatory, visual and creative methods in your research.
- Co-design outputs for different audiences. For example, consider whether a 30 second illustrated film might be more effective in communicating research findings than a 3-minute interview-based video.
- VCS partners noted the importance of supporting community members to know and understand their rights, including in relation to engaging with research. For example, when gaining informed consent for working with children in schools, researchers should be aware of the risks associated with "opt-out" consent methods, where parents must actively state if they do not want their child to take part. Families with limited language or literacy skills — or those who simply miss the information sheet — may unintentionally consent without fully understanding what participation involves. Working closely with schools to identify the most suitable ways of engaging families — for example, by holding information sessions or discussions in school with a co-facilitator who is known to the families — can help ensure that consent is fully informed and inclusive.

It is particularly important to make clear where contributions will be confidential and anonymised. This includes explaining how research records and data (including transcripts and recordings) and findings will be stored and used. However, it is also important to note that, in some research, it is appropriate to name consenting organisations and credit them for their contributions. This is a key question to address when applying for Ethical Review, including drafting clear information sheets and consent forms that include different options, where appropriate, around anonymity for individuals and organisations and ensuring a clear plan for data management.

Potential risks

- All university researchers will need to complete a risk assessment for any off-site work. Plan and carry out research with awareness that members of marginalised East London communities who are involved in research may have experienced acute poverty and its impacts, discrimination or other traumatic or negative life experiences. Workshop participants noted that without proper care and understanding, researchers may cause harm. Training, for example in trauma-informed research approaches, may be needed for research that deals with sensitive issues and appropriate safeguarding measures should be put in place.
- Be aware of ongoing events in the political landscape that may impact (directly or indirectly) marginalised community members and show appropriate sensitivity.
- Take care not to 'out' participants who disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity if they are not out in their community, particularly if working with a small community or group of participants. Even if research data is anonymised, it might be possible for other community members to identify someone as LGBTQ+ through reading the research outputs. If a person discloses their LGBTQ+ identity in the context of the research, steps should be taken to ensure the participant is aware of the potential implications of it being used in published material. Researchers should note someone might be out in some areas of their life, but not others.

Theme 6: Celebrate and learn

Equitable research in East London can bring people together to address shared challenges or areas of interest and can support the development of strong, trusting, long term relationships. Research partnerships and collaborations can achieve positive social change and other impacts and can upskill and empower community members.

Equitable research processes may sometimes be challenging but can also provide an opportunity for collaborative reflection on how to overcome difficulties and how to improve future work. Several workshop participants highlighted the importance of embedding research evaluation throughout all stages of a project, enabling everyone involved to discuss and share what works well and what could be improved (see Box 11 on evaluation support). Sharing research experiences with colleagues and partners, including through meetings of the East London Research Network (see Box 3), help to enhance a civic and community-engaged research culture that is equitable, inclusive and interdisciplinary. Recognising and celebrating successes such as developing collaborations, skills, knowledge and positive impact is also important for everyone involved.

11. Evaluation support

Queen Mary's Public Engagement Evaluation Toolkit is designed to make it easy to evaluate the design, execution and impact of public engagement with research.

It provides resources about how to design an evaluation and tools that will enrich engagement while providing opportunities to evaluate what works.

Scan to access the Evaluation Toolkit

The guidance themes set out in this section bring together advice and insights shared by VCS partners and Queen Mary researchers and research support staff, drawing on their experiences of research in East London. The following section complements this guidance by presenting case studies that provide more detailed accounts of research activities related to these themes.

5. Case studies

This section presents a series of case studies written by VCS partners working with East London communities. The case studies describe a range of research activities and projects, including work carried out with researchers at Queen Mary as well as research led by VCS partners themselves, and offer examples that connect to the guidance themes outlined in the previous section.

- account3
- Coffee Afrik CIC
- East London Citizens
- Social Action for Health
- Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service
- Toynbee Hall
- Women's Environmental Network
- Women's Inclusive Team

Case study 1:
account3

Project	Tower Hamlets Women's Network (THWN) End of Project Impact Evaluation
Community and voluntary organisation	account3
Collaborators	Cherifa Atoussi (account3), Niharika Pandit (Department of Sociology, Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary), Ife Akinroyeje (Centre for Public Engagement, Queen Mary)
Project overview	The Tower Hamlets Women's Network (hereafter THWN) is a collective of local women, as well as staff and volunteers from not-for-profit women's or social organisations based in London Borough of Tower Hamlets. THWN was established in September 2021 as part of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Equalities Hub and is led by account3 (Cherifa Atoussi), a local women-led organisation that has been established in the borough for over three decades. "Nothing About Us, Without Us" is the theme driving THWN. The network creates a unique space to ignite dialogue on the priorities for local women, bringing their perspectives and experiences to policymakers to enable gender-responsive and locally-led equality and rights actions.

In February 2024, account3 approached Queen Mary Community Engagement Manager, Ife Akinroyeje, for support with the final evaluation of our three-year project THWN. This evaluation was a key deliverable for our funders, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and we recognised the need for additional academic and financial capacity to deliver it meaningfully.

With Ife's support, we were connected to Dr Niharika Pandit, whose expertise in Global South feminism and participatory approaches strongly aligned with account3's ethos and values. Her involvement brought academic depth, cultural relevance, and a collaborative spirit to the process. Queen Mary also allocated dedicated public engagement funding to enable the evaluation to take place, ensuring the collaboration was well-resourced and grounded in mutual respect and shared values.

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

A key strength of the engagement was Dr Niharika Pandit's hands-on, inclusive approach. She met with members of the THWN at account3 to explain the evaluation process clearly and to build trust. She supported members to take on active roles — training them in participatory methods and interviewing techniques, and working closely with them to develop one-to-one interview questions.

In addition to the interviews, Dr Pandit facilitated a focus group from start to finish. Dr Pandit's cultural sensitivity, her ability to speak in accessible, non-academic language, and her willingness to share relatable stories from women's groups in her country of origin created a safe and respectful environment. Her presence and approach helped participants feel represented, heard, and empowered throughout the evaluation.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

As a community-organisation co-applicant for Queen Mary public engagement funding, it would be helpful to have early clarity on the application process and on what support can be claimed within a Queen Mary-led application. Although funding was ultimately awarded to support the evaluation, there was some initial uncertainty around what could be claimed on our behalf. We are grateful to Ife for her support in helping to clarify this and ensure the application was completed on time.

Case study 2:
Coffee Afrik

Project	Barriers for Young Black Men Seeking Healthcare
Community and voluntary organisation	Coffee Afrik, Barts Health NHS Trust Community Engagement and Participation team
Collaborators	Khaleel Mohammed, Abdirahim Hassan (Coffee Afrik), Yusuf, Osama, Said, Jama, Zeki, Mohammed, Hassan, Ali (Coffee Afrik co-researchers), Lucy Johnson, John Ford (Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary)
Project overview	This community-led research collaboration with Queen Mary in East London explored the barriers young Black men face when accessing healthcare. Using a photovoice methodology, the project aimed to elevate lived experiences, challenge systemic narratives, and contribute to more culturally responsive healthcare practices. Participants aged 18 to 25 captured images reflecting their interactions and challenges within the healthcare system. These visual stories became prompts for reflective group discussions, where shared experiences of exclusion, distrust, and resilience emerged. The process prioritised youth voice, positioning participants not just as contributors but as co-researchers shaping inquiry, interpretation, and advocacy.

To learn more about Coffee Afrik CIC, scan or visit **coffeeafrique.co.uk**

To learn more about the Health Equity Evidence Centre, scan or visit **qmul.ac.uk/ ceg/research/health-inequalities/health- equity-evidence-centre/**

What worked well when engaging with young people from East London communities?

Creating a safe, inclusive and non-judgmental space was central when engaging participants. From the outset, we co-developed a working agreement based on shared ethical principles, ensuring mutual accountability and clarity. Roles were co-assigned early on, fostering a strong sense of ownership, responsibility and group cohesion. The youth-led structure, supported by consistent facilitation, helped create conditions where participants could speak freely, take creative risks, and deepen their own leadership.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Sustaining engagement over time proved challenging, especially for participants balancing education, work and caregiving responsibilities. Future projects could address this by offering stipends and flexible micro-roles, providing clearer timelines and bite-sized contributions. Engagement in future projects will also be strengthened by embedding well-being support and check-ins, and by building in time for rest and recognition to avoid burnout.

'This wrist band they give you makes you feel like a statistic and another young black male that they categorise as a number it is similar to the jail system where you are also giving a number that they use to identify you which is very triggering and traumatic.'

Osama

A PHOTOVOICE SHOWCASE EVENT

ACCESS DENIED

THE STRUGGLES OF YOUNG BLACK MEN IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

31st July | 5–6:30pm
The Old Library, Garrod Building, Turner St, London E1 2AD

Case study 3:
East London Citizens

Project	Healthy Homes: Addressing Housing Distress to Improve Health and Wellbeing in UK Inner Cities
Community and voluntary organisation	Citizens UK
Collaborators	Afsana Salik, Emmanual Gotora (Citizens UK), Rachel Humphris (Department of Sociology, Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary)
Project overview	This research collaboration in East London seeks to address the health challenges faced by precariously housed residents in Tower Hamlets. The project aims to build a strong evidence base on the health impacts of poor housing conditions and to identify common barriers to accessing tenant support services and primary care. Using Citizens UK's community organising model, the initiative empowers residents by equipping them with skills in storytelling, leadership, and negotiation, enabling them to become advocates for change. Insights from the research will be translated into actionable policy recommendations in partnership with key stakeholders, including Tower Hamlets Council, migrant and refugee groups, and Barts NHS Trust. Ultimately, the project aims to establish a clearer and more effective pathway for local government to address the interconnection between poor housing, poor health, and wider social and economic costs.

To learn more about The East London Citizens Organisation, scan or visit
citizensuk.org/chapters/east-london/

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

One of the key successes in engaging diverse communities in East London was ensuring that the listening process was inclusive and accessible. We held sessions in familiar and trusted spaces such as local mosques, churches, ESOL groups, and schools, and scheduled them at varying times to encourage broader participation across different backgrounds. Having academic partner Rachel Humphris present in the sessions helped build trust and credibility. Her engagement allowed residents to connect directly with Queen Mary, fostering a sense of partnership. Light refreshments were provided at each event, helping to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere that encouraged open and relational conversations. Additionally, some sessions were delivered in community languages, such as Bangla, which helped overcome language barriers and made discussions more accessible to all.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

One of the challenges we faced was the limited visibility of Queen Mary in some of the community sessions. While the presence of academic partners like Rachel Humphris was highly valued when they were able to attend, having consistent Queen Mary representation across all sessions would have strengthened trust and built a deeper sense of partnership with the community. We also felt that hosting one or two of the sessions at Queen Mary itself could have helped bridge the gap between the university and local residents, making the institution feel more open and accessible. In future projects, creating a shared schedule that allows for at least some form of academic presence whether in person, via video, or through a representative could enhance continuity and reinforce the collaborative nature of the work.

Case study 4:
Social Action for Health (SAfH)

Project	Community Research Day
Community and voluntary organisation	Social Action for Health (SAfH)
Collaborators	Researchers from across the UK

Project overview

Social Action for Health specialises in working with communities most at risk of health disadvantage and inequalities. They provide free services and support that equip communities across East London to manage their health, improve wellbeing, and make positive decisions for themselves, their families and communities. SAfH services are delivered in an accessible, sensitive, and culturally appropriate way, supported by staff who often speak at least one community language, including Bengali, Somali, Urdu, Polish, Chinese, Spanish and English.

SAfH hosted a Community Research Day, a speed-dating meets academic research event, to provide opportunities for:
- early career researchers to share their research with the Social Action for Health community, and
- members of East London's diverse communities with little or no research experience, to meet researchers and to share their perspectives, experiences and questions.

Academics from seven universities across the UK presented to 22 community members from Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Islington and Redbridge about their health research. Community members were mainly aged 30–49 (nearly 60%), with representation across older age groups up to 70+. The group was highly diverse, with a majority Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi (59%) and representation from White British and Black British communities.

Researchers then rotated through different 'community tables' (speed-dating style) for a series of mini-focus groups. Discussion themes ranged from how to recruit more diverse participants to their specific study, to discussing research-questions in detail. Three of the seven tables were run in Bengali (Sylheti) with translators. All tables were 'hosted' by our peer-support community facilitators, who were known and trusted by the community members.

The event finished with a delicious hot lunch with plenty of leftovers for participants to take home. Vouchers were paid to the participants as a thank you and in recognition of their brilliant insights and deep contributions.

Following the event, SAfH are currently working with three of the researchers. Participants who met researchers on the day are being supported as members of community advisory groups, have attended feedback groups and assisted with outreach and recruitment in the community.

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

Researchers commented on how valuable it was to be working closely with Social Action for Health, because the organisation and its staff and volunteers hold deep relationships in the community, fostered over many years. Researchers trusted recommendations from the SAfH team and were willing to learn. This led to a very collaborative approach between the researchers, Social Action for Health and ultimately the participants.

Significant time was spent planning the different tables, with different groups to be invited, different facilitators and support staff to ensure the smooth running of the day and also to support after the event, in case of upset discussing potentially personal and difficult topics. Significant time and effort was put into planning administration of the event which often gets overlooked, as well as the follow-up with participants, eg: correspondence, timely payment of vouchers, travel costs, prayer space and food suitability.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Dissemination and feedback is a key part of building trust with communities and this is central to Social Action for Health engagement. The SAfH team will only work with researchers who are prepared to report back to the community about their findings and next steps. This is usually achieved through highly visual and engaging infographics, which the team can translate and / or explain to participants who do not usually engage in health research.

Following the Community Research Day, collecting and collating information from the seven academics and then circulating these infographics to the participants, took longer than SAfH would typically have wished. In future projects, preparing the infographic templates beforehand to enable specific information to be added quickly and then shared with the participants while the event is fresher in their mind, would be more ideal.

> *I learned eczema is not just on white skin, everybody and every community suffer eczema."*
>
> **Participant**

> *Participants want more information on research. They would like research to be in community centres"*
>
> **Facilitator**

> *I was blown away by the insights from local community members to the extent that I've had to change my approach. You wouldn't get this from papers, textbooks or seminars – the local community's wisdom is unmatched!"*
>
> **Researcher**

> *We learned what's going on. It was a lot better than zoom, it was brilliant. I'm impressed with how natural it was. It was nice that everyone felt comfortable."*
>
> **Participant**

> *Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to such a wonderful group about our research. It was brilliant to meet everyone working and volunteering with SAfH and to be able to hear people's thoughts and ideas".*
>
> **Researcher**

To learn more about Social Action for Health, scan or visit **safh.org.uk**

Case study 5:
Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS)

Project

Flourishing Communities

Community and voluntary organisation

Tower Hamlets CVS, Women's Inclusive Team and Limehouse project

Collaborators

Megan Clinch (Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary), Tower Hamlets GP Care Group (Aberfeldy and Suttons Wharf practices)

Project overview

The National Lottery-funded project Flourishing Communities aimed to address the health inequalities that women from global majority communities experience when accessing sexual and reproductive health care in Tower Hamlets. The programme was initially started with the Women's Inclusive Team (WIT), an organisation that supports Somali women. They ran sessions in community languages where women were asked about their experiences of sexual and reproductive health. The insights that were gathered demonstrated the women's embarrassment in discussing personal health issues and their mistrust of services being sensitive to their needs or for them.

A steering group was then established with women from each organisation to ensure their voices were central to decision making. Their insights were turned into discussion cards that enabled the women to work with the facilitator from THCVS and a Queen Mary researcher (Megan Clinch) to explore in more detail their views on the barriers and opportunities to accessing health services, such as understanding why they are triaged and not able to speak directly to a doctor, language and interpretation access and not feeling that the staff represented the Somali community.

The group collaborated with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Tower Hamlets to communicate findings to healthcare professionals and discuss solutions. To support the collaboration between the university, the partners and the community, the partners worked together to translate the findings from the initial insights into resources that demonstrated that the project had heard the women's experiences (click **here** for more details). The programme used the resources to further involve the women in identifying solutions to the issues they had highlighted to working with NHS staff. The collaboration enabled focus discussions with the GP practices, creating immediate solutions to some of the issues identified by the women, supporting the project and demonstrating the impact of co-production.

The project built on this approach and worked with the Bangladeshi community with the Limehouse project and with refugees and asylum seekers with Praxis. The evaluation by Queen Mary helped the project to focus on what we needed to do to build trust with services. It also gave the project recognition with health providers. The project worked with the other health services to improve outcomes for women with Ambrose King sexual health services, Barts maternity services and public health commissioners. The project has enabled the voluntary sector organisations to be linked into the evolving health system through building relationships, staff confidence and attracting funding to extend the work with their communities.

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

Focus groups with Somali women that looked at their health needs and issues were especially effective in gathering the information needed for this research. Sessions worked particularly well when the researcher was present to facilitate and discuss issues with the women. Developing resources that demonstrated that we had heard their needs supported further engagement from these women past the research stage and facilitated their involvement in identifying solutions and creating impact. This was done through discussions with the NHS services. Overall, the project helped to build trust between women from local communities and the health service.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Challenges arose in relation to the VCS organisations having enough time to write up the findings and feeling confident to complete the evaluation. The solution we have worked with moving forward is to build in a budget so we can use a learning partner who supports the development of a theory of change and supports the writing of the evaluation as well as acting as a critical friend.

To learn more about Flourishing Communities, scan or visit **thcvs.org.uk/flourishing-communities**

Case study 6:
Toynbee Hall

Project	Emotional Support for Young People project
Community and voluntary organisation	Toynbee Hall
Collaborators	12 peer researchers (all Tower Hamlets residents aged 16-22) and Thrive LDN

Project overview

This was a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project investigating how increased living costs for low-income families impact their capacity to provide emotional support to young people (16–22 years old). This included exploring emotional support needs, barriers to that support, and parents'/guardians' perspectives to help families, government and the third sector better support young people. Peer researchers identified key issues, designed question guides, and conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews and workshops with 44 young people and 25 parents/guardians of young people in that age group. The peer researchers co-designed a survey, which was conducted on a geographically representative sample of 1,515 England and Wales residents aged 16–22, including a boosted ethnic minority sample of 768 respondents.

During the action phase, peer researchers and staff presented their co-designed recommendations to a range of policymakers and stakeholders including, among others: London Region Mental Health Teams Community of Practice (Department for Education); London Borough of Tower Hamlets Public Health Team; Tower Hamlets Trauma-Informed Community of Practice; and teams at Queen Mary. Toynbee Hall was also able to begin the process of implementing specific recommendations aimed at community organisations through co-designing and delivering a pilot community wellbeing programme responding directly to the mental health support needs of local young people.

We have now received funding to deliver Phase II of this project, which started in May 2025.

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

Building trust across the whole team and ensuring peer researchers felt confident to take control of the project was key. Engaging icebreakers and activities to get to know each other during early sessions were helpful for creating an open and supportive environment, as was discussing and creating shared ground rules for our sessions together.

For supporting young peer researchers to feel ownership over the project, building a sense that their perspectives, experiences and knowledge were valuable was key. The vast majority had never been involved in a research project before and had few experiences of feeling heard by institutions or decision-makers. In practice, this meant listening attentively to everything young people shared – encouraging them to respond to and build on each other's contributions – while recording all of this visually on a shared mind map or board, which everyone could add to while conversations were ongoing. Making it visual in this way helped the group connect with the feeling that they were creating something together.

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It also meant that the perspectives and issues they felt were most important drove the focus of the following sessions. Research tools such as question guides were created and reshaped together so that young people could see their priorities reflected in them and we experimented with different ways for the group to build consensus and make decisions (for example, dot voting with feasibility and potential impact in mind). Peer researchers seeing that they were actively shaping the project in these ways was vital for earning trust.

Shared understanding and language were also important. One of the ways peer researchers shape the project is through how we think and talk about a set of issues. It was important to put time into building a shared understanding and shared language around an issue — creating space for everyone to learn from one another's perspectives before beginning to narrow the focus or make collective decisions. This worked really well for setting up a research phase that peer researchers felt reflected their priorities.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Build in more time for experimentation with different research approaches from the outset.

We ran multiple research training workshops covering the pros and cons of a range of methods and approaches (including activity- and arts-based approaches). This gave peer researchers the tools to design something creative that they really felt reflected their priorities. It was also a lot of information and options to digest, and it took time to bring it all together into a co-designed approach for the research phase within the time and budget we had initially allocated. Peer researchers were determined to find an approach that would allow participants to share openly, but they knew from their own experiences in early sessions how heavy and personal discussing these research topics could feel. They also wanted to create a positive experience for participants that took care of their wellbeing.

With this in mind, they initially trialled an activity-based workshop where facilitators guided a group discussion while participants got stuck into some gardening. This didn't work well for facilitators or participants, so we took the decision to move project timelines and budget around. The peer researchers weren't discouraged and were creative in adapting a mapping tool from a later Social Network Analysis training that we organised, based on what they wanted to get out of the research phase. They also decided to switch to one-to-one interviews so that participants could map and reflect on their emotional support networks more privately before getting into groups for a solutions-focused discussion. Finally, they pushed for including a 30-minute arts and wellbeing activity before the workshop to help participants and peer researchers build trust and open up.

Valuing this space for trial and error was really important for arriving at an approach that peer researchers felt truly reflected them. Without it, the research phase would not have drawn out such rich and open conversations. It was a challenge to support this and give it the time it needed when there wasn't enough space in the initial timeline and budget — it meant, for example, having less time to practise the final question guide/approach before starting. Ideally, we would have had more time to practise interview skills with several rounds of feedback before going into the first workshops. Peer researchers had to learn on the go, with group and individual feedback as the interviews and workshops progressed.

Address power imbalances early on: interactions between young peer researchers and steering group members.

While we included icebreakers, it was a challenge for young people to feel fully confident to share openly and challenge decision-makers during meetings with the steering group. In future, it would be helpful to do more to address these power imbalances and build trust and relationships between young peer researchers and decision-makers — perhaps drawing on some of the approaches young people designed later in the project for their own workshops. We trialled this for the final project event, with young people designing icebreakers, which seemed to work well. One difficulty of doing this with a steering group is securing buy-in and time commitment from a range of decision-makers, all with their own time pressures. However, it would support more in-depth engagement, with each group having time to learn from each other's perspectives.

To learn more about the PAR Project, visit **toynbeehall.org.uk/research/emotional-support-for-young-people**

Case study 7:
Women's Environmental Network (Wen)

Project	Food Lives (part of FoodSEqual)
Community and voluntary organisation	Women's Environmental Network (Wen), University of Sussex
Collaborators	Shazna Hussain, Sajna Miah, Zoe Miles (Wen), Elaine Swan (University of Sussex)
Project overview	Our research project Food Lives was part of a larger 5-year UKRI funded food system project. Our research strand focused on Tower Hamlets and was a partnership between the Women's Environmental Network and the University of Sussex. Almost a quarter of people in the UK are living in food poverty, due to unjust and inequitable distribution of economic, social, and cultural resources. The Food Systems Equality (FoodSEqual) project sought to transform this situation, involving the groups who are usually overlooked when food systems, policies and products are designed. The project was underpinned by an ethos of collaboration and co-creation. Researchers were embedded in the heart of four UK communities, bringing local residents together with food manufacturers, retailers and policymakers to co-develop systems and policies that can provide affordable, sustainable, culturally appropriate and healthy food that people want to eat. Our methods were based on feminist food methodology and qualitative participant methods including food photography, food photo diaries, shop-alongs, cook-alongs, food tasting workshops, food history tour and farm visits. We wanted to explore what people eat, what they want to eat, how they procure and cook their food, and why. Food is more than simply fuel. It is also a means of self and cultural expression, a source of pride and pleasure, and an opportunity for resistance.

To learn more about FoodSEqual, scan or visit **ukfoodsystems.ukri.org/research-projects-training-reports/food-systems-equality**

To learn more about FOODLIVES, scan or visit **wen.org.uk/food-lives**

To learn more about Feminist Food Stories, scan or visit **servings.uk**

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

When engaging with local communities, it was particularly beneficial to have bilingual community researchers with skills in both English and Sylheti. The time that community researchers spent on outreach (e.g. coffee mornings, Arabic classes, social spaces, etc.) and visiting people withing their community spaces also helped to build relationships and trust. Because of the length of the project, the team were able to build longer term rapport and trust over time which deepened engagement and responses. The project was properly funded which meant that community researchers were on part-time salaries and employed by a community organisation and so could access holiday and sick pay. The funding was also ear-marked for recompensing community venues, community suppliers, and community members. At the start of the project, the team tried out research methods such as food photo diaries on the project team, so that we could experience what it was like to participate and to represent our lives in particular ways. This gave us more empathy and concrete experiential learning. We also ran an initial big splash kick-off event with a range of activities including research take-away packs.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Generating interest in our research and engaging community members in participating in our methods required effort, financial cost and time. We needed to try out different approaches and different research sites. We did not have a physical community space, and this was an obstacle to easily engaging community members. We needed to travel around and try a range of community spaces. We also put a lot of time into contacting people and reminding them by phone of their research appointments. Sometimes the health of participants affected their ability to attend these appointments, and we made efforts to re-schedule with community members when needed.

Case study 8:
Women's Inclusive Team (WIT)

Project	The Haawa Project: Culturally-Sensitive Domestic Abuse Support for Somali and BAME Women
Community and voluntary organisation	Women's Inclusive Team (WIT)
Collaborators	Safia Jama and Haawa Project Team (WIT)

Project overview

The Haawa Project was developed in response to the clear lack of access to domestic abuse (DA) services by Somali women in Tower Hamlets. It was underpinned by a small-scale research project carried out by WIT in 2020–2021, which found that only one Somali woman accessed a DA service in Tower Hamlets over a one-year period. This figure was disproportionate and misrepresented the lived reality of the community.

At the time, there were no culturally sensitive DA services available to Somali women in the borough, and mainstream services were not engaging with them in ways that felt accessible or safe. The absence of appropriate provision meant many women endured abuse in silence. Our research found that a lack of culturally competent staff, language barriers, stigma, and a lack of awareness of rights were all significant obstacles.

This led us to pilot a small domestic abuse project in partnership with Solace Women's Aid. The goal was to trial tailored support that addressed the specific needs of Somali women and collect more data to understand the scale of the issue. The research aimed to understand the barriers Somali women faced in accessing DA services. Through surveys, focus groups, and in-depth case studies, WIT identified key challenges: lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse, limited English, cultural stigma, tribal dynamics, and deep mistrust of statutory services. The project combined research, awareness-raising, and frontline service delivery, with the aim of closing the gap between statutory services and Somali women at risk. This pilot confirmed the wider concern: Somali women were in need of support but were not accessing mainstream services.

Following this, we organised a conference with local stakeholders and presented our initial findings. The evidence gathered through this process enabled us to build a stronger case for funding and launch the Haawa Project. This project is the direct outcome of that early research — proof that when community-based research is taken seriously, it can lead to long-term, meaningful change.

Today, Haawa has secured funding and continues to grow, providing vital support to Somali and other BAME women across East London. The project has also had a significant impact on community awareness and engagement. Through sustained outreach, we built trust with local mosques and Imams, who are now confident in identifying signs of domestic abuse and referring women to our service. This shift is powerful — having male faith leaders involved in the conversation has opened the door for wider dialogue across the community.

We've seen younger Somali men and women begin to engage in conversations about healthy relationships — something that was previously silenced. While there is still a long way to go, the presence of a specialist Somali DA service has created an access point that feels safe, relevant, and rooted in the lived experience of the community.

What worked well when engaging with people from different communities in East London?

In our work, we've seen how Somali women in particular are more likely to speak openly when the space is culturally safe and led by people who share their lived experience. Researchers should begin by working in partnership with trusted community organisations who already hold relationships with local people. This builds trust and opens up meaningful access that goes beyond surveys.

Language, cultural awareness, and religious sensitivity also play a big role. For example, our engagement with local mosques and Imams meant we were able to open up sensitive conversations about domestic abuse that would not have been possible otherwise. Researchers must take the time to understand local dynamics — whether they relate to gender roles, migration history, or religious and tribal identities — and factor this into their approach.

Were some areas more challenging? What could be done differently in future projects?

Engaging survivors in meaningful research while ensuring their emotional safety was one of the most sensitive aspects of this project. Many women were hesitant to disclose abuse, even in anonymous settings, due to shame or fear of community backlash. Language barriers, cultural taboos, and concerns about confidentiality made data collection complex.

Another challenge was securing long-term funding. While the initial research helped evidence the need, maintaining momentum and staff capacity required significant unpaid time and resource-stretching.

In future, projects would benefit from:
- Building in more time and funding for relationship-building with local services
- Having a dedicated bilingual researcher from the outset
- Working with GPs and housing officers more proactively to identify women at risk
- Continuing to invest in safe, anonymous access points for advice

To learn more about Women's Inclusive Team, scan or visit **wit.org.uk**

6. East London Place Navigator

Partnerships are integral to making positive impact in East London, but making sense of the local landscape isn't always easy.

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, as part of the National Civic Impact Accelerator, has designed a Place Navigator to assist universities and their partners to build understanding of organisations, networks and collaboratives in their geographical areas.

It maps key players, sectors, and systems, with practical insights and a clear view of local infrastructure. It helps teams connect, collaborate, and create real impact where it matters most.

At Queen Mary, we have adapted this approach to map connections across East London, highlighting the organisations and networks researchers have worked with and

continue to collaborate with. While this isn't a comprehensive list, we hope it serves as a useful starting point for anyone new to East London or exploring community-based research in the area.

We will continue to update this resource over time. If you notice something missing, please complete the short form and we will include it in our next update.

Scan to access East London Place Navigator

Scan to fill in the feedback form

Arts, Culture and Heritage
Organisations and initiatives that celebrate creativity, storytelling, and local history through art, performance, and heritage projects.

Economic Development
Organisations and partnerships focused on supporting local businesses, creating jobs, and driving inclusive economic growth across communities.

Education and Skills
Schools, colleges, universities, and training providers helping people develop knowledge, skills, and opportunities for lifelong learning.

Environment
Organisations working to protect and improve the natural and built environment, from green spaces and climate action to sustainable living.

Faith
Faith-based groups and places of worship that support spiritual life, community connection, and social action across East London.

Health
Health and wellbeing organisations, from NHS trusts to community health projects, focused on improving physical and mental health outcomes.

Justice
Groups promoting fairness, equality, and access to justice.

Local Government
Councils and public bodies responsible for local services, planning, and community wellbeing across East London's boroughs.

Sport
Clubs, community groups, and initiatives using sport and physical activity to improve health, inclusion, and community engagement.

Voluntary and Community Sector
Charities and grassroots organisations working to strengthen communities and support local residents.

The list of organisations in this category does not represent all of the sector in East London, particularly smaller community organisations. If you'd like support navigating and building relationships with these, please contact the CVS as the infrastructure supporting organisation for the sector in each borough, or the Tower Hamlets CVS who can help connect to the appropriate team in each borough.

Arts, Culture and Heritage

Museums and heritage
- Barts Hospital Museum
- Barts Pathology Museum
- Eastside Communiy Heritage
- Everyday Muslim
- East End Women's Museum
- East London History Society
- Fuse (Havering) – Queen's Theatre Hornchurch
- Hackney Museum and Archives
- Havering Museum
- Historic Royal Palaces (includes Tower of London)
- London Museum
- Museum of London Docklands
- Museum of the Home
- Ragged School Museum
- V&A East
- Valence House Museum
- Vestry House Museum
- Whitechapel Gallery
- William Morris Gallery
- Young V&A

Libraries and archives
- Bank of England Museum/ Archives
- Barking and Dagenham Libraries
- Barts Health Archives
- Ben Uri Archive
- Bishopsgate Institute
- Bradians Trust
- Bruce Castle - Harringey Archives
- Drapers Company and Archives
- Hackney Libraries
- Hackney Museum and Archives
- Havering Libraries
- Idea Store – Tower Hamlets
- Newham Libraries
- Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives
- Tower Hamlets Libraries
- Waltham Forest Libraries

Arts and cultural organisations
- Brick Lane Bookshop
- Bow Arts
- Bow Geezers
- Caramel Rock
- Chisenhale Dance
- Contemporary Visual Arts Network East London
- East London Dance
- Four Corners
- Fuse: Havering
- Havering Changing
- Havering London
- Liberia Book Shop
- Limehouse Town Hall
- Numbi Arts
- RichMix
- Spitalfields Music
- Spotlight
- The HAC Bow
- Tower Hamlets Arts and Events
- Wilton's Music Hall

Economic Development

- Canary Wharf Group
- East End Trades Guild
- East London Business Alliance (ELBA)
- London's Local Chambers of Commerce
- London Community Land Trusts
- Roman Road Trust
- Romford BID
- Shift (innovation catalyst)
- Sisters in Business
- Thames Life Community Development Trust
- The Hackney Wick and ish Island Zone
- The Royal Docks Enterprise Zone

Education and skills

Partnerships and Trusts
- Drapers' Multi-Academy Trust co-sponsored by Queen Mary
- University Schools Trust co-sponsored by Queen Mary
- Tower Hamlets Education Partnership

Schools and education providers
- East London post 16 providers
- Barking and Dagenham Schools
- Hackney schools and education providers
- Havering schools
- Newham schools and post 16 providers
- Redbridge schools
- Tower Hamlets schools and education providers
- Tower Hamlets sixth forms and colleges
- Waltham Forest Schools and colleges

Youth services
- Future Youth Zone – B&D
- Newham Youth Zones
- Spotlight – Tower Hamlets
- Redbridge Youth Service and Youth Hub
- Tower Project
- Young Hackney
- Young Tower Hamlets
- Waltham Forest Community Hub - Youth Hub

Environment

- Canals and Rivers Trust
- East London Garden Society
- ecoACTIVE
- Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park
- Groundwork London
- Hackney and Tower Hamlets Friends of the Earth
- London Wildlife Trust
- Mudchute Park and Farm
- Port of London Authority
- Royal London Docks
- Spitalfields City Farm
- Stepney City Farm
- Surge Co-operative
- The Conservation Volunteers – Waltham Forest
- Victoria Park Friends
- Women's Environmental Network (Wen)
- Woodberry Wetlands

Faith

- B&D Faith Leaders Network
- Care for St Anne's Church
- Council of Mosques
- Darul Ummah Mosque, Shadwell
- East London Mosque (ELM)
- ELM Maryam Centre Women's Services
- Faith Action – Tower Hamlets and B&D
- Hackney Faiths Network
- Redbridge Faith Forum
- Salvation Army (branches across East London)
- St George in the East Church
- The Faith and Belief Forum
- Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum

Health

Partnerships and Trusts
- Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHRUT)
- Barts Health NHS Trust
- East London NHS Foundation Trust
- NE London ICS/ICB
- Primary Care Networks & GP Practices
- NE London VCSFE Collaborative

Health and wellbeing organisations (with services in East London)
- Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham
- Healthwatch Hackney
- Healthwatch Newham
- Healthwatch Redbridge
- Healthwatch Tower Hamlets
- Healthwatch Waltham Forest
- Local Authorities Public Health Teams
- Local Voice
- London Social Prescribing Network
- Barking and Dagenham CAMHS
- Hackney and City CAMHS
- Havering CAMHS
- Newham CAMHS
- Redbridge CAMHS
- Tower Hamlets CAMHS
- Waltham forest CAMHS

Health and wellbeing organisations
- Apasen
- Bromley by Bow Centre
- City Care
- Compass Wellbeing
- Creative Health Havering
- Communities Keeping Well
- Docklands Outreach
- King George and Queens' Hospitals Charity
- MIND Havering, Barking and Dagenham
- MIND City, Hackney and Waltham Forest
- MIND Tower Hamlets, Newham and Redbridge
- Newham Centre for Health and Care Equity
- Newham Health Collaborative
- Newham Wellbeing in Schools team (WINS)
- North East London Training Hub
- Positive East
- Rethink Mental Illness
- Social Action for Health
- Sister Circle
- Tower Hamlets Children's social care
- Tower Hamlets Connect
- Tower Hamlets Connection Coalition
- Tower Hamlets GP Care Group
- Tower Hamlets Together
- Waltham Forest Black People Mental Health Organisation
- Well Newham

Research-specific
- CRN North Thames
- Tower Hamlets Health Determinants Research Collaboration (TH HDRC)
- NIHR North London Regional Research Delivery Network (RRDN)
- UCL Partners Health Innovation

Justice

- Account Hackney
- account3
- Citizens Advice Service
- Community Links
- House of Annetta
- Migrants' Rights Network
- Project Remake
- Runnymede Trust
- Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network
- United Voices of the World

Local Government

- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
- London Borough of Hackney
- London Borough of Havering
- London Borough of Newham
- London Borough of Redbridge
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- London Borough of Waltham Forest

Partnership organisations
- Central London Forward, a partnership of London's 12 central boroughs (including Hackney and Tower Hamlets)
- Local London, a partnership of London's nine NE and SE boroughs (not including Hackney or Tower Hamlets)

Sport

- Adamant Football Club
- Amateur FA
- Be Well in Tower Hamlets
- Copper Box Arena
- Dagenham & Redbridge FC
- East London Hockey Club
- East London RFC
- England Netball
- Leyton Orient Trust
- London Pulse Netball
- London Sport
- Limehouse Laces Women's Football Club
- Newark Youth London
- Pulse Social Sports Group
- Qmotion
- Redbridge Sports & Leisure
- Sporting Foundation
- SportsDock - University of East London
- Sports Inspired
- Stratford East Football Club
- Stratford Town FC
- StreetGames
- Tower Hamlets Football Club
- Tower Hamlets sport and physical activity
- Tower Hamlets Tennis
- Tower Hamlets Trojans Basketball Club
- Tower Hamlets Youth Sport Foundation
- Trapped in Zone One
- WalkWheelCycle Trust
- Wapping FC
- Wapping Hockey Club | Wapping Kidds
- West Ham Boxing Club
- West Ham United Foundation

Voluntary and Community Sector

Infrastructure organisations

- Barking and Dagenham Council for Voluntary Service (BDCVS)
- Community Action Redbridge (formerly Redbridge CVS)
- Compost London - Newham
- East London Citizens (TELCO)/ London Citizens
- Havering Volunteer Centre
- Hackney Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)
- John Smith House – Barking & Dagenham
- Legends of the Forest volunteering – Waltham Forest
- London Plus
- One Newham
- Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services (THCVS)
- Toynbee Hall
- Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets

Organisations and Centres

- Account3 – Tower Hamlets
- Age UK East London
- Alevi Cultural Centre
- Apanjon
- Bikeworks CIC
- Bonny Downs Community Association – Newham
- Born Everywhere, Made in Newham
- Carers of Barking and Dagenham
- Carers Centre Tower Hamlets
- Carers First Waltham Forest
- Centre for Ageing Better
- City and Hackney Carers Centre
- Claudia Jones Organisation
- Coffee Afrik CIC
- Community Resources – B&D
- Day-Mer Community Centre
- East London Out Project (ELOP)
- Hackney Migrant Centre
- Halkevi Community Centre
- Havering Carers' Hub
- Imaan
- Limehouse Project
- LinkAge Plus
- Local Offer Tower Hamlets
- London Black Women's Project
- London gypsies and travellers
- London LGBTQ+ Community Centre
- London Youth
- Magic Me
- Micro Rainbow
- Mile End Community Project
- Near Neighbours
- Newham Community Project
- Ocean Regeneration Trust
- Ocean Somali Community Organisation (OSCA)
- Ocean Women's Association
- Osmani Centre
- Osmani Trust
- Praxis for Migrants and Refugees
- Real Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO)
- Redbridge Carers Support Service
- Roma Support Group
- Somali Senior Citizens Club
- Shewise
- Step Forward
- Stifford Centre
- St Hilda's East Community Centre
- St Margaret's House – Tower Hamlets
- The Young Foundation – including the Institute for Community Studies
- Tower Hamlets Children and Youth Forum
- Tower Hamlets Disabled People's Network
- Tower Hamlets Ethnic Minority Network
- Tower Hamlets LGBT Community Forum
- Tower Hamlets Older People's Reference Group
- Tower Hamlets Women's Network
- Toyhouse – Tower Hamlets
- Turkish Cypriot Centre
- Walk East
- Waltham Forest Women's Network
- Women's Inclusive Team (WIT)
- Whitechapel Mission

7. East London services

These suggestions for venues, catering, creatives, interpreters and other East London expertise come recommended from previous work with Queen Mary staff or East London organisations.

For Queen Mary staff: some may or may not be set up as suppliers on Agresso, the Queen Mary finance system. Please work with your School/Institute finance contact before engaging to ensure you follow the Route to Payment guidance.

We will continue to update this resource over time. If you would like us to include an organisation you have worked with that isn't on the list, please complete the short form and we'll include it in our next update.

Scan to fill in the East London services form

Photograph courtesy of Future of London.

Venues

- **Ragged School Museum**
  Mile End, Tower Hamlets
- **London Museum Docklands**
  Tower Hamlets
- **Rich Mix, Shoreditch**
  Tower Hamlets
- **Brady Arts and Community Centre**
  Whitechapel, Tower Hamlets
- **Muslim Centre**
  Whitechapel, Tower Hamlets
- **The Green House**
  Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets
- **The Royal Foundation of St Katharine**
  Limehouse, Tower Hamlets
- **Toynbee Hall**
  Tower Hamlets
- **Tower Hamlets Council room hire**
  Tower Hamlets
- **Poplar Union**
  Poplar, Tower Hamlets
- **St Margaret's House**
  Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets
- **Hoxton Hall**
  Tower Hamlets
- **The Heritage and Arts Centre**
  Mile End, Tower Hamlets
- **Limehouse Town Hall**
  Tower Hamlets
- **St Hilda's East**
  Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets
- **Oxford House**
  Bethnal Green, Tower Hamlets
- **The Ecology Pavilion**
  Mile End Park, Tower Hamlets
- **The Art Pavilion**
  Mile End Park, Tower Hamlets
- **Tower Hamlets Town Hall**
  Tower Hamlets
- **East London Mosque**
  Tower Hamlets
- **St George's in the East Church**
  Shadwell, Tower Hamlets
- **Bernie Cameron Community Centre**
  Bow, Tower Hamlets
- **Tower Hamlets halls and venues for hire**
- **Idea Stores**
  Tower Hamlets

- **Hason Raja Centre**
  Spitalfields Housing Association, Vallance Road
- **Round Chapel Old School Rooms**
  Clapton, Hackney
- **Hackney Museum**
  Hackney
- **Sutton House**
  Hackney
- **Community Hall**
  Hackney
- **Museum of the Home**
  Hoxton, Hackney
- **Vision Venues**
  Redbridge
- **Barking & Dagenham halls and venues for hire**
- **Newham halls and venues for hire**
- **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park venues**
  Newham
- **Waltham Forest halls and venues for hire**
- **Waltham Forest College**
  Walthamstow
- **Waltham Forest Community Hub**
  Walthamstow
- **Havering halls and venues for hire**
- **MyPlace Youth and Community Centre**
  Harold Hill
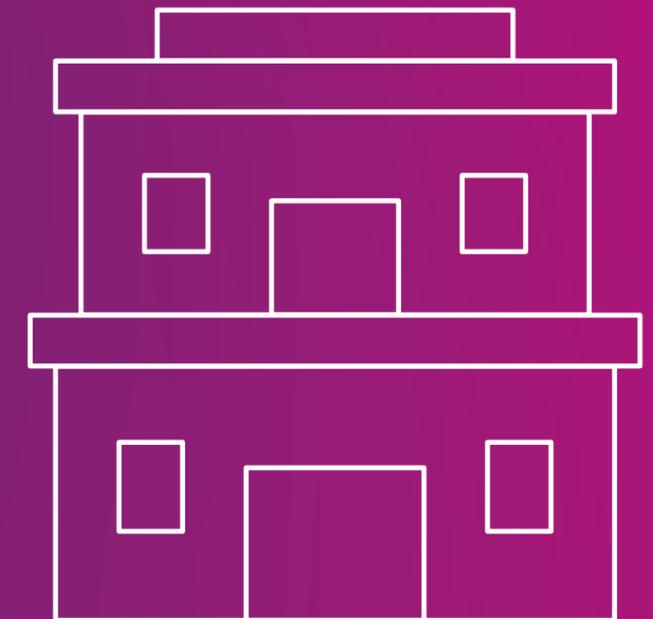
Food/catering

- **Tiffin Walli** – social enterprise based in Redbridge who work with local women to utilise their passion for food by providing catering for events. Contact Sangeeta.
- **Hooyo East** – Somali take away/catering service that invests proceeds into Women's Inclusive Team (WIT) programmes.
- **Oitij-jo Kitchen** – a women-led social enterprise based in Tower Hamlets that offers home-style Bangladeshi cuisine and catering services for events (buffet, takeaway, boxed meals, BBQ). Contact Maher.
- **All Season Foods** – offers full-service catering specialising in Asian, Bangladeshi and halal cuisine – with bespoke menus, event staff and locally sourced ingredients.

Film production/photography/artists
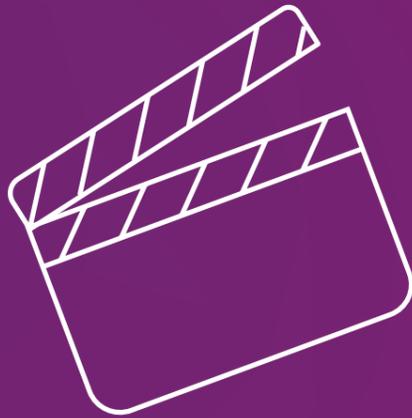
- **Bluebird Pictures** – production company based in Barking.
- **Woven Ink** – animation and creative studio that works with researchers and organisations to promote their work.
- **Mile End Community Project** – film makers and other creative projects based in Mile End.
- **Eithne Nightingale** – photography and film making
- **Mitchell Harris** – film editing and production
- **Jon Cole** – photography
- **Teresa Hare Duke** – visual art, photography, creative production
- **Sketch Sky McCool** - visual artist

Other

- **Do Little Events based in Tower Hamlets** – Event management, marquee hire, fun activities

8. Funding sources

This guidance has highlighted that successful equitable East London research requires researchers to spend time developing understanding of the communities they wish to engage in research activities and building trusting relationships and collaborative partnerships with East London organisations and community members. It also requires that East London community partners and research participants are appropriately recognised and recompensed for their time, expertise, and contributions, with commercial partners sharing responsibility for meeting these research costs.

In this section we provide information on sources of funding or other resourcing which can enable partnerships and engagement with research.

External research funding

Major UK funders of academic research value and promote involvement of communities, the public and patients in projects that they fund, as well as a focus on place. This means that funding proposals will be strengthened by building in equitable East London research approaches. There may also be specific opportunities related to place or public engagement through external funders.

Queen Mary researchers should include costs for engagement and impact within their external research grant funding. For support in shaping up these plans and to include adequate costs across all years of a grant application, please email the Engagement team on **engagement@qmul.ac.uk** and the Impact team on **impact@qmul.ac.uk**

At Queen Mary, the Joint Research Management Office (JRMO), provides resources and support in designing new research applications and costings - **jrmo.org.uk**. The Pre-Costing Questionnaire includes prompts to ensure that engagement and impact activities are fully costed in grant applications. It is important to work with VCS organisations and community members at an early stage to agree activities and costings.

External funder websites provide useful information about their focus on Public and Community Engagement with research.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

'One of the goals of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) public engagement strategy is to enable researchers and the public to work together to advance knowledge, develop tomorrow's technologies and address national and global challenges in partnership. Our aim is for equitable and inclusive public involvement to be an integral part of research.'

Scan to learn more

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

'Working with the public is at the heart of what we do.

Involving the public in our work improves the quality of our research and helps us to ensure it is relevant. Working with the public means our research is more likely to be transformed into health benefits for people.

We believe that it is important to give the public a voice in all our work. The public voice influences everything we do from how we prioritise the issues we want to study, how we carry out research, how we interpret our results to how we share our findings.

By providing opportunities for all members of the public to get involved in and engage with our research, we will increase our accountability for the way we spend the public funds we receive.'

Scan to learn more

Wellcome

'We believe using an engaged research approach improves research and makes it more impactful.

Engaged research is an umbrella term that captures different approaches to embedding engagement into research. This can include community engagement, patient involvement, policy engagement, working with lived experience experts or any other approach that brings a diversity of perspectives into your research process.

An engaged research approach embeds stakeholder perspectives across the research lifecycle - from agenda setting, funding, and research design through to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It typically involves building relationships, sharing power, and using inclusive and equitable methods. Engagement should not be a stand-alone activity but an integrated part of your research. An engaged research approach can involve a variety of methodologies, frameworks, and skills to appropriately engage relevant stakeholders at key points.

Engaged research looks different across disciplines and research proposals. The modes, methodologies, and frequency of engagement should vary in line with what best suits your research - the key questions, relevant stakeholders, and the intended objectives for engagement contributing to the work.'

Scan to learn more

Place-based research activity is now becoming more focused on economic development and growth in line with Government priorities, so **emphasising the economic impact of your research will be key in external funding success.**

UK funder websites provide useful information about their focus on place:

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

For UKRI, *place* is a central principle guiding how research and innovation deliver benefits across the UK. The organisation's strategy commits to ensuring that geography does not limit access to funding or participation, while maximising the social, cultural, and economic impact of research within local contexts. By investing in regional clusters, infrastructures, and partnerships, UKRI seeks to create a more geographically balanced research and innovation system that contributes to national prosperity and community wellbeing.

Scan to access the toolkit

Medical Research Council (MRC)

MRC recognises the importance of place for strengthening capacity across the UK for the long-term benefit of UK science, socio-economic growth and, importantly, the health benefits that result from research and innovation (R&I) investment to all citizens.

Scan to learn more

Other place-based funding examples include:

NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration programme (HDRC)

The HDRC programme is a national initiative funded by NIHR, involving partnerships between local authorities (i.e., councils), academic institutions, and others, aimed at strengthening research capability in local government settings. The five-year funding is designed to build infrastructure, capacity and research culture rather than funding only discrete research projects. The programme emphasises that research and evidence-use should be located within the local authority context so that decisions about health, wellbeing and the wider determinants of health reflect the realities of the place.

Queen Mary is a partner organisation on the Tower Hamlets HDRC led by Tower Hamlets Council, together with University of East London, London Metropolitan University and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service.

Scan to learn more (Tower Hamlets website)

Scan to learn more (Queen Mary website)

Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs)

The Local Policy Innovation Partnerships (LPIPs) programme focuses on tackling locally defined challenges by supporting inclusive and sustainable growth rooted in the specific priorities, assets, and lived realities of each place. Each partnership defines its own geographical area and works collaboratively across universities, public bodies, businesses, and communities to strengthen local research and innovation ecosystems.

The scheme emphasises practical, evidence-informed solutions that address issues such as skills, innovation, the green economy, and community development. By generating insights from local contexts and feeding them into national policymaking, LPIPs aim to bridge local and national systems, build local capability, and reduce regional inequalities in opportunity, growth, and innovation across the UK.

Scan to learn more

Internal Queen Mary funding opportunities

For when external funding isn't feasible or possible for developing new research engagement or impact, Queen Mary has a number of funding opportunities which can be used to support collaboration, participatory approaches and engagement.

Public Engagement Grant Schemes

The Public Engagement grant schemes enable Queen Mary staff and students to deliver projects that engage the public with Queen Mary research, teaching or other core business. These programmes are not able to fund research. All spending and evaluation will need to take place by the end of the academic year.

Applications need to be led by a Queen Mary staff member or student with external organisations applying as co-applicants. See the web pages for eligibility criteria and advice sessions for those wanting to submit applications.

Scan to learn more

The Participatory Research Fund

Funded by Research England, this grant scheme enables Queen Mary staff and students to run participatory or co-produced research which involves non-academic partners in the co-design, implementation and/or dissemination of research. Participatory Research grant applications need to be led by a Queen Mary staff member, and external organisations can be co-applicants.

Scan to learn more

Research Impact Funding

The Impact Awards support projects that help turn Queen Mary research into real-world benefits.

It offers a range of funding opportunities for activities such as developing ideas, building partnerships, supporting innovation, and strengthening pathways to societal, commercial, or policy impact.

The schemes includes flexible awards that accommodate early-stage exploration, more developed impact projects, and initiatives that deepen engagement with external organisations. It also provides opportunities for academics to collaborate directly with policy bodies through secondments, helping to enhance knowledge exchange and influence decision-making processes.

Scan for eligibility criteria and sources of support

The President and Principal's Fund for Educational Excellence

Established to encourage a culture of educational innovation and exploration at Queen Mary, which

could be linked to your engagement and research practice.

Scan to learn more

Additional funding opportunities to support collaborative working

Student research projects and funding

Another way of resourcing equitable East London research is for academic staff to support students who are undertaking research projects or placements. Their workplans can build in time and activity which helps to meet the needs and priorities of community research partners and supports partnership working in relation to the research project or programme. This might involve

students at different stages of study which forms part of a
- Degree programme placement
- Final year undergraduate or master's dissertation
- Doctoral studentship (PhD).

Collaboration with East London partners is likely to be mutually beneficial since it can offer the student valuable experience in equitable

research approaches and of work beyond academia, while building capacity within a partner organisation to focus on a particular place-based priority or challenge.

There are some funding opportunities for students which might support their involvement in equitable East London research. See below for examples.

Queen Mary Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Academic staff devise short three-month projects to be undertaken by student researchers (undergraduate or PGT students) where the student is paid

a bursary. Projects can be undertaken in collaboration with an external organisation.

Scan to learn more

Queen Mary Summer Training Research Initiative to Support Diversity and Equity (STRIDE)

This annual programme aims to provide paid research opportunities and financial support to undergraduate students from underrepresented groups (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, or Gypsy/Traveller) during the summer months (June to early August).

Students are funded to undertake a research project full time over a period of eight weeks. Projects are devised by academic staff and supervisors and can include collaboration with an external partner.

Scan to learn more

Collaborative Doctoral Studentships

Collaborative doctoral studentships provide funding for doctoral research (typically for between three to four years), developed as a partnership between an HEI based academic in collaboration with an organisation outside higher education. They are

intended to encourage and develop partnerships and generate outputs and benefits for the collaborating institutions.

Applications can nominate a doctoral student or one can be recruited through

open competition following the award, who is then registered at, and funded via, the university. Partner organisations are encouraged to contribute to the funding, although this is often 'in kind'. Partner organisations will be involved in co-supervising the PhD student.

These are funded via UKRI doctoral funding programmes, including:

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): the ESRC London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (LISS DTP) is led by King's College London in partnership with Queen Mary and Imperial College London. Alongside its open studentship competition for social science doctoral research, LISS DTP also funds opportunities for collaborative research with external organisations via CASE studentships.

Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC): in addition to its doctoral focal awards and doctoral landscape awards, the AHRC funds Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships. CDPs are allocations of funded collaborative research studentships made to a museum, library, archive or heritage organisation, or group of such organisations, to allocate to collaborative projects that support their work and objectives. Find out more at:

Scan to learn more about LISS DTP

Scan to learn more about AHRC CDPs

9. Place-based working resources

Reports and resources that may support equitable place-based research approaches, but are not specific to East London.

- Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University & National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2022). *Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice (2nd edition).*
Available at: **https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/2288453/community-based-participatory-research-a-guide-to-ethical-principles-and-practice-2nd-edition**

The guide sets out a comprehensive framework for conducting research in partnership with communities, foregrounding ethical principles such as respect, equity, transparency and shared decision-making, and providing practical guidance across all research phases from planning to dissemination.

- Charles, A., Ewbank, L., Naylor, C., Walsh, N. and Murray, R. (2021). *Developing place-based partnerships: The foundation of effective integrated care systems.*
Available at: **https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/8dd1590aa1/developing_place_based_partnerships_2021.pdf**

The report provides a detailed review of how partnerships at the "place" level (within Integrated Care Systems in England) can drive improvements in health and wellbeing by combining multiple sectors, building local vision, coordinating resources and embedding leadership and community engagement.

- Davies, S.B. (2019). *Place-Based Approaches: Characteristics and Learning*.
Available at: **https://www.anewdirection.org.uk/research/place-based-approaches-characteristics-and-learning**

The report explores a variety of models for place-based work, drawing on eight global initiatives, and identifies key insights on how such approaches can support more integrated, responsive cultural and educational practice in local contexts.

- Department for Culture Media and Sport & Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018). *Place Based Social Action: Learning Review July 2018.*
Available at: **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/place-based-social-action-learning-review-july-2018**

Outlines how communities, local organisations and public services can work together with funding support to co-create shared visions for place-based social action, while also highlighting the significant challenges around

demonstrating impact and developing robust evaluation approaches.

- IVAR (2015). *Working in Place A framework for place-based approaches Research in partnership with London Funders*
Available at: **https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/IVAR008-Place-Based-Funding-Report_AW-3-1.pdf**

The report explores how foundations and trusts in the UK approach place-based funding, offering a structured set of questions and a planning framework for designing, delivering and reviewing investments in defined local geographies.

- Lankelly Chase (2017). *Historical review of place based approaches.*
Available at: **https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Historical-review-of-place-based-approaches.pdf**

The report provides a comprehensive overview of over 50 years of place-based change efforts across the UK and beyond, analysing what drives success, common limitations and strategic questions for funders and policymakers.

- Munro, F. (2015). *Place-based working.*
Available at: **https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/irisson/place-based-working**

This resource explains how adopting locally embedded, asset-based collaboration across sectors enables more responsive support for people and communities, while cautioning against common pitfalls like short-term horizons, tokenistic engagement and top-down approaches.

- *National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement & National Civic Impact Accelerator. Place Navigator (2025)*
Available at: **https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/resources/place-navigator/**

A visual, interactive tool designed to help university staff map and understand local infrastructures — such as health & social care, education & skills, voluntary sector, local government, arts & culture, economic development and public services. It breaks down each sector into easy-to-use sections ("what you need to know", "top tips for working together", "key players", "resources & case studies") so users can identify relevant partners, align with local agendas, and build more effective civic-engagement collaborations.

- Gifford et al. (2025). *Equitable partnerships for civic engagement: a toolkit for civic, community and university partners. NCIA and Queen Mary University of London.*
Available at: **https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/portfolio-items/equitable-partnerships-for-civic-engagement/**

Provides practical exercises, case studies and resources to help universities, community organisations and civic partners build fairer, more sustainable partnerships by recognising diverse expertise, ensuring mutual benefit and achieving stronger community outcomes.

- Smith, S., Irving, M., Mann, G., Bjørndal, A. and Lewis, J. (2023). *Evaluating Place-Based Approaches: a review of methods used.*
Available at: **https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Evaluating-place-based-approaches.pdf**

Outlines a variety of evaluation methods suited to complex, geographically-focused collaborations, emphasising the need for mixed designs, long-term learning systems, and strong alignment between context, intervention and measurement.

- *The Ideas Alliance*
h**ttps://ideas-alliance.org.uk/**

Supports organisations and places to embed co-production, community power and collaborative commissioning. They offer practical, place-based resources — including support for community-led projects, and tools that help local people shape services and systems.

- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). *UKRI Place Toolkit (2022).*
Available at: **https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/UKRI-251024-PlaceToolkit-V8.pdf**

A guidance resource designed to help teams integrate "place" — i.e., geographic and regional context — into programme design, delivery and evaluation, so that research and innovation activities achieve broader, more inclusive impacts across different regions of the UK.

qmul.ac.uk

Glossary and acronyms

Community: a group of people living in the same place or having particular characteristics in common.

Community researched/co-researcher: someone who collaborates with others on a research project, actively contributing to the research process as an equal partner.

East London Civic Action Network (ELCAN): A Queen Mary-convened network that brings together partners and stakeholders across East London with staff and researchers at Queen Mary to address key challenges and develop collaborative action, including on health equity (2024) and growth, skills and innovation (2026).

East London Research Network (ELRN): An internal Queen Mary network that works to support interdisciplinary research taking place in, with and for East London by sharing opportunities and by facilitating exchange and new collaborations.

Equitable: in research this refers to a process that ensures all stakeholders, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, have equal opportunities to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from research, aiming to address power imbalances and systemic inequalities to achieve outcomes that benefit everyone.

Extractive approaches: research practices where researchers, often from universities or research institutions, collect data and knowledge from communities, particularly marginalised ones, without adequately involving them in the research process, giving back to the community, or ensuring their benefit.

IMD: Index of Multiple Deprivation. This is the official government measure calculated by combining different types of deprivation in 33,755 small areas or neighbourhoods in England, called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). The most recent IMD data was released in October 2025.

Infrastructure: set of facilities and systems (physical but also social, as in a voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation) in an area that supports its functioning.

Intersectionality: Theory highlighting how the intersections of multiple social identities like class, gender, race and sexuality result in a combination of privilege and discrimination.

Outcomes: short, medium or longer-term effects or changes resulting from outputs (see next). Some main types of change which people may experience are in circumstance, behaviour, capacity, awareness and attitude.

Outputs: quantity of products, services, facilities or other interventions that result from project or organisational activities (e.g. number of workshop sessions held, of people trained, of healthy meals delivered during a project)

Participatory approaches: methods that actively involve stakeholders, particularly those affected by the issue being addressed, in the decision-making, planning, and implementation processes.

Peer researcher: someone who shares similar characteristics or experiences with the study participants and contributes their lived experience to the research process, often in a participatory or co-produced approach.

Photovoice: a participatory visual research method where participants use photography to document and reflect on issues important to them, fostering dialogue and promoting social change.

Power imbalances: a situation where one individual or group possesses more authority, influence, or resources than another, leading to unequal relationships and potential for unfairness or exploitation.

Research impact: an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.

Safeguarding: measures taken to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm, abuse, and neglect, ensuring their health, well-being, and protection of their human rights.

Trauma informed research approaches: approaches that prioritise the safety, well-being, and dignity of those taking part in research by acknowledging the potential impact of trauma on their lives and adapting research practices accordingly. Training should be undertaken to ensure that such approaches are supportive of participants and do not cause them harm.

VCS: voluntary and community sector.

VCFSE: voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector.

Queen Mary
University of London

neighbourlylab

account

blooming
parenting

East London
citizens

Coffee
Plink
cic

MUSLIM
COMMUNITY
ASSOCIATION

Real
Disabled people
working together
for real choices

Social
Action
for
Health

thcvs
Council for Voluntary Service

Toynbee Hall

Wen.

Women's
Inclusive
Team