

citizens^{uk}



CITIZENS AGENDA

GENERAL ELECTION 2024/25

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ABOUT CITIZENS UK

We are the UK's biggest, most diverse, and most effective people-powered alliance.

We bring together communities and local organisations to build a better, fairer society.



FOREWORD

We are proud to be part of the UK's biggest, most diverse, and most effective people-powered alliance.



**MAHERA RUBY, IAN RUTHERFORD,
AND NIRUSHAN SUDARSAN**
(PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT)
CO-CHAIRS, CITIZENS UK GENERAL
ELECTION ACTION TEAM (GrEAT)

Citizens UK exists to build the power of people and communities to engage in the democratic process. We are strictly non-partisan. We carry out voter registration and we highlight the needs of our communities to those who seek to govern and ask for commitments to work with us. We also seek to hold those with power to account for the decisions they make that affect our lives.

Our community organising method provides a way for people to focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us. We do this by listening deeply to the people in our communities, identifying what change we need to make things better and engaging decision-makers to make those changes happen. Now, our eighteen Citizens UK chapters have set out seven key issues we are asking the next UK Government to address.

This Citizens Agenda focuses on the challenges our communities are facing and amplifies the voices of people who are experiencing the issues first-hand. We share our vision for change and solutions that could make a difference. After further listening and engagement we will publish a Citizens Manifesto with clearer and more detailed policy proposals.

We hope this Citizens Agenda will contribute to shaping the political debate ahead of the next election. If you are a leader with Citizens UK, we hope you will find it useful in engaging your local candidates. If you are a local candidate, we hope it will provide a basis for dialogue with your local Citizens chapter. And if you are a person experiencing one of the issues mentioned, we hope you will feel reassured that democracy is broad enough to include you and the issues you care about – and we encourage you to get involved.

DR MAHERA RUBY (THE EAST LONDON CITIZENS ORGANISATION – TELCO)

REV. IAN RUTHERFORD (GREATER MANCHESTER CITIZENS)

NIRUSHAN SUDARSAN (CITIZENS CYMRU WALES),

CO-CHAIRS OF THE CITIZENS UK GENERAL ELECTION ACTION TEAM (GrEAT)

1. LIVING WAGE & LIVING HOURS

“Given how meaningful the work is I’m angry that my employers and other care providers don’t give us a fair wage. For me it means I sometimes have to work a triple shift. That’s a day followed by a night shift followed by another day. It’s exhausting. I’ve just got married and as I look forward to the possibility of family, how can I stay in this job I love so much?”

*FLINT,
CAREWORKER FROM LONDON*

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Over 13,000 Living Wage accredited employers and 427,000 workers receiving pay rises every year thanks to the real Living Wage. We’ve put £2.1bn back into the pockets of workers since the campaign began over 20 years ago.**
- 2. Won a real Living Wage for care workers in Wales, impacting over 50,000 social care staff.**
- 3. Over 100 Living Hours accredited employers, providing security and predictability of hours to over 50,000 workers.**

Campaign overview

A wage that meets everyday needs is the minimum people need to live with dignity. Yet one in eight UK workers earn below the real Living Wage.¹ Polling by our Living Wage Foundation found that 56 per cent of those people had turned to a food bank in the past 12 months,² with soaring inflation forcing

choices between ‘heating and eating’. Citizens UK launched the Living Wage campaign in 2001 and it is one of our most established campaigns with over 13,000 responsible employers now accredited as Living Wage Employers. But the campaign has never been more urgent or relevant. The pandemic shone a spotlight on the importance of key workers such those in the care sector. It highlighted the injustice of the UK’s care workers earning less than the real Living Wage and struggling to survive while caring for the most vulnerable in our society. That injustice has only been made worse in this cost of living crisis.

Now is the opportunity to campaign to win the real Living Wage in health and social care for the first time in England – following Wales and Scotland - and to build it into government procurement so that all public money supports Living Wage jobs, as in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

It’s only a Living Wage if you have enough hours to make ends meet. That’s why we will also campaign to promote and embed Living Hours – with a focus on health and social



care, recognising this sector has high levels of insecure work. Living Hours provides minimum shift notice and hours, giving the 6.1m people in insecure work³ greater security and control over their lives and income.

What are we trying to change?

Around 3.5 million people now earn below the real Living Wage,⁴ with women and minority ethnic workers disproportionately likely to be in low paid jobs.⁵ In social care alone, a vital sector that continues to grow as our population ages, around 40 per cent of jobs are paid below the real Living Wage.

That means millions of working people are also in poverty, unable to cover living costs and meet everyday needs. At the same time, millions more workers are trapped in insecure forms of work, unable to get the regular, secure hours they need to plan for their futures. Many experience last-minute shift cancellations that cause further costs and disruption, such as transport and childcare.

How are people in our communities affected?

The Living Wage movement began at a meeting in East London more than twenty years ago, when Citizens UK brought together churches, mosques, schools and other local institutions to talk about the issues affecting their communities. One issue came up again and again – low pay. Working with community organisers, workers decided to act, and from that meeting a powerful movement came together calling for a Living Wage.

From this, we have helped secure over £2.1 billion into the pockets of low-paid workers in our membership and beyond. But with the cost of living soaring there is so much more to do.

Living Hours was developed through an in-depth listening campaign with 700 Citizens UK members. They provided evidence of the scale and complexity of under-employment and insecurity. This was the genesis for the development of our Living Hours standards.

FLINT'S STORY

My name is Flint from Paniym City Church in London, and I am a proud care worker. It's long hours and not enough pay but it's God's work and it's meaningful. As a care worker I get to serve others through simple acts of kindness. A kind word, a cup of tea, a listening ear to those who need it.

"Given how meaningful the work is I'm angry that my employers and other care providers don't give us a fair wage. For me it means I sometimes have to work a triple shift. That's a day followed by a night shift followed by another day. It's exhausting. I've just got married and as I look forward to the possibility of family, how can I stay in this job I love so much? I see colleagues with families struggling even more than me. One friend is a carer by day and a security guard at night to keep food on the table for his kids. As a dad you want to stand tall but sometimes, I see him, and he can barely stand at all.

FLINT,
CAREWORKER FROM LONDON

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. UK Government to provide sufficient funding and guidance to ensure that all publicly funded social care jobs in England are paid at the real Living Wage – as has already been achieved in Wales and Scotland.**
- 2. UK Government to embed the real Living Wage and Living Hours through procurement and commissioning strategies, sectoral agreements and good work standards.**
- 3. UK Government to strengthen people's rights and access to predictable, sufficient hours. All workers deserve wages and hours that meet their everyday needs.**



2. MENTAL HEALTH

“My experience of seeing a School-based Counsellor was a really positive thing for me. Seeing them made it possible to slowly work through everything and gain some confidence in myself.”

ELLIOT, PUPIL FROM TYNE AND WEAR CITIZENS

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Successfully piloted school-based counselling in five schools in Tyne and Wear, with an evaluation showing a positive impact on students and staff.**
- 2. Won increased funding for Mental Health Support Teams and new Virtual Waiting Rooms for those on long mental health waiting lists in Brighton and Hove.**
- 3. Trained hundreds of local leaders from civil society institutions across South London to become Mental Health Champions, supporting thousands of people through local 'Be Well' Hubs.**

Campaign overview

When we listen in communities across the country, we hear time and again how worried people are about their mental health and how hard it is to access support. This is especially true when it comes to young people who are struggling with unprecedented levels of mental health need.

We call on the next Government to adopt a preventative approach to meet the needs of children and young people at risk of ending up on mental health waiting lists and to invest in school and college-based counselling alongside community-led support networks, thus saving millions of pounds for the NHS.

What are we trying to change?

1 in 6 children aged 7 to 16 years and 1 in 4 young people aged 17 to 24 years have a probable mental disorder.⁶ Yet there is currently no statutory requirement for the provision of counselling in schools and colleges in England, unlike the rest of the UK. This leaves many pupils in England without access to a counsellor.

Children and young people with minor needs are supported by school and college staff and, in some places, by Mental Health Support Teams. Those with severe needs are on waiting lists for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. That leaves 1.8 million children and young people - whose needs are neither mild nor severe - invisible to services. It is these children and young people, occupying the 'missing middle' of mental health provision who, with counselling



by trained professionals, would get back on track emotionally and academically and avoid needing more specialist support in the future.

Targeted support would alleviate some of the pressures the NHS is under and relieve teachers and support staff from having to deal with issues they are not qualified to address.

How are people in our communities affected?

Fi is a Year 12 student attending college in Brighton. Over the past couple of years, many of their close friends suffered from poor mental health. Sharing their issues overwhelmed Fi's mental health and they developed depression. Subsequently, Fi spent over a year feeling miserable; believing that they were the one who had to help their friends get better.

Thankfully, Fi's school is a place where people are encouraged to speak out so Fi had several staff members who they could talk to about available support. Consequently, they received several counselling sessions from a trained therapist, which was paid for by the school. The sessions focused on how Fi felt overwhelmed emotionally. The psychotherapist gave Fi specific strategies

to help with their mental health. Freeing and reassuring them that their feelings were not only normal for someone taking on the stresses of others but something that could be supported by expert counselling.

Kevin is a Year 13 student attending school in Newcastle. He suffered multiple adverse childhood experiences, suffered intense family grief and was poorly fostered. This affected his attendance and attainment at school.

This came to a head at secondary school and his school attendance fell to 47 per cent. During his programme of in-school counselling he was able to address the depression and anger rooted in his early years' experiences: "It's the one and only place that I can just talk about me."

Since ending counselling his attendance rate at school has risen to over 90 per cent. He has also made academic progress and has recently completed a full roster of GCSE examinations. Consequently, he will be starting Year 13 this year - something that was in question two years ago. Kevin no longer needs to attend counselling and knows that, if needed he can ask to be referred to counselling again.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. Statutory provision of counselling in English schools, secondary schools and Further Education colleges.**
- 2. Ensure the counselling is provided by those trained on a nationally recognised course, registered with a professional body for ethical oversight, training and supervision, and experienced in working with primary school-age children.**
- 3. Ensure the provision is school- and college-based and 'whole school and community oriented' so it is sensitive to the child's family dynamics, the impact of social determinants and the demography of the school catchment area.**
- 4. Integrate the counselling provision with other key stakeholders: Mental Health Leads, Family Liaison Officers, senior management team, and external agencies (Social Services, Police, Local Education Authority).**
- 5. Enable Mental Health Trusts to work with schools and community institutions to strengthen local support networks around families and enable young people to identify and tackle the causes of mental ill health.**





3. WELCOMING REFUGEES & A FAIR PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP



OUR TRACK RECORD

1. Our Strangers into Citizens campaign, launched in 2006, led to over 150,000 people being able to regularise their immigration status.
2. Citizens UK helped communities across the UK to host over 1,000 Ukrainians and resettle 280 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan and Iraq through the traditional Community Sponsorship route - as well as persuaded the UK Government to resettle 20,000 Syrians.
3. In 2022, following years of organising, the government agreed to extend free school meals to all children regardless of their parents' immigration status
4. In 2016 Citizens UK led a campaign to resettle 1,000 refugee children stuck in France to join their families in the UK. We then worked with Lord Dubs to win the 'Dubs amendment' to secure the resettlement of children and their families to the UK
5. In 2022, the government agreed to Citizens UK's campaign to introduce a fee waiver for the £1,012 application fee for child citizenship and waive the fee entirely for children in care.
6. Citizens UK led the campaign that ended the detention of children and families for immigration purposes in 2011, saving thousands of kids from being locked up (sadly, recent legislation has removed this safeguard for new arrivals).

“We found here family, a lot of smiles and support from people around. Thanks to the British Government, to Citizens UK, and to the Diocese of Chelmsford, we met Paul and Myra. I don’t like the word “sponsors”. They are more than sponsors, they are our Guardian angels. They brought us into their family.”

LENA,
A GUEST UNDER CITIZENS UK'S
'COMMUNITIES FOR UKRAINE' SCHEME

WELCOMING REFUGEES

Campaign Overview

The UK has a proud tradition of offering sanctuary to people fleeing war and persecution. As a Recognised Provider of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and a Principal Sponsor for the government’s Community Sponsorship Scheme, we’ve seen the massive difference that communities and hosts can make in stepping up to welcome refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine into their homes and their neighbourhoods. We believe that more should be done to unleash the generosity and hospitality of the public through expanding resettlement routes and making it easier for communities to resettle refugees.

Meanwhile those who seek asylum in the UK face often lengthy backlogs, poor quality and unsustainable accommodation, and for new arrivals the prospect of detention of children and families for the first time since 2011. We want to

offer a welcome to people seeking sanctuary and ensure their dignity and rights are respected, regardless of whether they have been resettled or claimed asylum.

What are we trying to change?

We want to give every community in the UK the opportunity to become a place of welcome to those seeking sanctuary, and we want every resettled refugee and person seeking asylum to experience the best of British hospitality. We have seen the public appetite to welcome refugees through our Community Sponsorship Groups in every part of the UK, from rural communities in Pembrokeshire, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, to inner city London, Manchester and Birmingham – and every type of community in-between. And we have been overwhelmed by the tens of thousands of people who have

welcomed Ukrainians into their homes and supported refugees from Hong Kong.

However, that generosity of welcome is not experienced by all those who seek sanctuary in the UK. We want to see the best of UK government resettlement schemes inform a new agile community and civil society-led resettlement approach that can be extended to other refugees, such as those fleeing Afghanistan and Sudan. We need new safe routes for asylum seekers, supported with good processes, sufficient wrap-around support and necessary financial backing. And in relation to our asylum system, we need to ensure that the generosity of welcome in local communities is matched by asylum policies and practices that honour the dignity and rights of those who seek sanctuary here.

How are people in our communities affected?

Refugee Resettlement through Community Sponsorship: Diocese of Oxford Case Study

Following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Diocese of Oxford partnered with Citizens UK to resettle Ukrainians through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This network of support has led to 100 host households to collectively welcome 198 Ukrainians (of which 72 are children) across the Thames Valley area.

Guests from Ukraine are becoming part of families and communities, finding jobs, running local art events and sharing cultures and food. Some are moving into independent accommodation. Hosts have gained a growing awareness of the limitations and difficulties of navigating our social support system, and the reality of life for those who flee dangers in their home country and seek to establish a new life (whether temporarily or more permanently) in an unfamiliar country.



“We all have a right to better pathways that allow us to feel human – to be a citizen of the country we call home. As I have been through the process and lived the experience, it has made me more aware of how distant and worthless you feel waiting for an opportunity to be part of a community. All our situations and stories are different, but the pain, heartache and uncertainty are the same. All we want is a chance to be beneficial to society and use our skills.”

**AMANDA, SOUTH
LONDON CITIZENS**

A FAIR PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

Campaign Overview

Hundreds of thousands of people in our communities are on long, expensive, and painful pathways to citizenship. For most people, it will be more than a decade and tens of thousands of pounds before they can finally have the security that comes with British citizenship. Whilst on the pathway, most people will be denied access to basic services and support. They will face uncertainty and be at risk of poverty and destitution due to their immigration status. We believe that the pathway to citizenship should be affordable, timely and fair. This would improve lives and strengthen our communities, our democracy and our economy.

How are people in our communities affected?

“I came to the UK nearly 20 years ago to build a better life for my daughter. The UK is my home but I’m not yet a citizen. Millions of people like me are blocked and struggling to survive when all we want is to be recognised as British citizens, contribute to society and build our lives.” **MARY**

The length, costs, and barriers of our current systems leaves people stuck in limbo, unable to achieve their potential and make use of their talents. The stress, uncertainty and insecurity that comes as a result of our immigration system causes unnecessary pain and suffering. In 2020, Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that over

a quarter of destitute households were migrants and in many cases, the destitution arose primarily from people's immigration status.

People without any form of immigration status are unable to work or access basic services such as healthcare or the criminal justice system. Even people with a visa and the legal right to remain can be denied access to welfare through the so-called 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) conditions on their visas. This is effectively a welfare ban, denying people access to this safety net, including child benefit, and leaves people, including over 180,000 children, at risk of destitution.⁷

Combined with a lack of free legal advice, this leaves people in our communities to experience prolonged uncertainty, poverty and exclusion. Evidence suggests that this disproportionately affects minority ethnic women and disabled people. Insecure immigration status and the pathway to citizenship is a key campaign area for many of our chapters, including Tyne and Wear, South London, East London, North London, Nottingham, Wales, Thames Valley, Birmingham and Essex. We listened to thousands of people in our member institutions to identify the need to improve the pathway to citizenship.

Case Study: Every Child Should Benefit

Nori is a mum-of-two who is currently on the pathway to becoming a British Citizen. Her visa has a condition which bars her from accessing much of the welfare safety net including child benefit:



"Having at least £24 a week extra would make such a difference for us. It's the difference between taking our children to after-school activities like swimming, or not. It would help with the precarious housing situations many of us are in. The Home Office says that they will not wait for children of migrant families to become destitute before intervening, but this is what we are seeing in the case of families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Our children are suffering."

NORI, MUM-OF-TWO, IS ON THE PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. Expanding and simplifying refugee resettlement schemes, with a focus on involving communities in the sponsorship and integration process, and giving more agency to hosts/sponsors and the people they welcome;**
 - This could include an annual target of refugees resettled; the introduction of 'naming' into community sponsorship; and building on the experience of the Ukraine Scheme to streamline the Community Sponsorship process and expand it to other nationalities
- 2. Reforming the pathway to citizenship to be shorter, cheaper and fairer**
 - This could include shortening the 10 year route to citizenship to 5 years, reducing citizenship fees to cost price (especially for children), introducing a one-off regularisation process, and enabling all children to access child benefit, whatever their parents' immigration status.
- 3. Ensure people are treated with dignity throughout the immigration system**
 - This could include restoring the ban on children and families being detained for immigration purposes



4. HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

"I waited for a call from my Support Worker for three weeks. During this time, I had nowhere else to go and I started to sleep in stairwells. I contacted an organisation that provides shelter for rough sleepers, and they told me I had to be on the actual street for one to three days in order to get help from them. This was in the middle of December and the temperatures were below zero. I told them the weather is unbearable and streets is not safe for a young woman. However, they told me they couldn't help me unless I was living on the pavement."

SAHARA,
FROM LONDON

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Pioneered genuinely affordable housing in an urban Community Land Trust model;**
- 2. Successfully campaigned for the Good Development Standard, securing a change to the London planning framework, doubling the percentage of affordable housing in new developments.**
- 3. Launched a modular homes project, Malachi Homes, in Essex, Somerset and North London to support people experiencing homelessness;**
- 4. Secured a ban on letting agent fees in Wales.**

Campaign Overview

Housing that is affordable, secure and habitable is a basic human right and need - it is crucial to security, wellbeing and health. But too many

in the UK are living in housing that is insecure, unaffordable and of sub-standard quality.

Our community listening shows that there are people living in 'temporary' accommodation for excessively long periods of time – as much 21 years. Renters are facing spiralling costs that means their rent outstrips their income, in both private and social housing. And the homes we live in are too often subject to damp, mould, and other states of disrepair that impact our physical and mental health.

What are we trying to change?

Over 80,000 households faced homelessness in England between January and March 2023 – the highest number since records began. Additionally, 100,000 households were recorded as living in temporary accommodation, including 130,000 children also a record high.⁸ Lack of social housing has pushed more people into homelessness or unaffordable private renting. And for those in private accommodation, over half experience issues with damp and mould (51 per cent).⁹



Research from Shelter also shows that private renters who have complained to their landlord, letting agent or local council about housing conditions in the last three years were two-and-a-half times more likely to be handed an eviction notice,¹⁰ disincentivising tenants from speaking up.

How are people in our communities affected?

Housing has been an ongoing campaign area for Citizens UK since 2003 because of its central importance to family and community life. From recent listening, we know it is currently a top issue for many Citizens UK chapters and projects, including Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Cymru Wales, Peterborough, East London, West London, South London, Essex, Somerset and Parents and Communities Together (PACT). We have had many successes in tackling housing and homelessness locally, but we know there is much more that needs to change to secure better housing for our future – particularly on temporary housing, affordability and repairs.



SAHARA'S STORY

"My name is Sahara I live in temporary supported accommodation. I became homeless after I lost my job as a Recruitment Consultant, and I couldn't afford to pay my rent as a result. I started sofa surfing with friends but there's only so long you can stay with people before you start to take up space.

I contacted the council and they allocated a Support Worker to help get me into temporary accommodation. I waited for a call from my Support Worker for 3 weeks. During this time, I had nowhere else to go and I started to sleep in stairwells. I contacted an organisation that provides shelter for rough sleepers, and they told me I had to be on the actual street for 1-3 days in order to get help from them. This was in the middle of December and the temperatures were -1 degrees. I told them the weather is unbearable and streets is not safe for a young woman. However, they told me they couldn't help me unless I was living on the pavement.

Desperate for help, I contacted my GP as my mental health was deteriorating due to the situation. My GP then contacted my Support Worker who called me within 10 minutes to let me know I have a place in temporary accommodation. I don't what would have happened if my GP had not intervened. I have now been there for 1 year and 5 months with no clear direction of housing and how to move on."

**SAHARA,
FROM LONDON**

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. Temporary housing to mean temporary: a statutory time limit on temporary accommodation.**
- 2. Building more affordable homes: a genuine target for building social housing and supporting civil society landowners to build community-led affordable homes.**
- 3. Urgent repairs: government to support and incentivise local authorities to complete immediate and urgent repairs to council homes causing poor health.**
- 4. Regulation: higher standards and increased accountability, including a complaints mechanism, for decent homes in the private rental sector.**



5. RACIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

“The message I received at school about my place in the world was that black people were slaves and Africa was poor. Someone decided that these were the only things I and my peers needed to know. What a disservice. We all deserve an education system that endeavours to treat people with dignity and respect, regardless of racial classification or religion.”

**TINA SIMBO, NORTH EAST WELLBEING,
TYNE & WEAR CITIZENS**

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Won increased spending on diverse books for Nottingham’s city centre library, following on from the success of our ‘Better Books’ campaign, which provided all Nottingham primary schools with culturally diverse reading books.**
- 2. Secured commitments from senior education leaders in Bradford and Leeds to work together to create measures that will lead to more equitable recruitment and retention of staff.**
- 3. Working with schools in Tyne and Wear to create a whole school approach to anti-racism, implementing the National Education Union’s Anti-Racism Charter¹¹ leading to changes impacting global majority pupils, families and staff and the wider community.**

Campaign overview

Citizens UK Chapters across the country are organising for racial justice in education and winning change. Young people have won change to enjoy more diverse literature and greater religious freedoms, racist incidents are being taken more seriously, curricula are being improved and staff are having their voices heard by school leadership teams, who are listening and acting for racial justice.

Each day, so many educational leaders are working hard to create racial justice in their institutions, yet we know that there is only so much that can be done at a local level.

We want to work with the next Government to create an ambitious, inclusive, anti-racist education system that centres curricula, safeguarding, and workforce development, so that everyone can thrive.



What are we trying to change?

Our listening tells us that young people, and staff experience racism perpetrated against them due to their skin colour, religion, nationality or culture. Too many incidents are inadequately dealt with. The presence and contributions of global majority people¹² are not adequately reflected in curricula and there are significant disparities between the recruitment, retention, and progression of global majority staff, compared to their white counterparts.

A snapshot of the research reveals the scale of the problem. Black students are disproportionately subject to exclusions and sanctions in

educational settings.¹³ Young Muslims report that teachers often have stereotypical or low expectations of them, impacting their confidence and social mobility.¹⁴ There is a persistent gap between racial diversity within teaching staff and educational leadership and the general population.¹⁵ Likewise, between the presence of global majority people in school curricula and the reality of the richness of contributions made to our society.

With almost half of young black people saying that racism is the biggest barrier to educational success, things must improve.¹⁶

How does a lack of racial justice in education affect our communities?

"I want to change the negative stigmas around people of colour and severe underrepresentation in the curriculum. As a black female, it's so important that I am educated on my race and ethnicity and to help combat racism and stereotypes we need to find the root which, in my opinion, is education. In the Racial Justice in Education meetings, we discussed problems with the curriculum and how we can challenge those things. In those meetings, I have discussed systemic and systematic racism and the impact that it has on younger people's education. Eventually, I would love to see an actual change to the curriculum, and to see it take place would be a dream come true. I just want younger people of colour to finally see themselves represented in the curriculum."

JOANNY, STUDENT, NOTTINGHAM GIRLS ACADEMY

"When meeting students of colour for the first time, teachers are often shocked and surprised by well-articulated thoughts and feelings. This unconscious bias limits the difficulty of work a teacher would set for a student of colour. Another impact racial injustice has, is the lack of support for incidents involving black or brown students. In a situation where a white student would get let off with a warning for their misdoings, a black or brown student could face a harsher punishment without being able to explain themselves. Teachers should be trained to understand and view students in a non-negative way regardless of their own personal stigmas or biases. They should also be trained to view students of colour as people and learn how to teach in an equal and fair way."

IBRAHIM, SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT IN SOUTHWARK

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. A review of the national curriculum to better represent the contributions of global majority people to our society.¹⁷**
- 2. Improvement in the diversity of the teacher workforce through recruitment and retention.**
- 3. For statutory teacher training to include racial justice.**
- 4. To consider racism as a safeguarding issue in schools.**



6. CLIMATE JUSTICE:

*“Our future is in jeopardy because of the current climate crisis, making us feel angry, scared and worried. Our energy, our transport, our housing and the cost of living are all affected. It’s overwhelming. Finding a place to take action when we are sad and angry is what unites us and drives real, solid change. **Nobody is taking responsibility for climate change, so all of us must do it.** It is not solely up to the younger generation, nor the scientists, nor the decision makers. It’s up to all of us to work together!”*

BENIKA, SHRISTI, HAFSA AND SADIAH
FROM THE YOUTH CLIMATE ADVISORY
PANEL, CITIZENS UK BIRMINGHAM

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Won reduced bus fares for young people in Tyne and Wear**
- 2. Challenged the Mayor of London to upgrade 100,000 fuel poor homes across the city to support people who are struggling to keep warm at home**
- 3. Improved parks and green spaces in Leeds for healthier and greener neighbourhoods**

Campaign overview

The climate crisis is impacting our communities right now, with those already disadvantaged being the most affected. We know that delaying making progress will ultimately make things worse, and cost us more. We want to put the economic security and wellbeing of our communities at the heart of action on the climate, and are seeking green solutions to issues putting pressure on people’s everyday lives.

RETROFITTED HOMES & BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT



What are we trying to change?

While the climate crisis can be overwhelming in scale, we want to focus on two issues that make a difference to people's day-to-day lives.

The first of these is housing. Housing makes up 14 per cent of carbon emissions which is unsurprising given that the UK's housing is draughty and wastes energy. There is no credible pathway to net zero without upgrading our homes. Too many homes fall far short of basic living standards and are in need of immediate repairs, with damp and mould becoming an unending issue for some families. And combined with the cost of living crisis and soaring energy prices, housing and the cost of maintaining those homes is pushing more people into poverty - in some areas of the UK over 24 per cent of homes were in fuel poverty in recent years.¹⁸ In

2022, 13.4 per cent of households (3.26 million) were in fuel poverty in England, 24.6 per cent in Scotland in 2019, 14 per cent in Wales in 2021 and 24 per cent in Northern Ireland in 2019]

But it's not just our homes that are affected. In much of the country, public transport isn't fit for purpose either: people are late for their jobs because services are unreliable, restrictions on student concession fares can make them unfit for purpose and people prioritise car use because there aren't good enough alternatives. Private transport is one of the world's biggest sources of greenhouse gases, with emissions rising year on year, a trend that will not change without significant improvements to public transport infrastructure.

How are people in our communities affected?

Environmental and climate-related issues have long been a focus of local Citizens campaigns up and down the country. This year, more than 200 people took part in a 6-week online training course sharing their experience on what matters for local people and how they have won changes in their context. Seven local climate campaigns have emerged across Tyne and Wear, Leeds, London, Brighton, Greater Manchester, Thames Valley and Birmingham.

We have listened to community leaders across the country to identify the issues putting pressure on local people. Among many climate concerns mentioned, public transport and housing repair and upgrade were raised most frequently.



"I moved into a shared house in Brighton with some friends from university. We soon discovered, however, that the house had real problems with damp and mould. It now covers entire walls and ceiling in my bedroom. The mould completely took over the house despite our best efforts to remove it with bleach. I became really unwell due to the mould's impact on my asthma. I struggled to breathe in my home and it was impacting my education. I couldn't live like that. This whole ordeal hasn't only taken its toll on my physical health; it has had a significant impact on my mental health too. We all deserve a safe place to live and that was stolen from me."

**FRAN, A STUDENT AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

Across the country public transport is failing people. In Leeds, buses are unreliable, often late and cancelled and information at stops and via apps is not up to date. This means young people feel vulnerable and are often late for school resulting negative effects on their learning and the whole school day. Some pupils contact their parents or carers to leave work to take them to school when buses don't come. This is bad for the environment and affects work and earnings.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. Homes where heating doesn't cost the earth: a massive council and social housing repair and upgrade programme that invests in current council and social housing stock to upgrade it with high-quality retrofits that reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions, with priority given to homes in urgent need of repairs to tackle mould and damp.**
- 2. Affordable, green public transport: we want cities, towns and counties across the UK to have the powers and investment to build integrated, green, locally- responsive transport systems.**



7. DEMOCRACY & DEVOLUTION

“We are looking to London and Manchester as examples of how devolution can give local communities the power to raise local issues and have a handle on the local solutions. This, to us, is at the heart of devolution – not a political football, nor a party-political power-play, but an opportunity to devolve decision-making to communities.”

TOBY QUIBELL,
TYNE & WEAR CITIZENS

OUR TRACK RECORD

- 1. Trained leaders in our member institutions to register thousands of people to vote across our local Chapters, especially those least likely to participate in elections;**
- 2. Organised Accountability Assemblies to build relationships with the candidates seeking to lead devolved administrations in Wales, London, Greater Manchester, North Tyneside, West Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire and the West Midlands;**
- 3. Worked with schools and colleges in Wales to encourage participation of 16 and 17 year olds in Senedd elections.**

Campaign overview

The core of Citizens UK’s vision is of a vibrant and inclusive democracy with civil society at its heart. At a time when increasing numbers of citizens are sceptical about what democracy can deliver, we want to see power and decisions about resources brought closer to local people, and to extend the reach of our democracy to more young people.

What are we trying to change?

Faith in our democracy is at a low ebb. In recent polling, when asked how well they believe politicians ‘understand the lives of people like you’, a total of 78 per cent of voting adults answered ‘badly’. Young people are particularly disaffected, with 18 to 24-year-olds least likely to say that democracy serves them well (just 19 per cent say it operates well against 55 per cent who say badly). Only six per cent believe voters have the most powerful influence on government decision making, with around half of all adults saying that party donors, businesses or lobby groups wield the greatest power.¹⁹ We believe that we can change this by bringing decisions closer to the people affected, and enabling more people to actively participate in democracy.

Two of the biggest themes in UK politics at the moment are Levelling-up and devolution. As we have expanded our alliances into new areas of the UK, we have experienced the opportunities created through new regional Mayors in England and devolution to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We want the UK Government to push powers closer to citizens in more areas, in a way that also increases funding and support to areas that need it most. We also want to make this election about enfranchisement rather than disenfranchisement, with a call for ‘votes at 16’.



How are people in our communities affected?

"It is our experience that devolution creates real hope that local communities can engage in decision making processes that will help shape local policies, in areas such as transport and mental health services. It also provides opportunities to hold local leaders accountable for local services."

SONIA DENHAM, CO-CHAIR OF GREATER MANCHESTER CITIZENS

"We are proud to have worked together with Welsh Government to achieve a commitment to pay the Real Living Wage for Careworkers in Wales. Just this year an additional £70 million has been earmarked to lift the pay of 90,000 workers in the social care sector in Wales to the new Real Living Wage rate. I don't think we would have achieved that without devolution. Devolution has allowed Wales to be a trailblazer in other ways too – such as empowering 16 and 17-year-olds to vote."

DR DEBORAH HANN, CO-CHAIR OF CITIZENS CYMRU WALES

"In our rural part of the South West, we recently went through a local government reorganisation, with many small councils across a wide and sparsely-populated area being replaced by one unitary authority – Somerset Council. I'd like to see the UK Government devolve more powers so that we can do things like create an investment fund for establishing new business opportunities and skills education programmes, ensure an integrated public transport system with affordable travel schemes, or even fund collaborative partnerships and programmes for health and social care, business and education, and the arts. The powers they have in Greater Manchester, or across the Bristol Channel in Wales make us green with envy."

CHRIS WADDILOVE, CITIZENS SOMERSET

"I attend Cardinal Newman Catholic School, in Brighton. We're members of Brighton & Hove Citizens."

When I go up the i360 - a huge tower from the top of which you can see the whole of Brighton and Hove - I can see new buildings being built across my city. I can see many parks dotting the landscape. I can see some shops along the seafront boarded up as they've gone out of business. I can see buses up and down my city's roads. I can see ambulances and police cars. I can spot where Council offices are. I can see my city. Many things happen in front of my eyes, every day. Decisions are made about my life, the lives of my family and friends, day in, day out.

The decisions made about me are often beyond my control. Thankfully, Citizens provides me with the power I need to address some of that.

What would help even more is if I was able to vote! I have opinions. I want to make sure that they matter. My voice matters. My life matters. And I want to vote on the issues that matter to me and that will affect me for years to come."

WILLIAM, IS 16 YEARS OLD AND LIVES IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS WE THINK MIGHT HELP?

- 1. Greater devolution of power and resources to nations, regions and communities across the UK.**
- 2. Change the legal voting age to 16 in future General and Local Elections.**



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