LONDON FUNDERS

Equity and Justice Infrastructure: the current picture across the UK

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Background	5
What we know so far	6
Findings	8
Exploring perspectives in detail	20
Appendices	33

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of work undertaken to map the current landscape of equity and justice infrastructure in the UK.

Equity and Justice infrastructure is specialist support provided to organisations that are led by-and-for the communities that they represent, and working toward social equity (throughout this report, we refer to these organisations as EJOs).

Using literature, funding data, surveys, and interviews, we look at which organisations are providing equity and justice infrastructure, the support they offer, how they are funded, and the impact they have (referred to as EJIOs).

The report provides a starting point for thinking about how to strengthen the infrastructure that underpins justice and equity across the country. If you would like to see more detailed analysis, you can explore the data microsite and full research paper, both available via our website.

How We Defined Equity & Justice Infrastructure

Equity and justice are big, evolving ideas and we wanted to make sure our definitions reflected the real work happening in communities. To do this, we worked closely with an advisory group made up of funders and infrastructure organisations that provided their expertise gained from years working in the civil society infrastructure sector. Their input helped shape how we defined both the organisations doing equity and justice work, and those supporting them behind the scenes.

What Do We Mean by Equity & Justice Organisations (EJOs)?

These are organisations led by and for communities who are most affected by systemic inequality and injustice. Their work is focused on advancing social equity and justice.

What Are Equity & Justice Infrastructure Organisations (EJIOs)?

These are specialist organisations that support EJOs by helping them build capacity whether that's through training, governance support, fundraising, or creating spaces to connect and collaborate.

What Kind of Support Is Defined as Infrastructure?

Here's the full list of support types we considered as "infrastructure":

- Acting as an umbrella body for EJOs
- Organisational development (e.g. audits, IT systems, training)
- Governance support (e.g. board development, leadership recruitment)
- Workforce development (e.g. leadership training, professional development)
- Fundraising and business development
- Admin, legal, and financial hosting support
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Peer mentoring and volunteer placement
- Networking and collaboration spaces
- Campaigning, advocacy, and communications support
- Research, policy, and impact evaluation
- Connecting with community leaders
- Anti-oppression, anti-racism, and DEI training
- Hosting or distributing pooled and collaborative funds
- Partnership and consortia development
- Sharing sector news, jobs, and opportunities

Equity and Justice Organisations (EJOs) are essential for building a fairer and more inclusive society. Grounded in lived-experience, they are well-placed to support marginalised communities where public bodies and larger charities often cannot. **EJIOs** strengthen this work by helping frontline groups with capacity building, strategic advice, advocacy, and expertise in systems change.

In recent years, funders have shown more interest in supporting work led by and for the most marginalised communities.[1] But to make this funding effective, it also needs to support the infrastructure that sustains these groups. There is little UK-specific research on the role and impact of EJIOs, and none of it currently captures both funders' and EJIOs' perspectives on funding, need, and demand. Some organisations have attempted to fill this gap. In 2023, 360Giving published a report analysing funding for infrastructure organisations in the UK. Civic Power Fund also publishes its annual Funding Justice series, mapping funding for justice-focused issues in the UK.[2] However, at the time this report was written, there was no UK-specific report or academic paper focusing on the state of funding for EJIOs in the UK. **This report aims to help fill that gap**.

Findings

EJIOs remain underfunded and unevenly supported. Our research mapped 220 EJIOs in the UK. A quarter operate only in London, and many national bodies deliver most of their work in the capital due to the concentration of funding there. Overall the mapping found the availability of infrastructure was patchy, and frontline equity groups often lack the support they need.

Most EJIOs in our sample focus on race and ethnicity, or children and young people. Few serve older people and there is limited coverage of EJI support in rural communities.

Most EJIOs rely on short-term, project-based funding. Only a small number of funders are making deliberate, long-term investments, so much of the available funding remains restricted, insecure, and does not reflect the value of specialist infrastructure work.

Demand is outstripping capacity. More than half of surveyed frontline groups said specialist infrastructure support was hard to access or insufficient. Interviews confirmed this picture. EJIOs across all UK nations reported rising community need, stretched resources, and funding gaps. Local authorities recognised the importance of these organisations but pointed to their own budget constraints, which leave many specialist services unsupported.

EJIOs make a positive impact. Our data identified seven key impact areas, from improving governance and leadership, to increasing income generation, to amplifying marginalised voices. Case studies show how EJIOs build trust, reach underserved groups, influence policy, and hold public institutions to account. During the pandemic and beyond, EJIOs acted as vital intermediaries, helping communities survive while pushing for change.

But the current funding system is not fit for purpose. On top of the lack of multi-year core funding and overreliance on project grants, funding practices can further undervalue infrastructure and movement-building. Many EJIOs face burnout, high staff turnover, and limits on their impact because of chronic funding insecurity.

Funders we spoke to recognise the need for change. There is growing interest in trust-based philanthropy, long-term funding, and collaboration. But bolder, more strategic action is needed especially outside London and for equity groups facing multiple barriers.

We end this report with a call for more coordinated and intentional investment in equity infrastructure. Long-term, unrestricted funding would allow EJIOs to plan for the future, build sustainable systems, and strengthen grassroots action at scale. In a time of deepening inequality and division, strong equity infrastructure is essential to protecting rights, advancing justice, and supporting a resilient civil society.

Background: why we undertook this project

Equity and Justice Infrastructure Organisations (EJIOs) strengthen frontline equity and justice groups through capacity-building, advocacy, and sector coordination.

They play a vital but often overlooked role in driving social change. In moments of crises, such as the pandemic, and in wider movements for racial and social justice they have proved essential. Yet there is limited research about who they are, how they are funded, or the difference they make. Without this knowledge, it is harder to build a fairer civil society in the UK. **If funders want to prepare for and mitigate the long-term effects of today's political and social challenges, investing in a strong foundation for EJOs is crucial.**

Some research exists on voluntary sector infrastructure bodies in general, but UK-specific evidence on EJIOs is scarce. What is available comes mostly from project-level evaluations, grey literature, or studies from other countries. There has been no previous national mapping of this sector in the UK.

This report was commissioned to address that gap. It offers a clearer picture of the UK's equity and justice infrastructure: who these organisations are, where they work, how they are funded, and what impact they have. Using literature reviews, funding analysis, two national surveys, and 42 stakeholder interviews, it aims to help funders, policymakers, and sector leaders see where investment is most needed and how to build a stronger, more resilient equity infrastructure.

Ultimately, this research is intended to support more strategic and intentional resourcing of organisations that play a vital behind-the-scenes role in advancing equity. By improving our understanding of the supply, demand, and value of EJIOs, this report provides a platform for future strategic investment and long-term capacity-building in a sector crucial to tackling structural injustice in the UK.

What We Know So Far

A rapid literature review for this study found little UK-specific evidence on the state, role, and impact of EJIOs. Most available information comes from grey literature, internal evaluations, and funder reports, rather than systematic, sector-wide analysis.

Despite this, there is strong agreement, both theoretical and practical, on the value of specialist infrastructure in building the capacity, resilience, and influence of the equity sector. Findings discussed throughout this paper are grounded in evidence which can be explored in detail in our working paper.

Infrastructure bodies are often described as the "backbone" of the voluntary sector. They build skills, foster collaboration, share knowledge, and advocate for change. This support helps grassroots equity organisations survive and grow. Evidence from funders and intermediaries shows that specialist support can strengthen governance, stabilise income, sharpen strategy, and increase influence. These benefits are especially important for groups led by people with lived-experience of marginalisation, who often face greater barriers to funding and decision-making spaces.

While direct evidence of EJIO impact is patchy, there is some evidence that they deliver significant value by strengthening individual organisations, building sector-wide networks, and amplifying sector voice.[3] Some research defines them as accountability brokers, networkers, bridges, communicators, resource mobilisers, catalysts, and conveners. There is also some evidence of their role in advancing inclusion, anti-racism, and systems change. Their value has also been measured in economic terms in two UK-based studies – *Proving the Economic Value of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Infrastructure Support Organisations and Worth Every Penny of Every Pound: The social value of equalities infrastructure organisations.* The former concluded that every £1 invested into Voscur, a Bristol-based general infrastructure organisation, generated £11.82 in social value by improving organisational processes of the frontline organisations they were working with. Worth Every Penny of Every Pound: The social value of equalities infrastructure organisations looked specifically at EJIOs and found that every £1 invested into EJIOs generated between £2.30 and £9.20 of social and economic value by improving organisations processes and capacities.[4]

Intermediaries also underpin movement-building. Research shows that large-scale social change often combines periods of visible, rapid progress or "leaps" with years of quieter, foundational work or "creeps" in relationship-building, leadership development, and strategy. Recent events reinforce this. As the Civil Society Roots report points out, during COVID-19 and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, well-supported infrastructure enabled equity-focused organisations to respond quickly, reach communities effectively, and shape public policy.

Demand for infrastructure support is rising. Funders and organisations report growing need for capacity-building, strategy development, long-term learning, and peer support, especially among grassroots groups with limited resources. Yet, while some infrastructure bodies played critical roles during crises, funding often falls away afterwards.

Overall investment in infrastructure remains limited, particularly for equity-focused organisations. Research by 360Giving and Civic Power Fund shows that funding has not kept pace with sector growth and is concentrated among a small group of mostly London-based funders.[5] EJIOs often rely on short-term, project-based grants, frequently from government, which leaves them vulnerable to external shocks and unable to plan ahead.

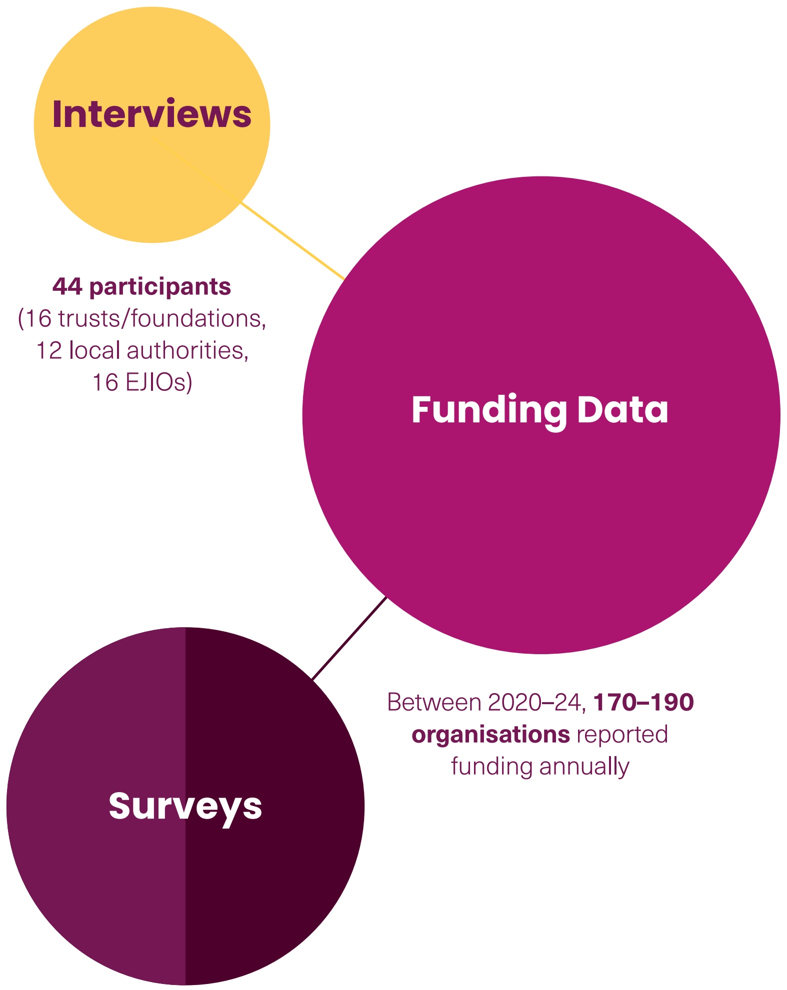
Taken together, the literature points to high value, chronic underinvestment, and untapped potential. While literature points to the value of EJIOs in building a more just and inclusive civil society, their ability to deliver will remain constrained but without sustained, strategic funding.

While existing findings provide a starting point for the conversation on investing in EJIOs, they also highlight notable gaps. Existing research focuses on generalist, rather than specialist infrastructure organisations, and most of the available evidence comes from outside the UK. There is limited existing evidence capturing perspectives of funders, EJIOs and local authorities, something we directly address through the second phase of our research.

Readers can explore the full analysis and sources by referring to our accompanying working paper.

Findings

To address gaps in the existing evidence we carried out a UK-wide mapping of EJIOs. The aim was to build a clearer understanding of where these organisations operate, how they are funded, the scale of their reach and the impact they have. We also examined the demand for their services across the UK.



44 participants (16 trusts/foundations, 12 local authorities, 16 EJIOs)

Between 2020–24, **170–190 organisations** reported funding annually

Two rounds (London and UK-wide) with **101 responses**

A mixed-method approach was used to explore five key questions:

1. Who is providing equity and justice infrastructure support?
2. How has funding changed for equity and justice infrastructure support in the past five years (2020–2024)?
3. Where is support located and what communities do they serve?
4. What is the current and emerging demand for this type of support?
5. What impact do organisations providing equity and justice infrastructure have on the sector and the communities they support?

Our findings draw on data from the Charity Commission, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and Companies House, alongside two national surveys and 42 in-depth stakeholder interviews. More detail on our methodology can be found in Appendix 1, with limitations outlined in Appendix 2.

This analysis provides a clearer understanding of the EJIO funding landscape, highlighting both gaps and opportunities. Insights from stakeholder interviews and surveys added depth to this picture, shaping a set of practical recommendations on how EJIOs can be more strategically and sustainably funded.

Findings

Equity & Justice Infrastructure Context

We found that there is a growing demand for EJIOs across the UK, alongside persistent challenges in accessing their support. Our mapping also revealed geographical disparities in where most EJIOs are located and provide their services.

Who Is Providing Support?

The mapping identified 220 organisations providing Equity and Justice Infrastructure support across the UK. Of these, **63% were dedicated EJIOs**, while the remaining were EJI Adjacent organisations.[6] This list included 21 CICs/companies, and one unregistered organisation.

Service provision by these 220 mapped EJIOs is uneven:

- 25% of the mapped organisations are based solely in London, and while 43% identify as providing national services, interviews revealed that national delivery is often limited or London-centric due to restricted funding and staff capacity. Outside of London, many organisations adopt ad-hoc, partnership-based delivery models, particularly in rural areas and devolved nations.
- Very few EJIOs provide hyper-local services outside major cities.
- **Race & ethnicity and children & young people** were the most common focus areas among EJIOs, accounting for nearly 60% of the sample. Some groups, particularly those focused on older people or working in rural areas, are significantly underrepresented in terms of infrastructure provision.

Partnership models are emerging to extend reach. For example, the Young Women's Movement in Scotland collaborates with local authorities and youth organisations to deliver programmes in rural areas, ensuring local relevance and community leadership.

Demand Is High, Access Is Uneven

Survey responses from 51 Equity & Justice Organisations (EJOs) revealed:

- 59% felt that specialist infrastructure support provided by EJIOs was inaccessible or insufficient to meet their needs.
- Only 16% felt that support provided by EJIOs were sufficient.
- 29% found that support provided by EJIOs was accessible in terms of cost.
- 31% found that support provided by EJIOs was accessible in terms of location.

Stakeholder interviews confirmed these findings. EJIOs in England, Wales, and Scotland reported being unable to meet current demand due to funding and capacity constraints. Some have had to scale back services or shift to deeper engagement models, supporting fewer people but more intensively.

> "We now support half the number of people we used to, but in a more in-depth way. Demand has increased a lot."
>
> National EJIO based in London

"We've had to decline opportunities due to capacity. There's demand from education and health institutions, but we can't prioritise them."

Race & Ethnicity EJIO in Scotland

Local authorities also noted growing demand for infrastructure support, particularly among small, community-led groups serving equity communities. However, most councils lack the resources to respond effectively. In some boroughs where we conducted interviews, we heard how infrastructure support is fragmented or informal, with many equity-led groups operating without formal registration or funding.

Access Barriers

Access to EJIOs is shaped by geography, funding, and organisational capacity:

- **Geographic gaps:** the data shows a lower concentration of EJIOs in rural areas and smaller towns. This might be because urban areas are generally more diverse and report more need. Data on a charity's place of registration which is used to determine their geographical spread also does not capture the depth and breadth of their service provision.
- **Funding constraints:** Most EJIOs rely on short-term, restricted funding, limiting their ability to plan and scale.

"We serve a national community, but it's hard to get regional funding – most grants are London-centric."

EJIO providing services primarily in London

In the next section of this report, we examine funding trends in more detail.

Findings

Equity & Justice Infrastructure Funding

The funding picture for EJIOs across the UK is both complex and uneven. Using data from the Charity Commission for England and Wales (CCEW), the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI), we can see the scale of investment in this work and also its fragility.

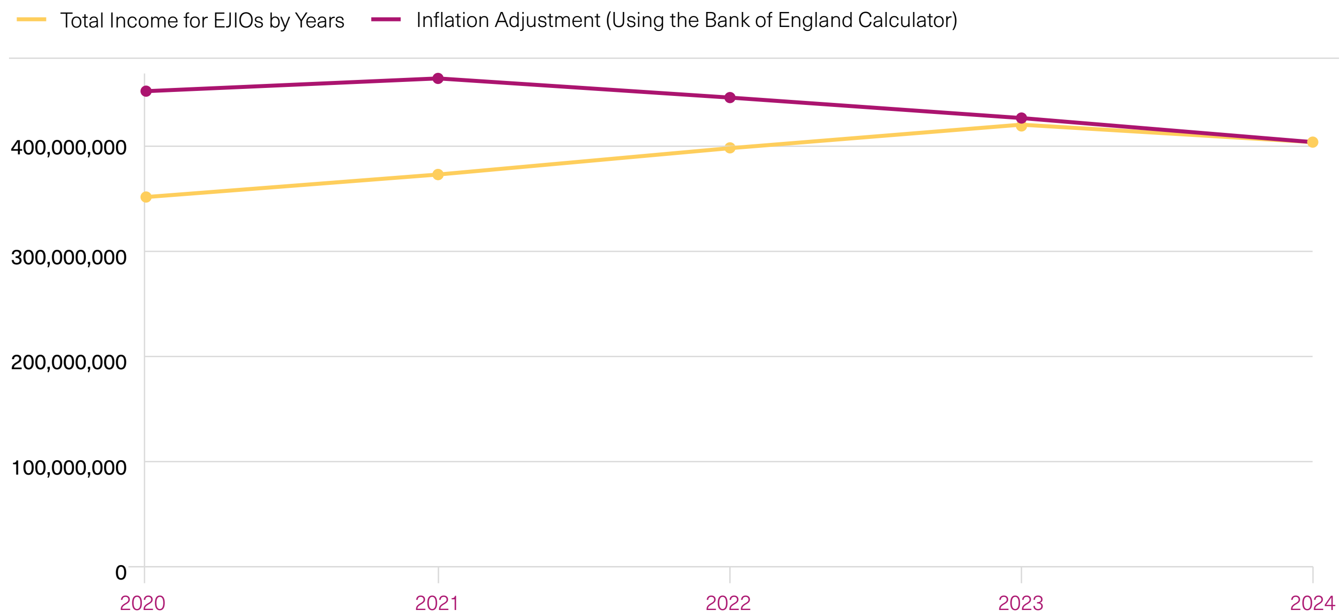
We explore this data and findings from stakeholder interviews in detail in the following section. You can also access the full analysis of funding data on our interactive online dashboard.

Funding has Declined

Between 2020 and 2023, the total funding for EJIOs in our dataset rose from £356.3 million to £412.6 million – a nominal increase of 15.8%. But when inflation is taken into account, this represents a real-terms fall of more than 9%. The first nominal drop in five years came in 2023, when income fell by £13.6 million (a decrease of 3.3%). This means that even though public awareness of equity and justice issues may have grown, especially after COVID-19 and renewed racial justice movements, funding levels have not kept pace with rising costs.

Income between 2020-24

Data was available for 193 out of the 220 organisations on our list.



Inflation was adjusted using the Bank of England inflation calculator.

See this visualisation in Flourish

This picture was echoed in our engagement with the sector. All 16 EJIOs interviewed told us they had seen real-terms cuts to their income, and 71% of survey respondents said the same. They described a funding environment that is precarious, inconsistent, and marked by significant regional differences. While some funders have made targeted investments, these have not been enough to counter wider funding pressures.

Looking at subsectors, Children and Young People-focused EJIOs consistently attracted the largest share of funding (over £120 million each year), but growth was modest at just 2.3%. Race and ethnicity-focused organisations saw the largest proportional growth (+90%), reflecting the increased focus on racial justice. Disability-focused EJIOs also grew significantly (+60%), while faith-based organisations saw a small decline (–7%). After adjusting for inflation, growth is far less pronounced: funding for Children and Young People fell by 17% in real-terms, Disability rose by 29% rather than 60%, and Race and Ethnicity grew by 55% instead of 90%. Inflation adjusted funding declined by 8% between this period for EJIOs focused on women and girls. You can explore the breakdown across all groups on the data microsite.

Finally, our analysis found that organisations with a broader remit that includes equity and justice work (EJI Adjacent) receive almost three times as much funding as those with a dedicated equity and justice focus. However, because funding data cannot be broken down by project, this does not necessarily mean the equity and justice work itself is well resourced.

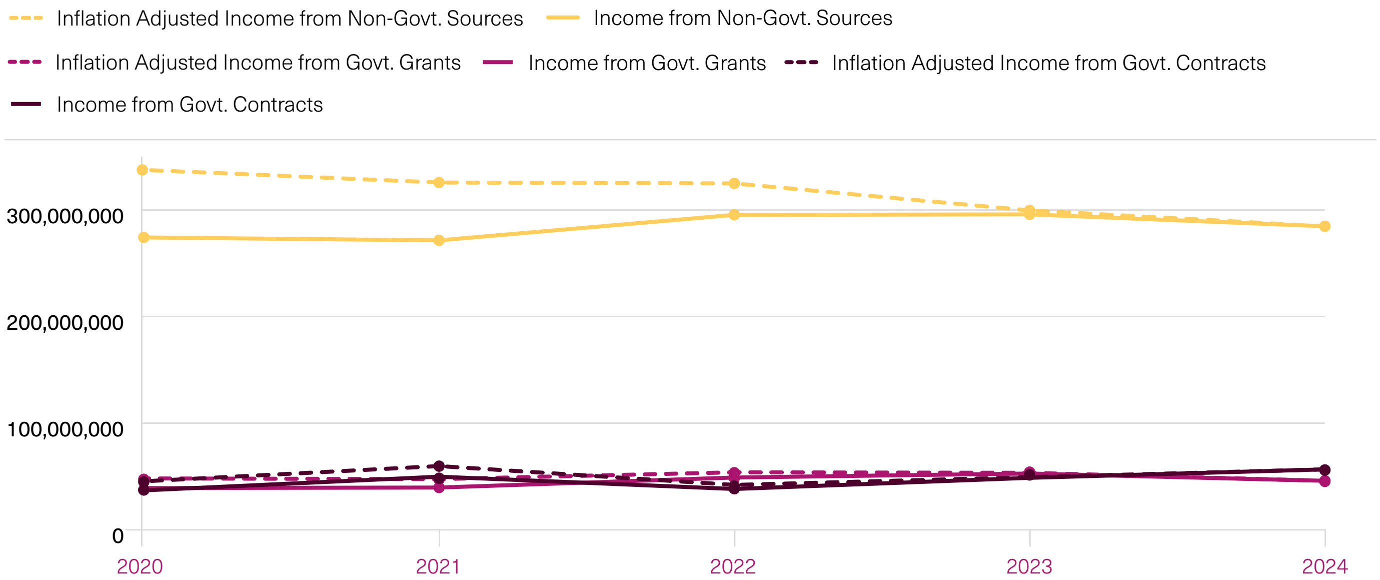
Sources of Funding

Government grants and contracts accounted for only 28% of total funding to EJIOs in England and Wales between 2020–24. However, EJI Focused organisations were more reliant on government income (~37%) compared to EJI Adjacent organisations (~21%). Notably, government contracts for EJI Focused organisations increased by 157% between 2020 and 2024, suggesting a shift toward more formalised service delivery.

Despite this growth, interviewees expressed concern about the limitations of government funding. Contracts often come with rigid outputs and timelines, restricting flexibility and capacity-building. Some EJIOs have moved away from government funding altogether to preserve autonomy.

Income Change by Source Type

Data on income sources was available for 183 out of 220 EJIOs on our list.



Inflation was adjusted using the Bank of England inflation calculator.

See this visualisation in Flourish >

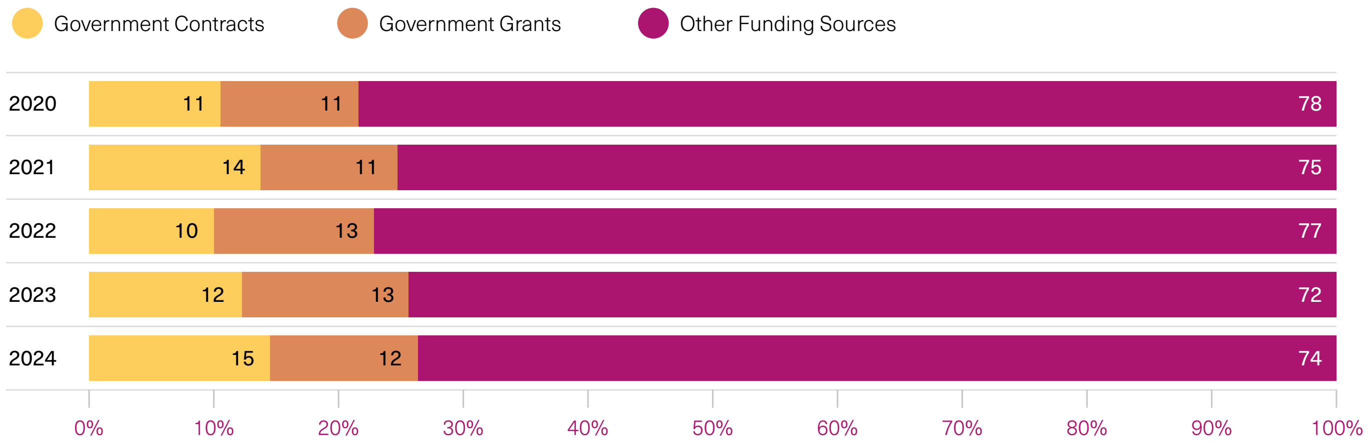
Restricted vs Unrestricted Funding

Manual review of accounts data for EJI Focused organisations revealed a consistent rise in restricted funding across all regions, with unrestricted funding declining sharply, especially in London (–42% between 2020–2024). In Northern Ireland, unrestricted funding remained under 10% of total income, highlighting the limited flexibility available to EJIOs.

Geographic Distribution

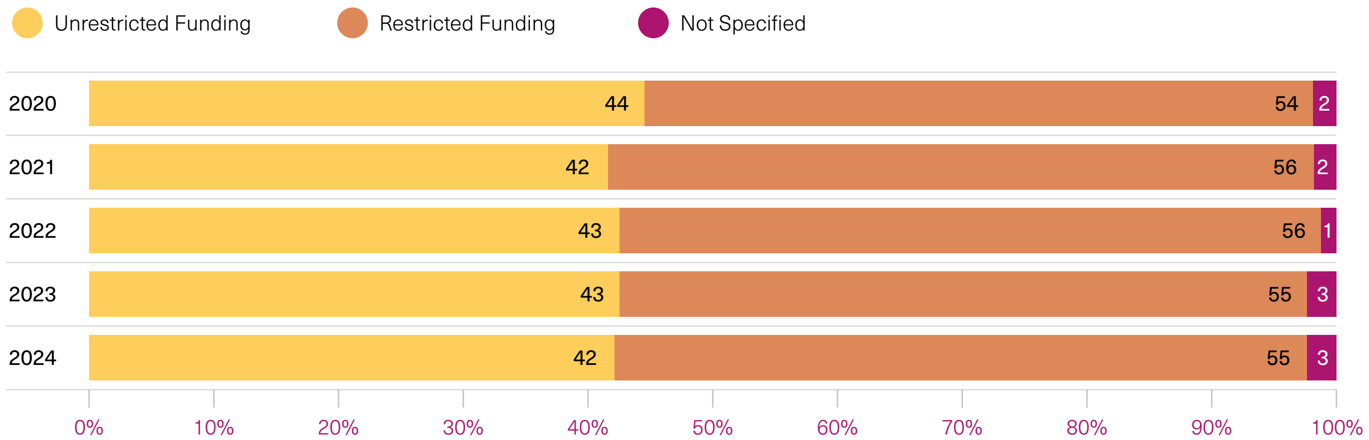
EJIOs are unevenly distributed across the UK. While 122 organisations operate nationally or across multiple regions, local clustering is evident in areas like the London boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, and Brent. London dominates in terms of service provision, likely due to its population density and diversity. Rural and smaller authorities are notably underrepresented, suggesting access and capacity gaps.

Type of Funding – total percentage dist.



See this visualisation in Flourish >

Distribution of Restricted vs. Unrestricted Funding for EJI Focused Organisations in the UK Charities



See this visualisation in Flourish >

Spotlight

EJIO Funding

Through the mapping we explored examples of current and previous funding streams which have sought to strengthen infrastructure. These examples include:

City Bridge Foundation: Anchor Fund

In 2023, City Bridge Foundation launched its Anchor Programme, developed in collaboration with civil society support organisations across London. The aim was to provide long-term stability for equity-focused infrastructure groups by offering 7–10 years of core funding, ranging from £50,000 to £150,000 per year. The first round invested £13.9 million into 13 organisations championing racial justice, disability rights, and gender equity. With this support, organisations reported being able to expand capacity, build lasting partnerships, influence policy, and take strategic risks, making changes that have had a transformative effect on sector practices. Independent evaluations emphasised the unique value of multi-year core funding, showing how it can unlock systemic impact.[7]

Comic Relief: Global Majority Fund

In 2020, Comic Relief, together with the National Emergencies Trust, City Bridge Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and the Health Foundation, launched the Global Majority Fund. The fund was designed to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Global Majority communities, where long-standing inequalities such as financial precarity, digital exclusion, and health disparities were made worse by the pandemic. The fund aimed to fill the gaps left by traditional funding models, which often fail to reach BME-led grassroots organisations or offer flexible, core support.

Grants addressed urgent needs ranging from mental health support and food aid to domestic abuse prevention, youth programmes, and violence reduction. Importantly, the fund also invested in strengthening the intermediary partners themselves, helping them build strategic capacity, improve governance, and develop grant-making systems.

By 2025, this approach had evolved into the **Race Equality and Infrastructure Flexible Fund**. This programme offers one-year grants of up to £50,000 to BME infrastructure organisations in five English regions, enabling them to cover core costs, build capacity, and lead regional race-equality work.[8, 9, 10, 11, 12]

Corra Foundation: Human Rights Fund for Scotland

The Independent Human Rights Fund for Scotland, hosted by the Corra Foundation, brings together multiple funders, including AB Charitable Trust, Baring Foundation, The Binks Trust, Cattanach, The Robertson Trust, The Indigo Trust, and the William Grant Foundation, to strengthen Scotland's human rights infrastructure. The fund supports pan-equalities organisations such as the Human Rights Consortium, combining grant funding with capacity building and shared learning opportunities.

A defining feature has been its commitment to **participatory grant-making**. Decision-making panels included people with lived-experience of issues such as disability, environmental justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and housing, ensuring funding decisions were grounded in real-world expertise.

While this approach has been widely valued the fund also recognised some challenges such as underrepresentation of certain groups, including Roma, Gypsy, and Traveller communities. Ensuring that participation in the participatory panel was accessible for all contributors also required additional investment in time, support, and flexibility.[13, 14]

Ford Foundation: BUILD – Building Institutions and Networks

In 2015, the Ford Foundation launched its **BUILD (Building Institutions and Networks)** initiative, a pioneering five-year, **$1 billion investment** in the long-term strength and sustainability of up to 300 social justice organisations worldwide—a commitment extended with another $1 billion from 2021 onward. BUILD provides **multi-year, unrestricted general operating support**, paired with targeted institutional strengthening, technical assistance, peer convenings, and strategic communications, enabling grantees to develop strategic clarity, enhance organisational systems, and deepen community ties. A developmental evaluation found that BUILD is "transformative," helping organisations of all sizes and contexts improve financial resilience (83% reported increased financial stability), sharpen leadership and strategy, and expand mission impact, with cascading benefits across fields and networks. In West Africa, for example, BUILD recipients reported that the programme supported their transition from reactive, project-based work to strategic institutional planning, strengthening governance, expanding outreach, and catalysing field-wide collaboration to drive systemic change.[15]

Findings

What do we know about the impact and benefits of EJIOs?

"Specialism is important – cultural competence. Having a real understanding of issues allows them to provide bespoke support and lead in a way that is responsive."

National Funder

EJIOs are uniquely placed to bridge the gap between equity-led communities and decision-makers, delivering impact in ways that are deeply rooted in trust, lived-experience and cultural expertise. Their contribution was recognised by both funders and frontline organisations who participated in our research. Our findings revealed their impact on civil society:

- **EJIOs are delivering impact across seven core areas**: organisational sustainability, income generation, strategic development, governance, leadership, voice and influence, and cross-sector collaboration. Organisations receiving support (from EJIOs) reported stronger internal systems, greater fundraising success, clearer strategies, and improved visibility in decision-making spaces.
- **Trust and community connection** emerged as defining features of EJIOs. Their work is rooted in lived-experience, cultural expertise, and community accountability, qualities that make them uniquely effective intermediaries between minoritised groups and public institutions.
- Case studies demonstrated **how EJIOs helped shape COVID-19 responses**, build leadership pipelines, support community organising, and influence policy often with limited or insecure funding.
- Local government authorities, in London, acknowledged the value of equity-focused infrastructure but noted limited funding and fragmented provision. In some boroughs, formal infrastructure for equity groups no longer exists, or operates informally through unregistered mutual aid and community networks.

Despite these benefits observed by both funders and frontline organisations, **as we outlined above, funding for EJIOs remains short-term, highly competitive, and concentrated among a small number of funders**. Many groups receive multiple small grants, which increases administrative burdens and undermines long-term planning. Several organisations noted that although their programmes were intended to be multi-year, funding was only confirmed annually, leading to staff turnover, and lower impact.

"By us, for us, with us… there is a level of trust, knowledge of community issues and experience of inequity that the system throws out."

London-based EJIO

Case Study

Using EJIOs to Build Trust and Reach Communities

Race Council Cymru

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Race Council Cymru (RCC) became a vital intermediary between Wales' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) grassroots communities and public institutions. Representing more than 300 ethnic minority organisations and coordinating five regional hubs, RCC drew on its strong community presence to amplify underrepresented voices and reduce the disproportionate impact of the crisis on BAME populations.

As health statistics revealed stark racial disparities, RCC played a key role in influencing Welsh Government policy. They co-led the First Minister's Advisory Committee on the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Groups, and through this committee and a programme of extensive community consultations, RCC helped shape public health and socio-economic responses that were grounded in lived-experience.

Beyond its pandemic response, RCC supported regional youth leaders in forming Black Lives Matter Wales following the global protests. The organisation helped develop a manifesto for race-equality which was presented to the Welsh Government, signalling a long-term commitment to tackling systemic racism.[16]

Rosa Fund-Imkaan Partnership – Covid Emergency Fund

In response to the combined impact of COVID-19 and a sharp rise in violence against Black and minoritised women, Rosa and Imkaan co-designed an emergency grant programme. This initiative drew on research and advocacy from the Women's Resource Centre and Imkaan, whose 2020 briefing revealed a critical lack of race-conscious, rapid-response funding and chronic underinvestment in specialist "by and for" organisations.

Mobilising over £630,000 from donors including Esmée Fairbairn, Oak Foundation, Indigo Trust and the Emmanuel Kaye Foundation, the fund specifically targeted BME women's organisations. 27 organisations received grants, directly benefiting 3,147 women and girls. All grantees reported improvements in access to support and mental wellbeing, while 96% said the funding improved sustainability or resolved cash flow issues. In addition, 93% used the grants to adapt working methods, such as upgrading IT and enabling remote delivery.

Rosa provided grant administration capacity, while Imkaan leveraged its membership network to reach communities quickly and effectively.[17]

Ubele Phoenix Fund

At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, Ubele led The Phoenix Fund, which distributed £2m in direct grants and £0.4m in infrastructure support to 184 grassroots community groups in England. By centring lived-experience networks and using participatory grant-making, Ubele ensured resources reached those most affected by systemic inequality, enabling communities to define and deliver their own solutions.

In May 2021, Ubele co-founded The Phoenix Way to build on this approach. Working with six regional hubs, and supported by major funders including the National Lottery Community Fund, Youth Endowment Fund, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Foundation Chanel and the Global Fund for Children, The Phoenix Way invested £6.5m between 2023 and 2024 in Black and racially minoritised communities.

Through participatory funding rounds, the programme awarded £2m to 47 youth-focused groups in April 2023, followed by £2.2m to 36 organisations supporting at-risk young people later that year. In total, 138 community-led organisations received flexible funding shaped by community priorities.

Growing Role of CICs in Providing Equity & Justice Infrastructure Support

Our mapping revealed a growing number of CICs that now provide Equity & Justice Infrastructure support. Stakeholder interviews revealed the following as reasons behind registering as CICs as opposed to as charities:

- Registering as a CIC proves to be cheaper
- Lack of trust in Charity Commission
- Lower reporting burden in comparison to charity reporting requirements

Registering as a CIC might come with some freedom but also has its own set of challenges. Despite a growing number of organisations choosing to register as CICs, some funders currently do not fund CICs and/or social enterprises, which limits the funding available to them.

Exploring Perspectives in Detail

Exploring Perspectives in Detail
Funders (Trusts and Foundations)

In this section we draw together findings from interviews undertaken with a sample of London-specific and national funders. Some of the common themes from these interviews included:

1 **While infrastructure is increasingly seen as critical, it is not often a funding priority:** Funders widely recognised the strategic importance of infrastructure organisations in supporting the effectiveness and resilience of frontline equity-led groups. Some described EJIOs as "key enablers" and "critical connectors" between grassroots organisations and decision-makers. Many acknowledged that infrastructure is essential for achieving broader outcomes around racial justice, migration justice, community power, and sector transformation. Despite this recognition, infrastructure funding remains relatively marginal in most portfolios . Several funders admitted that investment in infrastructure often occurs "around the edges" or is "squeezed" when core delivery or frontline work is prioritised. Others noted that infrastructure is hard to justify internally when impact measurement frameworks prioritise direct, tangible outcomes rather than enabling functions.

2 **Equity-Led infrastructure faces deep and persistent undersupply:** Funders consistently described the UK's equity infrastructure ecosystem as thin, fragile, and underfunded. Several spoke of a "patchwork" of provision that is often dependent on a few overstretched organisations. Many observed that outside of London, the gaps are particularly stark, especially in rural areas and across the Midlands and North of England. There was also recognition that certain communities such as older people, disabled people, or intersectional groups are particularly underserved by existing infrastructure. Interviewees emphasised that infrastructure needs are context-specific and community-driven, making a "one-size-fits-all" approach ineffective.

3 **Demand for support is growing faster than capacity:** The majority of the funders interviewed reported growing demand for infrastructure support from grantees and the wider sector – both in terms of quantity and complexity. There was particular demand from EJOs for support with leadership development, strategic planning, income generation, legal structures, and navigating funding systems. However, many infrastructure organisations are unable to meet this demand due to limited capacity, short-term funding, and burnout among staff. One funder observed: "People are turning to infrastructure organisations with everything – they're under huge pressure and have limited room to innovate." Several spoke of "thin layers of support" being stretched even further in the face of escalating social, legal, and economic challenges.

4 **Infrastructure is an enabler of systems change:** A number of funders, particularly those with a focus on justice or movement building, described infrastructure as a vital enabler of long-term systemic change. EJIOs were seen as playing a dual role: helping frontline groups to survive and thrive, and shaping the broader policy and funding conditions that affect equity-led work. Some funders described this work as "invisible scaffolding" that allows movements to organise, advocate, and win policy change. However, others noted that this role is not well understood across the funding sector, and that advocacy and policy-related infrastructure often remains underfunded due to risk aversion or political sensitivities.

5 **Current funding models often undermine stability:** There was widespread frustration with the status quo of short-term, project-based funding. Most funders interviewed acknowledged that such models create administrative burdens, inhibit strategic planning, and discourage collaboration. Several had started to shift towards multi-year, core funding but others still operated within rigid grant frameworks that are ill-suited to infrastructure work. Some funders expressed concern that infrastructure organisations receive multiple small grants from different sources, leading to duplication, burnout, and a lack of coherence. As one put it, "it's like duct-taping together a system that should be resourced to stand on its own."

6 **Measuring impact remains a challenge:** Many funders recognised the difficulty of articulating and evidencing the impact of infrastructure organisations. While the value of their work is widely felt by grantees and partners, standard outcome frameworks often fail to capture this. This has made it harder to make the case for funding EJIOs within institutions focused on direct service delivery. Some funders are experimenting with more qualitative, narrative, and participatory approaches to evaluation acknowledging that infrastructure work often has indirect, long-term impacts that don't fit neatly into existing reporting systems.

7 **Growing appetite for collaborative and strategic approaches:** Encouragingly, several funders noted a growing willingness to work collaboratively and align funding strategies. Funder collaborations like Propel and Funders for Race Equality[18] were seen as promising spaces for shared learning and co-investment. Some are beginning to explore pooled funds, regional approaches, or joint infrastructure calls. Still, there are barriers to deeper collaboration including misaligned timelines, data gaps, and varied levels of risk appetite. Funders also highlighted the need for shared definitions and typologies of infrastructure, to enable more coherent investment across the ecosystem.

Funder Plus: Who Provides What?

Some funders provide non-financial or additional financial support to grantees to build their capacity through training, facilitating networks and collaboration, and developing technological products to support grantee needs. This type of support is often referred to as "funder plus" support.[19] Most funders who we interviewed discussed a potential role that EJIOs could play in delivering infrastructure support that funders currently provide either due to high demand or to meet grantees' specialist needs.

Disrupt: Providing Funding For Technological Needs

Disrupt Foundation is a UK-based funder committed to strengthening social justice infrastructure by supporting both organisations and projects that enable long-term systemic change. With a modest annual budget of £2 million, Disrupt focuses on funding infrastructure across three dimensions – access to justice, tech for good, and community planning.

Kompasi,[20] a tech platform funded by Disrupt, emerged out of the need for better referral services for vulnerable migrants. The platform provides details on local organisations taking referrals, alongside other information, consolidating a wealth of knowledge for people going through the immigration process. Disrupt's approach recognises that tech-based or efficiency-based solutions often won't solve injustice alone but it can empower communities to navigate, resist, and reshape unjust systems.

Their "funder-plus" model extends beyond grants, providing grantees with tailored support, most often around technical expertise. This hands-on approach helps assess and respond to recurring infrastructure needs, especially for membership-based organisations, which often face challenges around regional organising and membership systems.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation: Bringing Together Ideas for Change Through Annual Residential

Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Migration Fund offers a unique funder plus offer for its grantees – bringing them together in-person over a multi-day residential. Grantees have an opportunity to attend workshops, panels, connect with key stakeholders in the migration sector and take time to rest.[21] Residential agendas are responsive and created after conducting a sector-wide needs-assessment.

Esmee Fairbairn's Capacity Building Support

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation's Funding Plus is a responsive, demand-led programme offering UK-based grantees up to £9,000 to commission capacity building support, ranging from strategy, organisational development, mental health and wellbeing coaching, to communications consultancy. The programme provides tailored support to grantees in areas such as strategic and organisational development, communications and advocacy, leadership skills, and wellbeing coaching. It helps organisations enhance evaluation, income diversification, digital strategy, and public engagement, while also prioritising mental health and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Looking Ahead

Most funders expressed a continued commitment to supporting equity infrastructure, but acknowledged that without more systemic, strategic investment, the sector risks further fragmentation and burnout. Many agreed that now is the time for the sector to move beyond "emergency mode" and towards a longer-term vision for how infrastructure can support sustained, transformative change.

Exploring perspectives in detail

Local Authorities

In this section, we draw together findings from interviews and desk research on local authorities' approaches to funding and supporting equity and justice infrastructure. Common themes included:

1 **A deep dive into London's boroughs showed that equity and justice infrastructure funding was limited and quite fragmented.** Across London's boroughs, most local authorities continue to invest in generalist voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure, often through local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs). However, explicit investment in equity-led infrastructure remains the exception rather than the rule. Camden is a notable outlier, with a £4m We Make Camden programme prioritising Global Majority-led organisations and underpinned by a seven-year sector resilience plan. Tower Hamlets has also made significant commitments (£1.4m over four years), though it has recently shifted towards in-house delivery alongside strategic CVS contracts. By contrast, several boroughs acknowledged limited direct investment, despite rising demand from under-served communities.

2 **Increasing preference for frontline delivery over intermediary bodies.** Several boroughs described a trend towards funding frontline service delivery or providing capacity-building directly, rather than investing in intermediary infrastructure organisations. For example, one borough maintains strategic contracts with the CVS while delivering council-run training for grassroots groups. In another, funding is channelled through multiple strands, with some equity-led groups reached indirectly. The absence of standardised reporting makes it hard to track precise levels of investment in equity-focused infrastructure across boroughs.

3 **Short-term funding allocations undermine stability.** A consistent theme from our interviews with LAs was the lack of long-term, sustainable funding. Many councils cited shrinking national settlements, inflationary pressures, and statutory cost increases, especially in social care and housing, as barriers to multi-year investment. Short-term mechanisms such as the Household Support Fund or Covid-response grants were seen as welcome but temporary fixes. The risks of short-termism were illustrated by an Equity and Justice Infrastructure Organisation (EJIO) in Northern Ireland, which received annual

funding renewals for a seven-year project. The uncertainty caused staff turnover, high recruitment costs, and loss of institutional knowledge. "If we'd had the full seven years' funding upfront…it would have been transformational".

4 **Growing demand from grassroots and equity-led groups.** Several boroughs reported rising requests for infrastructure support from small, grassroots organisations, particularly Global Majority-led, refugee/migrant, and LGBTQ+ groups, many of whom face practical barriers such as lacking charitable status, bank accounts, or fundraising experience, which make them ineligible for mainstream funding. These informal groups and networks were described as "off the radar" but essential to local service delivery, especially during the pandemic.

5 **Emerging models of good practice.** Despite challenges, several boroughs are experimenting with promising approaches. For example, Camden has targeted investment in disability and youth-focused infrastructure. Hounslow is partnering with equality networks and supporting resident-led anchor organisations to co-design civic infrastructure. Tower Hamlets has introduced trustee diversity initiatives to strengthen governance in equity-led groups. These models demonstrate how targeted, inclusive investment can better connect EJOs to wider resources and strengthen local ecosystems.

Looking Ahead

While local authorities show clear commitment to supporting the voluntary and community sector, equity and justice infrastructure remains underfunded, inconsistent, and vulnerable to short-term policy cycles. There is growing recognition that stable, multi-year funding is essential for building the capacity of EJOs and ensuring they can participate fully in local decision-making. Without this shift, councils risk perpetuating a system where those best placed to address inequalities remain on the margins, rather than as equal partners in shaping their communities' futures.

Exploring perspectives in detail

Equity and Justice Infrastructure Organisation (EJIOs) and Equity and Justice Organisations

In this section, we draw together findings from interviews with a diverse sample of EJIOs and EJOs across the UK. This included small local CICs as well as specialist national and regional infrastructure organisations. Common themes included:

1 **The value of infrastructure as service delivery and advocacy**. EJIOs consistently described their role as straddling two worlds providing direct, practical support to EJOs while also advocating for systemic change. Many see themselves as "infrastructure for infrastructure," enabling smaller groups to access funding, build capacity, and connect with decision-makers. This dual role is resource-intensive, requiring specialist knowledge, deep community trust, and the ability to navigate policy spaces. Organisations stressed that infrastructure is not just about delivering projects, but about creating the conditions for equity-led groups to survive and thrive.

2 **Chronic underfunding and short-termism.** Almost all organisations highlighted the instability created by short-term, restricted funding. While some had secured multi-year grants, these were the exception, not the rule. Annual renewals for long-term projects were seen as especially damaging, causing staff turnover, loss of institutional knowledge, and a constant state of firefighting. Several also noted that inflation, rising operational costs, and shifts in funder strategies had eroded the real value of grants, even where nominal amounts remained stable.

3 **Capacity constraints and growing demand.** Demand for support is rising across all sub-sectors, from grassroots health and youth organisations to racial justice and gender equality movements. Many EJIOs and EJOs are working at or beyond capacity, unable to meet all requests. Some reported shifting from high-volume, light-touch support to lower-volume but deeper engagement as a necessary trade-off, but one that leaves many needs unmet. In some areas (particularly more rural areas and those with high deprivation), a lack of local infrastructure compounds these pressures, with some communities "off the radar" of mainstream systems.

4 **The value of trusted, community-led support.** Several organisations emphasised the unique value of being "by us, for us, with us." EJOs often feel more comfortable seeking support from organisations that share lived-experience and understand systemic inequities first-hand. This trust enables deeper conversations, more relevant advice, and greater willingness to engage with capacity-building. Without these culturally competent intermediaries, many groups would not approach or persist with mainstream infrastructure bodies.

5 **Barriers to funding.** Many interviewees pointed to structural barriers that limit EJOs' ability to secure mainstream grants including lack of charitable status, limited fundraising capacity, and application

processes that assume insider knowledge of funding systems. Some funders were praised for reducing bureaucracy, accepting alternative reporting formats, or involving people with lived-experience in decision-making. However, these practices remain far from the norm.

6 **The need for flexible, multi-year investment.** Across the board, EJIOs and EJOs called for funding that is long-term, flexible, and trust-based. Multi-year core grants were described as essential for staff morale, organisational stability, and strategic planning. Flexibility in spending was equally important from covering basic operational costs like rent and IT to enabling rapid response to emerging community needs. Organisations were clear that even small shifts in funding practice such as lighter reporting requirements or alignment with other funders' forms could free up significant capacity.

7 **Non-financial support matters.** Where available, "funder plus" support such as pro bono professional services, networking opportunities, and leadership development was valued highly. Examples included residential learning events, introductions to new funding sources, and venue hire support. The most effective models were those embedded in genuine partnership, with funders engaging directly in the work rather than relying solely on formal reporting. Both EJIOs and funders viewed funder plus support as an addition to existing infrastructure support rather than an alternative to it.

8 **Intersectional challenges and emerging threats.** Several EJIOs reported an increasingly hostile political and media climate towards equalities work, citing attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, rollback of progressive legislation, and the rise of far-right rhetoric. This has created additional pressures on already under-resourced sectors. In some cases, EJIOs reported feeling that funders' appetite for supporting work seen as "political" had declined, narrowing the space for advocacy.

Looking Ahead

Several interviewees called for funders to:

- Increase the proportion of multi-year core funding to infrastructure organisations
- Centre racial, disability, migration, and gender justice in funding centre equity and justice in their funding strategies
- Develop better ways to evidence and communicate the value of infrastructure
- Foster deeper collaboration across funders and regions
- Invest in long-term leadership and workforce development within EJIOs

The insights shared through these interviews point to an inflection point – infrastructure organisations are doing more with less yet are needed more than ever. If funders are serious about equity and justice, investing in the systems and people that enable frontline groups to thrive is essential.

Leveraging Lived-Experience Leadership to Reach Communities

LGBT Equity Fund by LGBT Consortium

In 2022, The National Lottery Community Fund partnered with LGBT Consortium – a network of LGBTQ+ groups in the UK to distribute £1.6m in small grants to grassroots, community-led groups. As an infrastructure body led by and for LGBT+ communities, Consortium brought unique sector knowledge and deep-rooted trust to the grantmaking process, enabling it to reach communities often excluded from traditional funding streams.

The National Lottery Community Fund partnered with LGBT Consortium due to its position as a trusted intermediary with a "by and for" ethos. Consortium embedded lived-experience throughout the design, delivery, and governance of the Equity Fund.[22]

LGBT+ communities, particularly those with intersecting marginalised identities such as Black and People of Colour, disabled, trans, intersex, older, and rural LGBT+ people, continue to experience systemic barriers to funding. The Fund was designed to respond to long-standing inequities by resourcing grassroots groups that are led by and for these communities. The final evaluation identified that traditional grantmaking models often rely on power dynamics, language, and criteria that alienate or exclude these groups.[23]

LGBT Consortium acted as a trusted intermediary, using its lived-experience leadership and deep community connections to design an inclusive and supportive application process, facilitate participatory grantmaking through community panels and provide post-grant capacity-building support. This approach ensured that funding decisions were made by and for the communities they aimed to serve, fostering trust, accessibility, and relevance. **The Equity Fund was successful in reaching underserved communities, catalysing organisational growth, creating stronger sector connections, enhancing service delivery and improving fundraising readiness.** [24]

Influencing Policy Changes

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, Human Rights Consortium, Committee on Administration of Justice, Inclusion London

The Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) is a Black-led infrastructure organisation in Scotland that actively campaigns for racial justice through a blend of evidence-based research, policy advocacy, grassroots coordination, and strategic legislative engagement.[25]

Its work has secured key policy changes, including amendments to the **Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017**, which now requires ministers and local authorities to report on poverty within protected groups, and the **Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018**, which embeds equality principles, mandates consultation with equality groups, and requires monitoring and reporting. CRER has also been commissioned by the Scottish Government to review anti-racist policymaking, assess the effectiveness of equality duties, and design the EHRC's principles for evaluating anti-prejudice initiatives.

Other organisations have similarly demonstrated their ability to successfully influence policy. In late 2022, Inclusion London secured a suite of protections and supports for disabled Londoners as the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) was expanded. After identifying the disproportionate financial burden faced by those reliant on adapted vehicles, they campaigned for and achieved temporary exemptions until 2027 for around 280,000 benefit recipients, enhanced scrappage grants for wheelchair-accessible and specially adapted cars, and new grace periods for carers and nominated drivers.

Through collaboration with the Mayor's office and TfL, events, and maintaining public pressure they ensured that the expanded ULEZ included meaningful, equity-focused modifications rather than imposing blanket financial penalties.[26]

Human Rights Consortium (HRC) is also working to influence the passing of a Scottish Human Rights Bill which the Scottish Government has committed to passing a new Human Rights Bill for Scotland by May 2026. The government has set up groups to advise on the Bill. HRC sits on the Human Rights Bill Governance and Engagement Advisory Board as well as an Implementation Core and Wider Engagement Group, thereby directly influencing the contents of the Bill.[27]

In Northern Ireland, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) has informed transformative legal and policy changes, including a landmark victory in March 2025 when the High Court ruled that Stormont's Executive had legally breached its duty established under the 1998 Good Friday and 2006 St. Andrews Agreements to adopt an anti-poverty strategy. This prompted renewed government commitment to produce a concrete cross-departmental strategy.[28]

Case Study:

Funding in Collaboration

Regenerative Futures Fund

Beyond Barriers Fund, was a six-year, £1.5m social investment pilot to support Black and Global Majority-led community enterprises launched by Trust for London, City Bridge Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The fund combines grant funding with skills transfer and is delivered with the impact-first investor Sumerian Foundation and BUD Leaders, a Black-led, female-led organisation in South London.

BUD Leaders will build its capacity to act as a social investor, supporting minority-led social enterprises with business advice, leadership mentoring and access to finance. The initiative responds to the Adebowale Commission on Social Investment's call for more inclusive models and addresses barriers such as inflexible funding and limited access to capital. It also provides unrestricted grant funding to help organisations progress to social investment, meeting a need identified in 2023 research by the Black-led agency **ClearView Research.**[29]

NEO Philanthropy

For over 15 years, **NEO Philanthropy** has operated collaborative funding platforms that allow donors to pool resources around shared social justice priorities. Between 2006 and 2016, NEO distributed over $200m in grants to nearly 600 organisations across 44 US states. In addition to funding, NEO offers capacity-building support such as fundraising coaching, management training and communications advice. The model increases funder leverage, enables coordinated strategies and creates opportunities for shared learning and new donor engagement.[30]

Decolonizing Wealth Project's Liberated Capital and Case4Reparations Fund

The **Decolonizing Wealth Project**, an Indigenous and Black-led organisation, seeks to transform philanthropy by challenging its colonial legacy. Its **Liberated Capital** fund, launched in 2021, has redistributed over $6.7 million to reparations-focused campaigns in the US. Through the **Case4Reparations Fund**, it supports the redistribution of wealth from institutions and governments to Black communities. This approach shifts from charity-based giving towards justice-centred funding that directly addresses historical harms.[31][32]

Co-Impact's Collaborative Philanthropy

Co-Impact is a global collaborative of more than 60 funding partners working to address the root causes of inequality in health, education and economic opportunity across Africa, Asia and Latin America. It operates two funds: the **Foundational Fund** and the **Gender Fund**. The Gender Fund alone has raised over $450m, supported by more than 20 funders, and focuses on advancing gender equality and women's leadership. Co-Impact's model provides large, long-term, flexible grants to locally-rooted organisations and coalitions, prioritising systems change over short-term interventions.[33][34]

What does this tell us about what needs to change?

Based on our findings, we propose a set of practical and strategic recommendations to strengthen the UK's equity and justice infrastructure ecosystem. These recommendations are grounded in the needs expressed by Equity & Justice Infrastructure Organisations (EJIOs), Equity & Justice Organisations (EJOs), funders, and local authorities throughout our research.

1. Provide long-term, unrestricted funding to EJIOs

EJIOs need access to a greater proportion of multi-year (5–10 years), unrestricted funding to build sustainable infrastructure, retain staff, and innovate. Short-term, project-based funding creates precarity and limits strategic planning. Longer-term core funding would allow EJIOs to respond to emerging needs and invest in organisational development.

2. Support strategic partnerships within the infrastructure sector

In addition to providing long-term funding for specialist EJIOs, investing in partnerships between EJIOs and broader EJOs can help strengthen frontline organisations through tailored capacity-building and shared learning. This might include supporting specialist networks or embedding targeted expertise within generalist infrastructure or other frontline bodies. Many general infrastructure organisations already offer specialist support through specific projects. While direct investment in EJIOs remains essential, fostering collaboration between them and other infrastructure organisations can combine equity-focused expertise with wider sector resources—helping to build a stronger, more sustainable EJIO sector.

3. Reimagine "Funder Plus" models

As more funders look to non-financial offers of support, they can consider the role of EJIOs in providing this support directly, for example through resourcing EJIOs to provide "funder plus" support to grantees. Currently, funder plus support is not consistently available across regions and sectors. Funders can work with EJIOs to identify areas of need and deliver this support alongside EJIOs that have the contextual knowledge and trust needed to deliver relevant, responsive and culturally informed support. This approach also strengthens the infrastructure ecosystem simultaneously. It's important that any support is shaped by grantee feedback about what they need and how they wish to access it.

4. Reduce reporting burden

Our conversations with funders who are funding EJIOs revealed that the long-term nature of their work does not lend itself well to annual reporting mechanisms. It is difficult to measure social progress, especially within very short durations. This requires moving away from traditional reporting and evaluation practices. Adapting reporting requirements (e.g. to better reflect long term change, aligning reporting cycles, and accepting narrative or verbal updates) can reduce administrative strain on grantees and enable organisations to focus on delivery, learning, development and impact.

5. Foster funder collaboration

Greater collaboration and collaboration among funders who are actively investing in infrastructure as well as those who are not yet active in this space is crucial to raise awareness of the value of specialist infrastructure, embed shared learning, and ensure more consistent support for EJIOs. Pooling resources offers a practical route to strengthen the sector, enabling funders to share risk, back innovation, and extend reach into communities that have historically been overlooked.

6. Invest in CICs and social enterprises

Our findings revealed that specialist infrastructure support is provided by a diverse range of organisations, including CICs and social enterprises. Ensuring that funding is available for all types of EJIOs will help ensure that all types of organisations that provide specialist infrastructure support are able to thrive, regardless of their organisational structure. This may require viewing eligibility criteria to include CICs and social enterprises, particularly those led by and for marginalised communities. Where funders are constrained by endowment rules or internal policies, intermediary funders and fiscal hosts offer a practical route to support CICs and social enterprises, enabling greater flexibility and experimentation.

7. Invest in Ideas and Individuals

Building capacity for innovation is key to strong sector infrastructure. Currently, specialist infrastructure support is often provided by small organisations which leverage community leaders to reach communities. However given the small size of the EJIO sector, limited support is available to individuals leading and building these organisations, or for innovation in the sector. Funders should consider how they can invest in emerging practice and individuals especially community leaders and changemakers. This includes leadership development, entrepreneurship training, and seed funding for new initiatives.

8. Improve the evidence base

This mapping revealed significant data gaps. Not all funders and local authorities share data to the 360Giving standard which means existing data sources like GrantNav are limited. Charity Commission data does not contain the same level of detail and excludes CICs/social enterprises. Closing this data gap by ensuring consistent reporting across the sector will help us understand the EJIO funding landscape better in the future.

Our research also found most existing knowledge is from the US and revealed a number of gaps in UK-specific literature on equity and justice infrastructure which merit further exploration:

- The role, effectiveness, and uniqueness of EJIOs across UK regions and sectors
- Sector-specific funding models for EJIOs
- Comparative studies of infrastructure support across different equity groups

Research centres, think tanks, and academic institutions can play a key role in informing strategic philanthropy and policy. However, research should be commissioned collaboratively with equity and justice organisations, with adequate resources to support their involvement throughout, ensuring it is shaped by and useful to the communities it serves.

Practical Steps to Implement These Recommendations

To move these recommendations forward, we suggest:

- **Adaptation:** Funders already supporting EJIOs can review and align their practices with these recommendations.
- **Roundtables and Learning Spaces:** Convene funders, EJIOs, and sector experts to share findings and co-design funding strategies.
- **Advocacy and Campaigns:** Encourage government and philanthropic investment in EJ infrastructure through coordinated advocacy.
- **Pooled Funds:** Create collaborative funding mechanisms to reduce risk, streamline processes, and unlock larger investments.
- **Integrated Funding Streams:** Embed EJ infrastructure support into existing grant programmes by offering add-on grants for capacity-building.
- **Direct Collaboration with EJIOs:** Partner with EJIOs to deliver funder plus support, co-design programmes, and inform funding decisions.

You can read the paper and detailed evidence, with works cited here

Appendix 1: Methodology

We used a multi-step approach to map Equity and Justice Infrastructure Organisations (EJIOs) and their funding, combining data analysis, sector input and manual review to ensure smaller or specialist organisations were included.

Building the List

We reviewed 360Giving grants data (2019–Oct 2024), including its infrastructure dataset, and manually filtered results against our criteria. We then added organisations identified through consultations with EJOs, EJIOs, funders, and sector bodies. After manual checks, we confirmed 220 organisations, comprising 198 registered charities, 21 CICs/companies, and one unregistered organisation. These were grouped as:

- EJI Focused (139, of which 30 London-based): majority of work on infrastructure support
- EJI Adjacent (81, of which 25 London-based): infrastructure activity as a secondary focus

Regional focus was tagged using charity regulator data, websites, or project descriptions.

Understanding Funding and Impact

We combined three sources:

- Surveys: Two rounds (London and UK-wide) with 101 responses (42 EJIOs, 59 EJOs).
- Stakeholder interviews: 44 participants (16 trusts/foundations, 12 local authorities, 16 EJIOs).
- Funding data: Extracted from regulator filings, supplemented by CIC/unregistered accounts, reviewing restricted vs unrestricted income. Between 2020–24, 170–190 organisations reported funding annually, with variations due to size and establishment stage.

Reviewing

This report is based on findings from both qualitative and quantitative research we carried out between 2024 and 2025. To make sure our approach and conclusions were sound, we asked a group of experts to review the original research paper and share their feedback. Those reviewers included Dr. Tobias Jung, Dr. Christopher Dougherty (University of St Andrews), Chen-Ta Sung (Cambridge Social Impact Consulting), and Tania Cohen and Ruth Jolley (360Giving).

Methodology – How We Did This Work

We wanted to make sure our mapping didn't miss any small or specialist organisations doing vital infrastructure work. So we took a multi-step approach, combining data analysis, sector consultations, and manual review.

Building the List of EJIOs

We started by reviewing grants data from 360Giving (2019–Oct 2024), focusing on keywords linked to infrastructure support. This gave us a list of potential EJIOs, which we manually reviewed to remove irrelevant entries and confirm which organisations were providing specialist support. We also used 360Giving's infrastructure dataset and manually filtered it to match our criteria.

We also asked both EJOs and EJIOs for recommendations. Some organisations self-identified as infrastructure providers, while others were named by EJOs as having supported them. We manually reviewed and added these to our list.

We also asked organisations and funders to review our list and suggest others. These included:

- London Plus
- NAVCA
- Black South West Network
- SRAAC Somali Community Association
- Race Council Cymru
- Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum
- Merseyside Disability Federation
- Mid-Ulster Disability Forum
- National Alliance of Women's Organisations
- OPAAL (UK)
- Scottish Alliance of Regional Equality Councils
- Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services

Additional recommendations came from:

- Human Rights Consortium
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Corra Foundation
- Wales Funder Forum
- Funders Forum for Northern Ireland
- AB Charitable Trust
- Greater London Authority

After manual checks, we finalised a list of 220 organisations:

- 198 registered charities
- 21 CICs/companies
- 1 unregistered organisation

We grouped organisations based on their focus:

- EJI Focused: Most of their work is infrastructure support for EJOs (139 total, 30 London-only)
- EJI Adjacent: Some of their work is infrastructure support, but not the majority (81 total, 25 London-only)

We used data from charity regulators (CCEW, OSCR, CCNI) to tag regional focus. For CICs and unregistered organisations, we reviewed websites and project descriptions manually.

Understanding Funding and Impact

We used three main methods:

1. Surveys

We ran two phases of surveys, first in London, then UK-wide. We received 101 responses (42 EJIOs, 59 EJOs). Surveys were shared via social media, funder networks, advisory board members, and direct outreach to all 220 organisations.

2. Stakeholder Interviews

We spoke to 44 stakeholders:

Type	Number
Independent Trust/Foundation	16
Local Authority (England)	12
EJIOs	16

3. Funding Data

We extracted funding data from charity regulators and manually reviewed accounts for CICs and unregistered organisations. We also looked at restricted vs. unrestricted income for EJI Focused organisations.

Year	Organisations Reporting Funding
2020	179
2021	182
2022	186
2023	190
2024	170

Some organisations didn't report due to size or being newly established.

Appendix 2: Limitations

This report provides the first systematic picture of funding for UK equity and justice infrastructure organisations (EJIOs), but there are important limitations. Data coverage is incomplete, especially for CICs, unregistered entities, and in Scotland and Northern Ireland where reporting formats differ. This means some parts of the sector are underrepresented and inconsistencies may be introduced. Much of the evidence on demand and impact comes from surveys, interviews, and grey literature, which offer valuable insights but are subject to bias and are not always representative.

The classification of organisations required assigning a main thematic focus and allocating organisations to EJI Focused or EJI Adjacent. While criteria and input from our advisory group was used to guide this, some judgment was required. The classification simplifies the often intersectional nature of their work and may obscure cross-sector contributions. Survey and interview participation is limited and likely reflects the perspectives of more engaged actors, while mapping methods may miss smaller or less visible organisations. Funding analysis is constrained by gaps in grant data, the lack of disaggregation by project or service type, reliance on registered addresses, and the absence of standardised equalities data. In addition, funding patterns are influenced by temporary Covid-era support, which does not reflect longer-term trends.

Despite these limitations, the report remains the only dedicated analysis of EJIOs in the UK and provides a baseline for future research and sector development.

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Endnotes

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6 We compiled a list of 220 EJIOs in the UK. Out of these 220 EJIOs, not all were only providing specialist infrastructure support. Some provided a mix of general and specialist infrastructure support and some provided a few specialist infrastructure support/services alongside delivering frontline services. We categorised these organisations as EJI Adjacent organisations. The remaining organisations solely provided specialist infrastructure services and were categorised as EJI Focused organisations. To summarise:

EJI Adjacent Organisations: Some of their work is infrastructure support, but not the majority (81 total, 25 London-only)

EJI Focused Organisations: Most of their work is infrastructure support for EJOs (139 total, 30 London-only)

You can read more about our methodology in Appendix I.

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