



**Citizenship &  
Integration Initiative**

# London Voices

# Executive Summary



Everyone has a unique journey to civic and democratic participation. Whether we speak about volunteering, voting, voicing a view in a consultation or contacting a local representative, our lived experiences make up our journeys. London Voices maps out Londoners' journeys to civic and democratic participation, with a focus on under-represented and marginalised Londoners - Black, minority ethnic and migrant Londoners; Deaf and disabled Londoners; young and private renting Londoners.

The Trust for London, on behalf of the Citizenship and Integration Initiative, and the UK Democracy Fund, a Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust initiative<sup>(1)</sup>, have come together to support comprehensive research into the mechanisms that can facilitate equal, inclusive, representative civic and democratic participation as part of the London Voices project. The Greater London Authority (GLA) has supported this research and its wider aims. The report has been drafted independently of the GLA and the Mayor of London and as a result makes recommendations for both.

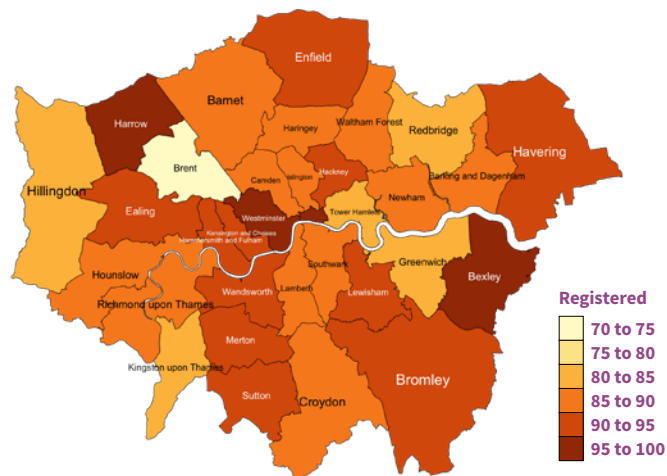
In this report, **civic participation** is defined as the ways in which Londoners want and are able to engage in their local community. For example, it includes running or trying to set up a local service (formal or informal volunteering), organising a community, sport or culture event, setting up or signing a petition, writing to and booking a meeting with a representative (councillor, MP, etc).

**Democratic participation** is defined as the degree to which Londoners want and are able to engage in London's and the UK democratic system. For example, it includes campaigning for a political issue and/or a political party, running as a party - political

or independent candidate for public office, being able and willing to register to vote, and voting in elections.

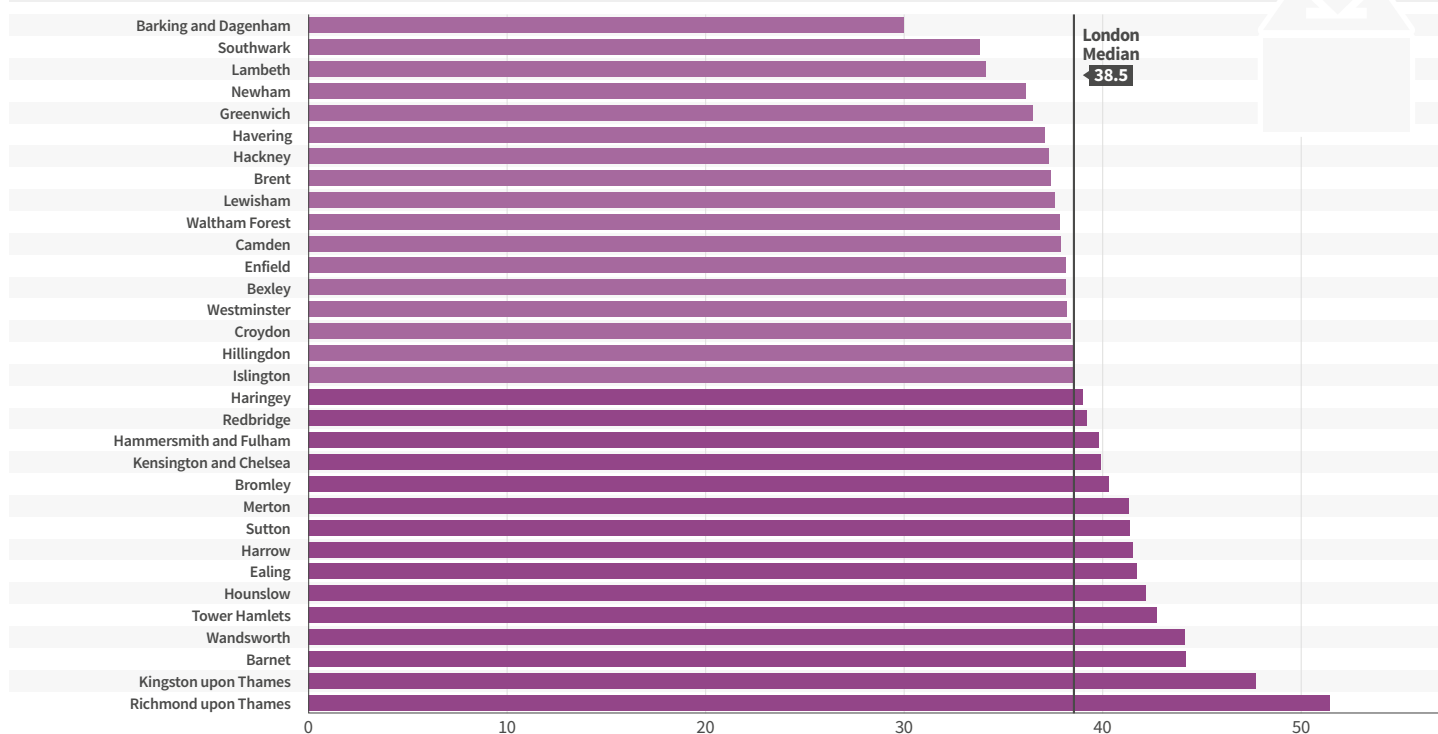
The report argues that civic and democratic participation in London and the United Kingdom more broadly need to be addressed urgently. Voter turnout is one of the most important indicators of democratic participation. London had a voter turnout of 67.5% in the 2019 General Election<sup>(2)</sup>, compared with a UK - wide turnout of 67.3%<sup>(3)</sup>, both rates below averages in most Western European countries. In the 2018 London local elections, the voter turnout was 39%<sup>(4)</sup>, compared to 42% in the postponed 2021 Mayoral and Assembly elections<sup>(5)</sup>.

### Percentage of respondents REGISTERED TO VOTE by borough



Source: Survey of Londoners 2018/19. Weighted percentages

### VOTER TURNOUT in 2018 Local Elections across London



Source: Electoral Commission

(1) The UK Democracy Fund funded the work reported in this publication. The material presented here represents the views of the authors, not necessarily those of JRRF or other UK Democracy Fund contributors.

(2) <https://electionresults.parliament.uk/election/2019-12-12/results/Location/Region/London>

(3) <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2019-turnout/>

(4) <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/borough-council-election-results-2018>

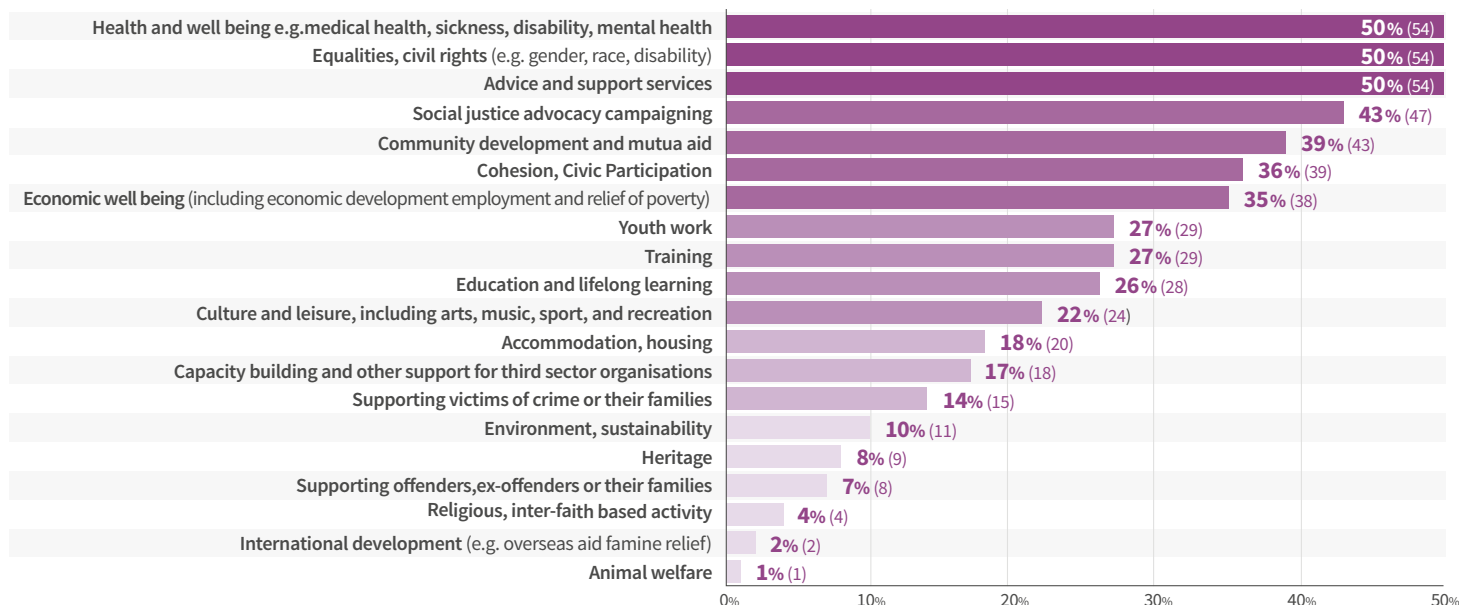
(5) <https://www.londonelects.org.uk/im-voter/election-results/results-2021>

This report presents findings from extensive data collection using inclusive, participatory quantitative and qualitative methods. An original survey with civil society organisations of various sizes from across London was conducted between early July and mid-August 2021.

109 organisations took part in the survey, comprising a total of 4087 full-time employees, 5611 volunteers and supporting around 380,000 Londoners. In-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with 21 organisations. Seven focus groups and eight

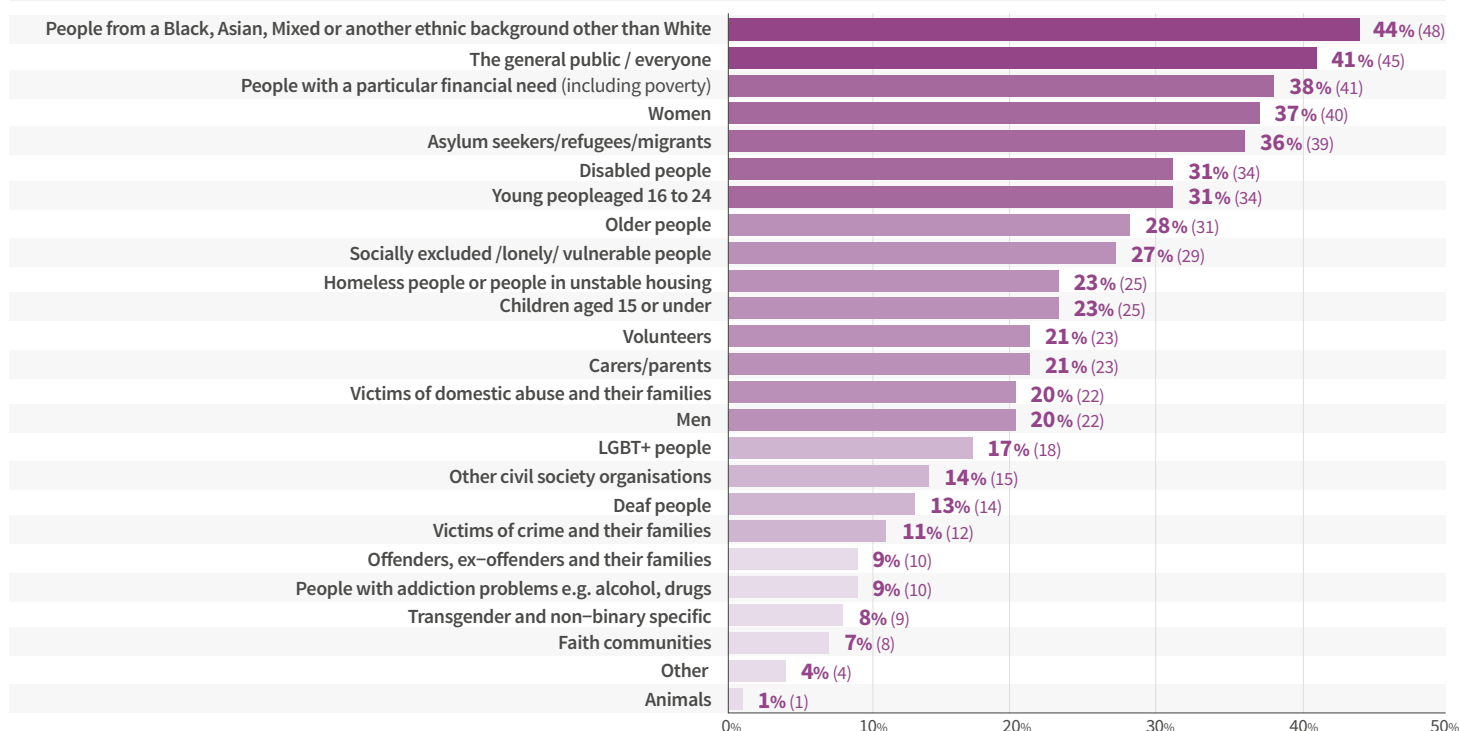
community interviews were co-designed with and led by five different young and migrant Londoner and disabled people-led organisations to provide further community voices and lived experience perspectives. This provided a rich and robust evidence base for insights into current best practices and challenges that civil society organisations and their beneficiaries face in terms of their civic and democratic engagement. These lived experiences informed the recommendations on how and who should support equal, accessible, representative civic and democratic participation in London.

### AREAS OF WORK of surveyed organisations



Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations % of Respondents – (Number of Respondents in parentheses)

### BENEFICIARIES of surveyed organisations



Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations % of Respondents – (Number of Respondents in parentheses)



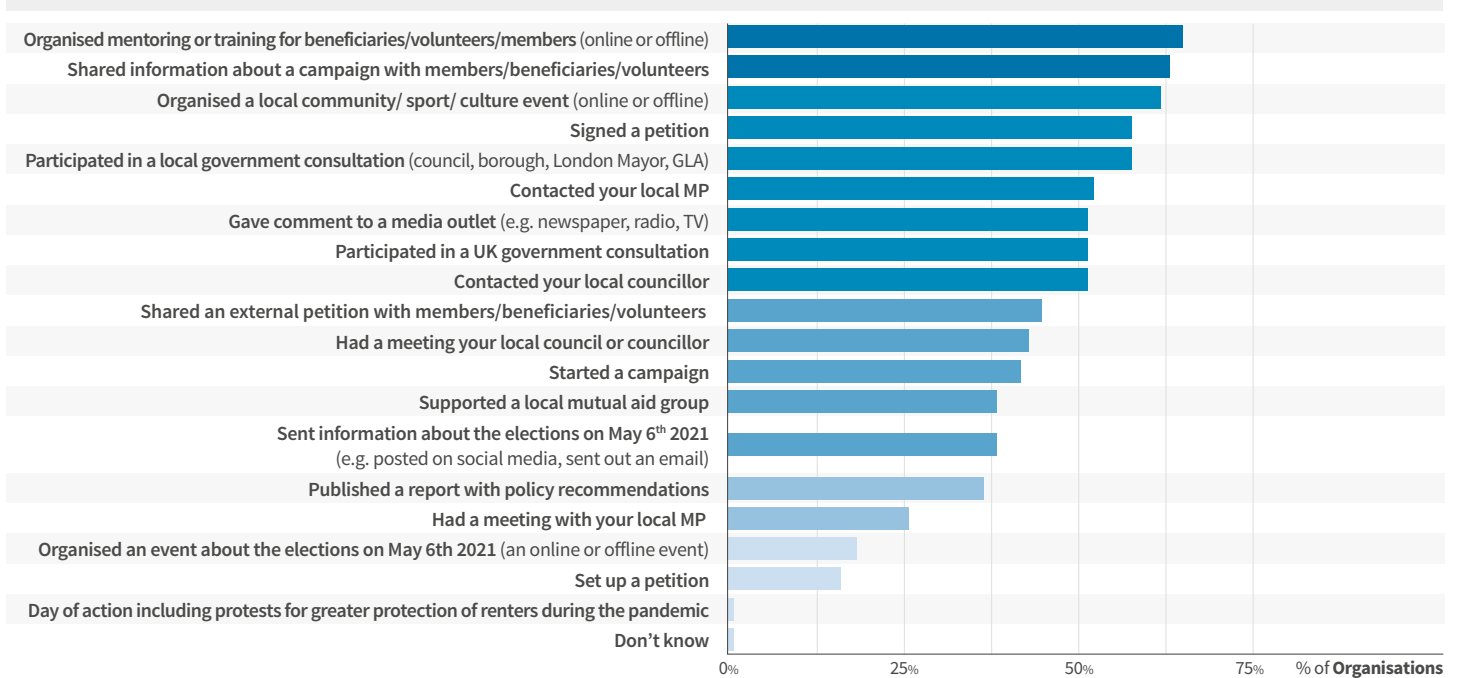
# Research findings

The survey results show that civil society organisations make a huge contribution to civic participation in London – over 60% of civil society organisations who took part have organised training, mentoring or community events that enable the civic participation of Londoners. However, only around a third have organised initiatives around voter registration or other democratic awareness activities. There is a clear gap in how comfortable civil society feels organising community events, compared to events related to elections. This missed potential needs to be addressed. Funders, civic, democratic and political institutions need to support

civil society to campaign and organise non-party political, impartial civic and political participation initiatives. Some key changes that civil society would like to see in this respect are:

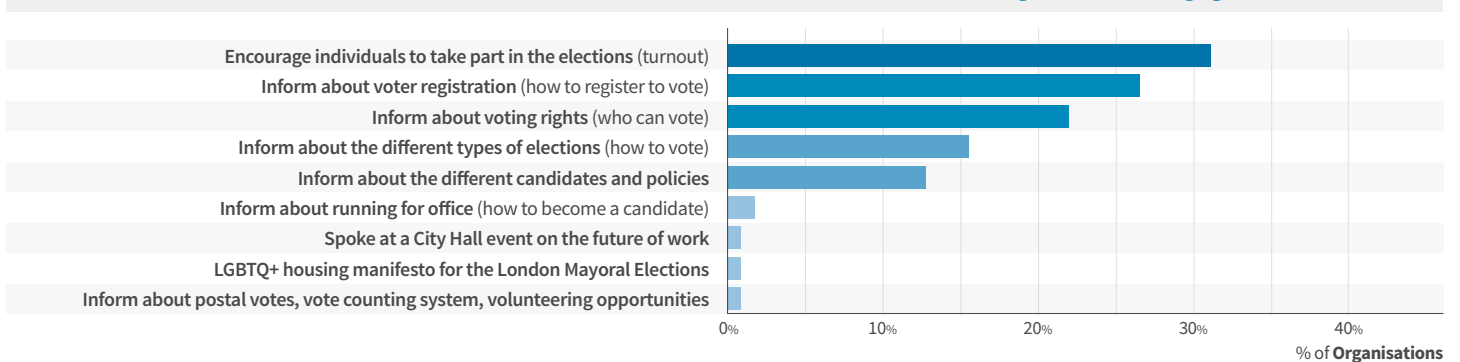
- local authorities embracing civil society as full and equal partners in the co-design and delivery of civic and democratic participation initiatives;
- the strengthening and creation of platforms that connect different civil society organisations;
- ensuring funding is available for non-party political, impartial campaigning and political participation activities.

## What TYPES OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION do organisations engage in?



Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations

## What TYPES OF VOTER REGISTRATION or INFORMATION ACTIVITIES do organisations engage in?

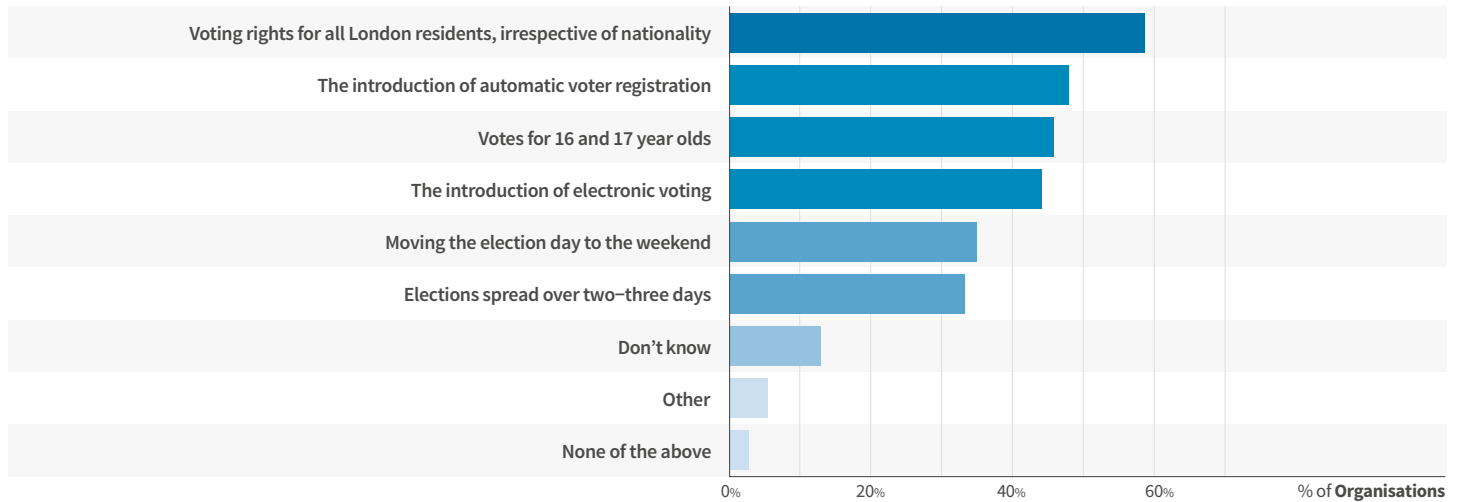


Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations – Lived experience meaning that they belong to one of the beneficiary groups of the organisation's work

There was also strong support for democratic reforms among the civil society organisations who took part in the London Voices research: over half of all civil society organisations surveyed said they were in favour of residence-based voting rights, and more opportunities for

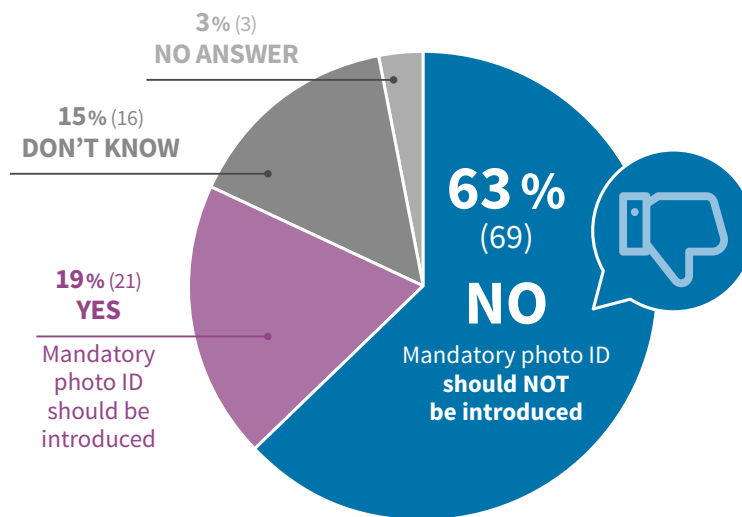
deliberative democracy, such as permanent Citizens' Assemblies. Over 60% of civil society organisations were also opposed to the introduction of mandatory photo voter ID, citing deep concerns about the effect on the electoral turnout of their beneficiaries.

**What of the following reforms, if any, do you think COULD INCREASE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION among Londoners?**



Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations

**Should MANDATORY PHOTO IDS for in-person voting be introduced or not?**



Source: London Voices Survey, N = 109 organisations % of Respondents – (Number of Respondents in parentheses)

This research illustrates the full journey to participation in London through the lived experiences of under-represented groups. Following the analysis of the stakeholder survey, complemented by the qualitative interview findings, this report focuses on presenting challenges and opportunities in civic and democratic participation through the voices of different communities. The case studies section of the report shows the perspectives of faith and non-faith Londoners, Black and minority ethnic Londoners, migrant and refugee communities, and young Londoners. Some case studies detail specific challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the impact on community building and grassroots organising. This section's aim is also to show examples of innovative civic and democratic engagement, for instance

through the case studies on London Voter Registration Week (LVRW) or grassroots-led campaigns like She Votes.

Finally, the report presents a series of detailed and practical recommendations for local authorities, the Greater London Assembly, the Mayor of London, Central Government, funders, civil society and political parties. These were co-designed with under-represented Londoners and an Advisory Board. If implemented, some immediately, others in the medium and long term, they could significantly improve Londoners' belonging, their trust in democratic systems and institutions, the feeling of being heard and the ability to use their voice and power to decide their future and the future of their city and the country!

*There's a huge lack of information. So, what their civic rights are, what they can and can't do, legally, how to get legal advice. There's a tremendous dearth of free legal advice... Or immigration lawyers, let's say. So just, you know, any information about what they're entitled to, I think it's very hard for people to get.*

Haringey Welcome

*Once I moved to London, and I started volunteering more with different groups and engaging more in civil society, that's when I actually found out that I can vote and that actually counts for something.*

M., Bulgarian citizen

*We want communities to be actively engaged in political processes, especially at the local level, and public appointments and to step up and get better representation.*

Jeremy Crook, BTEG

*In a vibrant civil society, it is incumbent on the government to endeavour to increase political participation by expanding voters' rights. The US case rightly highlights that the introduction of voter ID legislation reduced voter participation, and it is suggested that this was disproportionately high among racial and ethnic minority groups ... The government should instead look to address the fact that millions of people are left off the electoral register, to review anachronistic campaign laws and to empower the Electoral Commission with investigatory powers comparable to those of the Information Commissioner's Office to tackle the new battleground of digital campaigning.*

Voice4Change England

## Summary of recommendations

To increase civic and democratic participation, local authorities should recognise and appreciate civil society organisations as equal partners and understand that collaborating with civil society will deliver benefits for their residents. They should strengthen platforms and create resources for civil society organisations working on the same issue or in the same area to connect and plan joint initiatives.

The GLA should continue to convene and facilitate cooperation between civil society organisations, local authorities, funders and central government. The GLA also plays an important role in advocating for civic and democratic participation reform, and should continue to showcase and embed best practices in its own structures and programmes as well as adequately financing civic initiatives across London.

The Mayor of London should continue to facilitate sustainable and inclusive engagement with civil society on civic and democratic participation, with a focus on the most under-registered and under-represented Londoners. The Mayor of London should build on the important role played in advocating for reforms to strengthen civic and democratic participation and in bringing together statutory bodies, local authorities and central government around these key issues.

Central Government should focus on sharing evidence, resources and data on civic and democratic participation in an accessible way with organisations and key stakeholders. More opportunities should be created for collaboration with civil society, meaningful civic and democratic participation (including through legislation, such as the democratic reforms already adopted by the devolved nations) and a more sustainable funding structure for the civic and democratic sector.

Funders should implement sustainable and inclusive funding practices, by providing more core and unrestricted funding, making it easier for small and new civil society organisations to obtain funding for impartial democratic engagement activity, and by investing in more medium and long-term funding. Funders should also empower and support civil society organisations by providing training, mentorship and networking opportunities. This holistic approach is instrumental in supporting a third sector that has agency and is resilient, that can become genuinely intersectional, intergenerational and focuses on the most marginalised groups.

To strengthen civic and democratic participation, civil society organisations should coordinate and collaborate on activity and advocacy, should strive to create a sector that is intersectional, intergenerational and focused on the most marginalised groups. Civil society should also adopt a holistic approach to civic and democratic participation, embedding impartial democratic engagement and outreach activities into their regular events and services.

Political parties should support candidates from under-represented groups, invest in engagement with under-registered and under-represented communities and advocate for progressive, modern reforms to civic and democratic participation.

