Community Voices

Results from a community research project on the cost of living crisis



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Escanéame

Haringey LONDON

https://costoflivingcommunityresearch.commonplace.is/



‘Under Many Flags’ by local artist Matt Dosa. Flags are a symbol of identity, and when different flags are hung together, they represent unity and mutual recognition.

This research has been developed and delivered with communities.

We are hugely grateful to everyone who has taken part and supported the project.

Thank you to the community researchers who have been involved in the research from start to finish:

- Ayca Onkal from the Turkish-speaking community.
- Jamila Wolf from the Disabled community.
- Lorna Bartley from the disability and long-term condition community.
- Luisa Brands, CEO of Oldalone UK, from the Latin American community.
- Mek Ekrem from the Turkish community.
- Researcher from the Charedi community.
- Sultan Ozkurtlar, Operations Manager at the Turkish Cypriot Community Association, from the Turkish community.

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Many thanks also go to the voluntary and community sector organisations who have helped the community research project in many different ways, including Bridge Renewal Trust, DayMer, Disability Action Haringey, the Engine Room, Healthwatch, Interlink, Oldalone UK, and the Turkish Cypriot Community Association.

...And a huge thank you to all the participants who shared their experiences. This project would not have been possible without your contribution!

Acknowledgements

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- Jessica Russell, Participation Delivery Lead
- Vlada Shevelkova, Policy & Equalities Officer
- Maddie Milner, National Management Trainee

With a special mention to the wider project team: Christina Andrew (Head of Resettlement, Migration & Inequalities), Florence Guppy (Head of Community Enablement), Verna Baker (Community Catalyst), and Kandy-Lee Lewis (Connected Communities Coach).

Working together:

LONDON COUNCILS

SUPPORTED BY MAYOR OF LONDON

Haringey LONDON

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The Haringey Deal

Through the Haringey Deal, Haringey Council committed to changing its ways of working to achieve a fairer, greener borough.

At its core, the Haringey Deal is about improving relationships with residents and voluntary, community, and faith sector partners and other stakeholders by ensuring that the council is listening better, sharing power, and drawing on the expertise and passion of communities.

To support this ambitious agenda and truly understand the experiences of diverse communities, Haringey Council wanted to test a participatory research approach that directly involved community members as experts throughout the research process. As a result, the 'community research project' was launched.

The Haringey Deal is the council's journey to change practice, and this project reflects a step on that journey. The council has heard from communities about their experiences and learnt new methods of involving residents in its processes. Haringey Council will use this knowledge going forward to improve and evolve to meet the ambitions of the Deal.

the haringey deal
Doing things together



What is the community research project?

Community research involves members of communities delivering research within their community. In this project, the research involved interviews between community researchers and members of their own communities.

Community research is different from traditional research, which might involve organisations or academic researchers going into communities to carry out the research. Instead, community research sees community members as experts who have deep knowledge about their communities and can contribute this expertise to deliver more authentic insights.

Haringey Council set up the project to understand residents' experiences during the cost of living crisis. In particular, the project hoped to explore the networks of support and information within local communities to understand what is working well and how the council and communities can work together. The project aimed to involve the following communities: Bulgarian, Charedi, Disability, Gypsy, Kurdish, Latin American, Roma, Romanian, Traveller, and Turkish. These communities were selected as the pandemic highlighted the need for the council to work harder to hear the voices of these communities. The project was also open to other communities who wanted to take part.

Haringey Council recruited and trained seven 'community researchers' from the Turkish-speaking, Latin American, Charedi, and disability and/or long-term condition communities to deliver the research. Council staff worked closely with researchers to design all the processes, to ensure that they fitted with community preferences. The community researchers then interviewed members of their communities.

The council and researchers worked together to analyse the interview data and produce this booklet. Community researchers made a choice to have a combined research output, summarising all the interview data across different communities. This was done to recognise that, despite each community being unique, there are shared qualities in people's experiences during the cost of living crisis which are important to recognise.



Project timeline and process

Jul - Sep 2023

Outreach to voluntary and community sector organisations, induction of interested people into the project, and recruitment of researchers.

Oct 2023

Selection of researchers.
Project specific training.

Nov - Dec 2023

Question formulation workshop (researchers and Haringey Council came together to jointly design the interview questions).
Testing of the questions via practice interviews.

Jan - Feb 2024

Researchers lead interviews in their communities.



Mar - Apr 2024

Analysis workshop (researchers and Haringey Council came together to jointly alalyse the data from the interviews).
Production of the research output.

May 2024

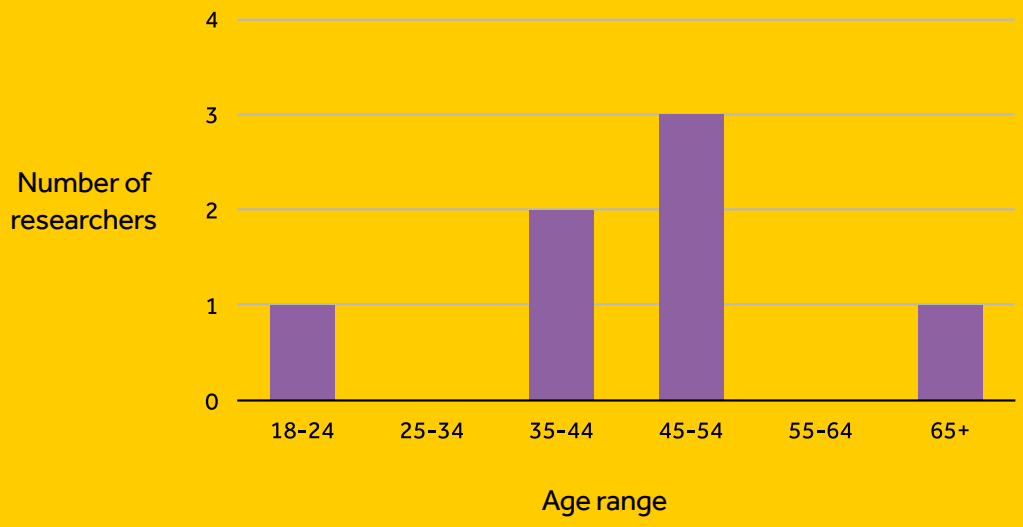
Project end and celebration event

Who participated in the research?

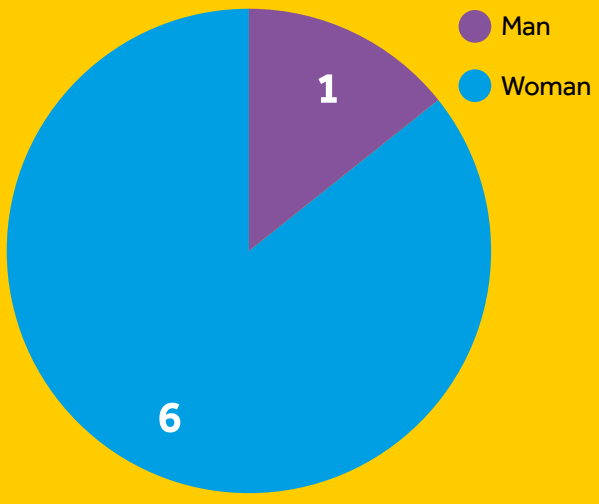
Researchers participating in the project

Seven researchers completed the community research project. At the beginning of the research, eleven people were inducted into the project; however, due to personal reasons and clashes with full-time work, four people chose to step away from the project. Below are the demographics of the researchers.

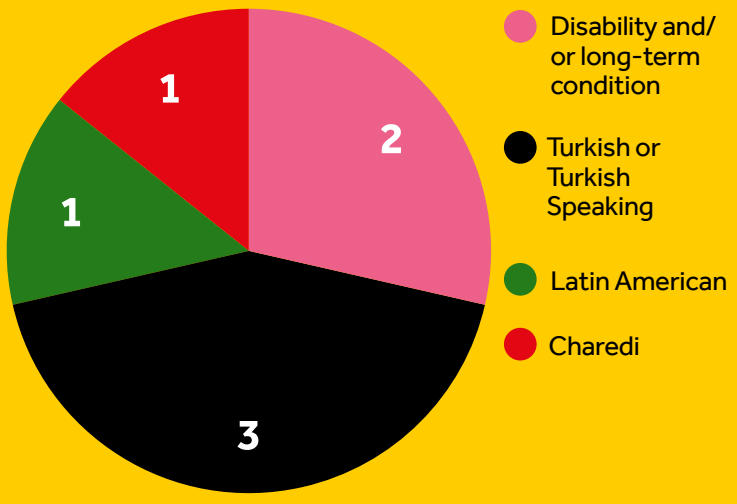
Ages of community researchers



Genders of community researchers

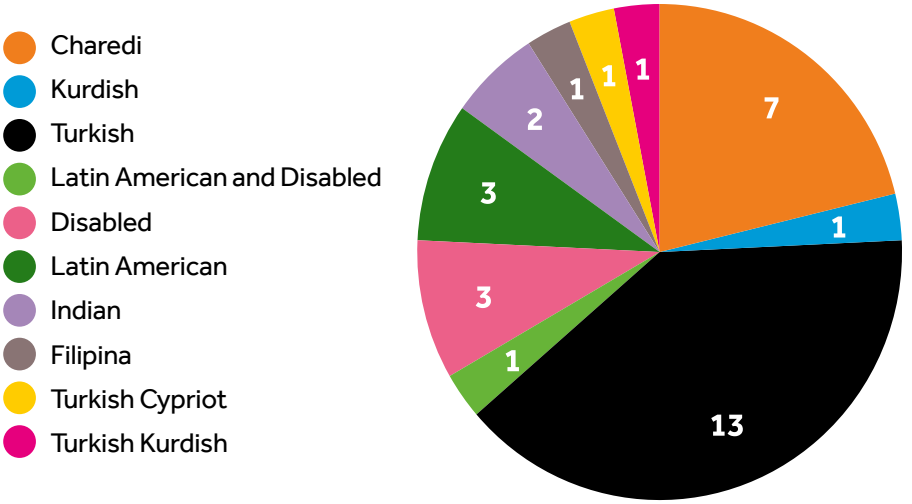


Communities represented by community researchers

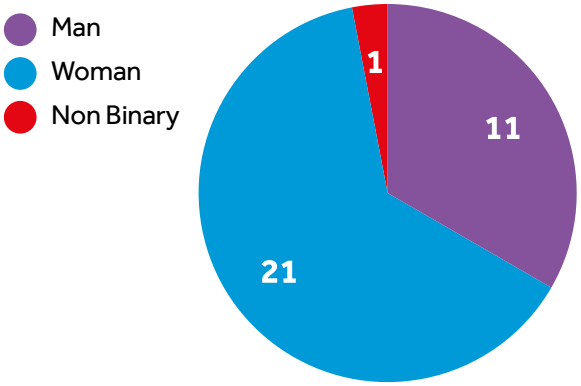


Communities participating in the research

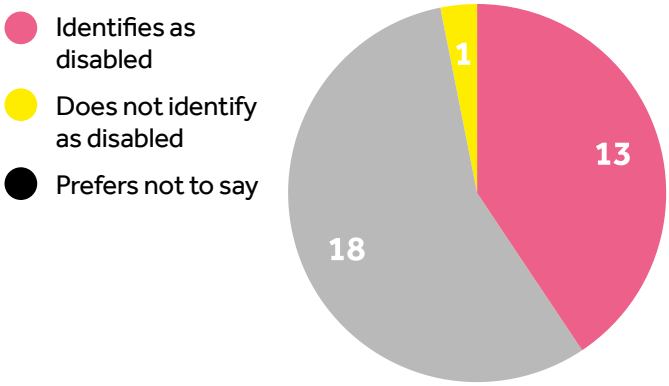
The seven community researchers carried out 40 interviews in total. Each participant had a choice to fill out an equality and diversity form, with 33 choosing to complete this form. The data below show the different characteristics of those participating in the research. This section contains a summary of the equality and diversity data collected, with some of the key data categories (like age, gender, and community).



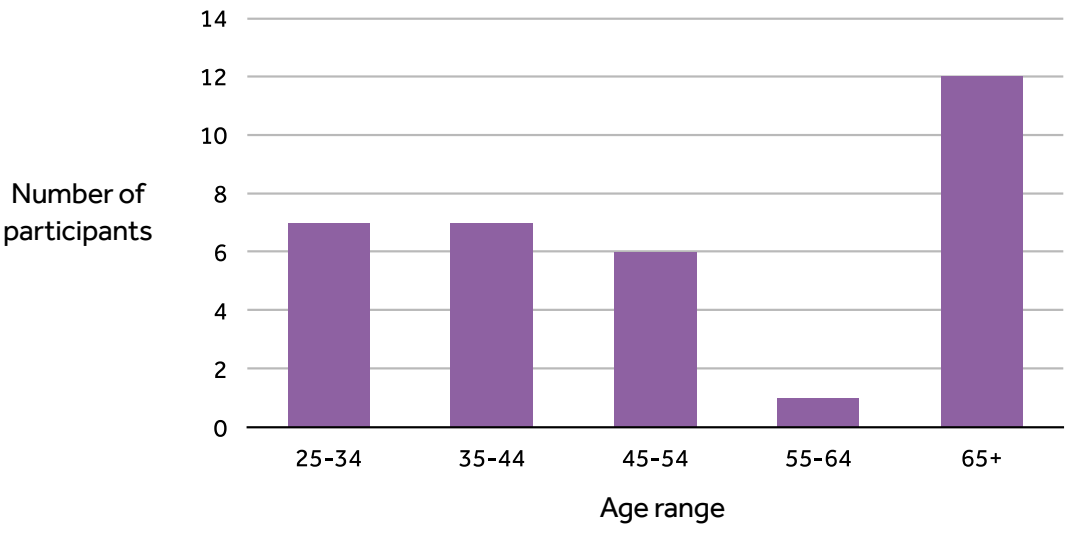
Genders of participants



Participants identifying as disabled



Age of participants



Summary of the interviews

The interviews covered a range of topics and subjects to understand the experiences of different communities during the cost of living crisis. The sections below summarise the participants' responses to the interview questions.

"What impact has the cost of living crisis had?"

Impact on shopping patterns, diet, and ability to cook culture-specific food, due to higher costs of food

Reduced living standard and quality of life

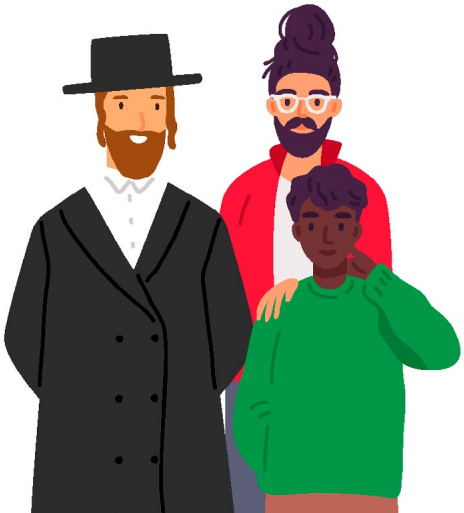
- Not being able to travel abroad to see friends and family
- Limitations on activities if they are not free
- Cutting back on 'luxuries' like car use

Reducing financial headroom and increasing debt

Impacts on mental health, like stress, depression, and anxiety

Cutting down on financial aid

Taking on more work or losing work



"What are your sources of information and advice?"

Voluntary, community, and faith sector organisations

Friends and family

Neighbours, through associations and informal connections

Social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube

National government and local government webpages

School and school networks, like parent associations

Workplaces

Newsletters and (foreign) newspapers

GPs and health providers



> **"It is very difficult to pay rent and basic services; our quality of life has decreased significantly. Our social life has also been affected, as we cannot visit friends due to lack of economic resources."**
>
> Interview participant

"What are your sources of support?"

Food banks

Friends and family, including adult children

Neighbours

Local groups, like baby groups

Community organisations with a specific purpose, like Mind

Faith organisations

Haringey Council (for specific services, e.g., Haringey Learns)

Health providers



"What barriers are there to accessing services and information?"

Services not being accessible

- No interpretation available
- Limited (time) availability of services
- Physical barriers, like lack of parking
- Many services being online, with limited physical presence

Information not being accessible

- No translation provided
- Not sending information early enough
- Information not being provided in different formats, like audio files

Services not being culturally informed, compassionate, or friendly

Private services charging people for culturally informed support or information in their language

Feelings of 'not belonging'

Lack of 'correct' provision, which considers people's individual circumstances and intersectionality

Services on offer not being appealing

Fear of repercussions if people seek support

Patterns across interviews

Community researchers and Haringey Council staff came together in a joint workshop to analyse the interviews in greater detail. Through discussions about the data, several themes emerged which capture important patterns in the data relating to people's thoughts, attitudes, and experiences.

Make every interaction empathetic

Residents often do not receive the level of care and support they should when accessing council services, and their interactions with the council are not welcoming, empathetic or compassionate. There was a particular focus on services not being flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of different groups, like older people or those whose first language is not English. Residents wanted the council to recognise that seeking help is a difficult step for many people, and therefore, those first connections with services are critical in making them feel a sense of comfort and belonging. The nature of the interaction with the council is just as important as the outcome.

Are you really listening?

Residents did not feel heard by the council. Council services often assume that people know how and when to ask the 'right' questions to find the 'right' solutions to their challenges. By not recognising that there may be a diversity of ways residents get in contact with the council and not actively listening to residents, the council is missing an opportunity to work through their challenges to find solutions and prevent issues from getting worse. This means residents often feel like they are using different streams to raise similar or the same issues and are being redirected to different services with no follow-up or outcomes. This adds to residents feeling unheard, rejected, or dismissed.

Trust and distrust

Certain communities had limited trust in the council. This may be due to negative experiences when seeking information or support from the council. Some individuals may also have negative perceptions of government organisations in the UK or other countries. The council's complicated and confusing processes mean that there is limited transparency about why certain decisions are made. This is compounded by a lack of proactive communication about decisions.

In contrast, residents placed a lot of trust in community organisations, who provide tailored services in an environment where relationships and trust are already established. These organisations earn residents' trust by providing personal, culturally informed, and empathetic services. Community organisations can help bridge the gap between residents and the council.



Physical places and in-person spaces

In-person support was important to residents and communities. Some groups in particular, like older people, value having in-person options as opposed to online or telephone ones. Conversations demonstrated that not everyone is confident at 'self-serving', and even those who are 'digitally included' are not confident in all tasks. People noted that they do not see services anymore as they are only available digitally. Despite some variation across communities, people value digital communication methods, like WhatsApp, showing the importance of information that can be transmitted quickly and efficiently across groups.

Additionally, local places were important to communities. There was a strong sense of belonging to neighbourhoods and localities, with many communities being based around where people live or local organisations (like schools). However, there was a general feeling that the council did not yet know how to tap into these local networks.

Ecosystem of support

Through conversations, it became evident that the council sits in an ecosystem of services and organisations that can provide information and support to people. These include voluntary and community organisations, schools, housing associations, faith organisations, and health and care providers. As such, the council should play a role in connecting different services and spaces and improving signposting by using these networks. The council should see its role as a facilitator rather than a provider in contexts where voluntary, community, and faith organisations are better placed to connect to diverse populations. The council may not always be central to people's lives, which is why it is important to connect to this ecosystem.

Accessibility and usability

Accessibility came up again and again in interviews, with many respondents mentioning physical and social barriers that prevent them from accessing the support they need. Additionally, some respondents had to cross borough boundaries to receive the 'right' service for them as services within Haringey were not relevant to them.

As well as barriers to service access, the system was seen as inaccessible especially to immigrants. The complex and bureaucratic systems meant that people often could not identify the support they need or how to seek it. For many the lack of culturally adapted services (e.g., where translation is available, interpreters are provided) mean that the support on offer is not useable or appropriate.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality (that is, the overlapping nature of different social characteristics like gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and others) was clear in interviews. Many respondents held more than one identity (for example, being a parent, an immigrant, and a woman), which influenced their networks and connections. These identities could combine to make existing barriers worse as older immigrants felt they were disadvantaged due to their age as well as due to not being native English speakers. Some respondents felt a sense of 'not belonging' or being 'invisible' due to services only catering to certain groups. At the same time, other respondents formed groups based on their intersectional identities

Opportunities for the future

Those who participated in the interviews were also asked about the future, in particular about how the council and communities can work together and how the council can build on the great work communities already do to support each other.

Participants responded by saying they wanted to see:

- ✔ Improved provision of information, offering translation and interpretation, increasing awareness of different offers, and sharing information across networks.
- ✔ Improved accessibility of and access to services.
- ✔ Local hubs where communities can access information and support.
- ✔ Voluntary and community sector organisations bridging the gap between the council and the communities.
- ✔ Council regularly visiting community locations and venues.
- ✔ Services that are more culturally informed, welcoming, and compassionate.
- ✔ Increased focus on minoritised populations and seldom heard voices.
- ✔ Increased participation from communities, for example through attendance at cabinet meetings.

> **"The idea would be for the council to work more closely with minorities to analyse their needs and challenges and discuss their priorities."**
> Interview participant





Actionable insights

Insight	Where will this feed in?
The council should move from transactional to relational working, ensuring all interactions with residents are positive, irrespective of outcomes, and anyone seeking support feels listened to	✓ Resident Experience agenda
The council should do more to recognise the diversity of contact points with residents (including more informal routes) to ensure that people do not have to reach out to them several times to be supported.	✓ Resident Experience agenda ✓ Digital Inclusion agenda ✓ Locality Hubs agenda
The council should work not only to build trust with residents (through better communication and improved interactions) but also with community organisations that may be further away from them.	✓ Approach to working with the voluntary, community, and faith sector.
There should be an increased focus on intersectionality to ensure that services cater to everyone.	✓ Knowing Our Communities agenda
The council should see itself as a link in a chain. This means making better use of their connections with community and voluntary organisations to support people, recognising their limits and when they are not best placed to intervene. This could also mean facilitating spaces for community organisations to come together.	✓ Approach to working with the voluntary, community, and faith sector.



The Wood Green Library mural by artist Anna Nicolò.
The word 'library' is displayed in different languages to reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of communities in Haringey.