



# IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION IN OUR MOSQUES AND CENTRES





وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ

The believers are those who are true to  
their trusts and covenants



<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Why is inclusion so important? .....	5
What is inclusion? .....	6
Categories of change .....	7
<b>1-Adjustments to Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2-Education and Awareness</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3-Programme Accommodations and Resources</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>4-Services Targeted for the Disabled and Their Families</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Further References</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Useful Resources</b> .....	<b>12</b>



# INTRODUCTION

One in five people are disabled in the UK. Despite Islam's positive attitude towards disability, the full inclusion of individuals with disability and their families in places of worship remains an unfulfilled reality. This is caused by two kinds of barriers present in our communities: physical barriers and social barriers.

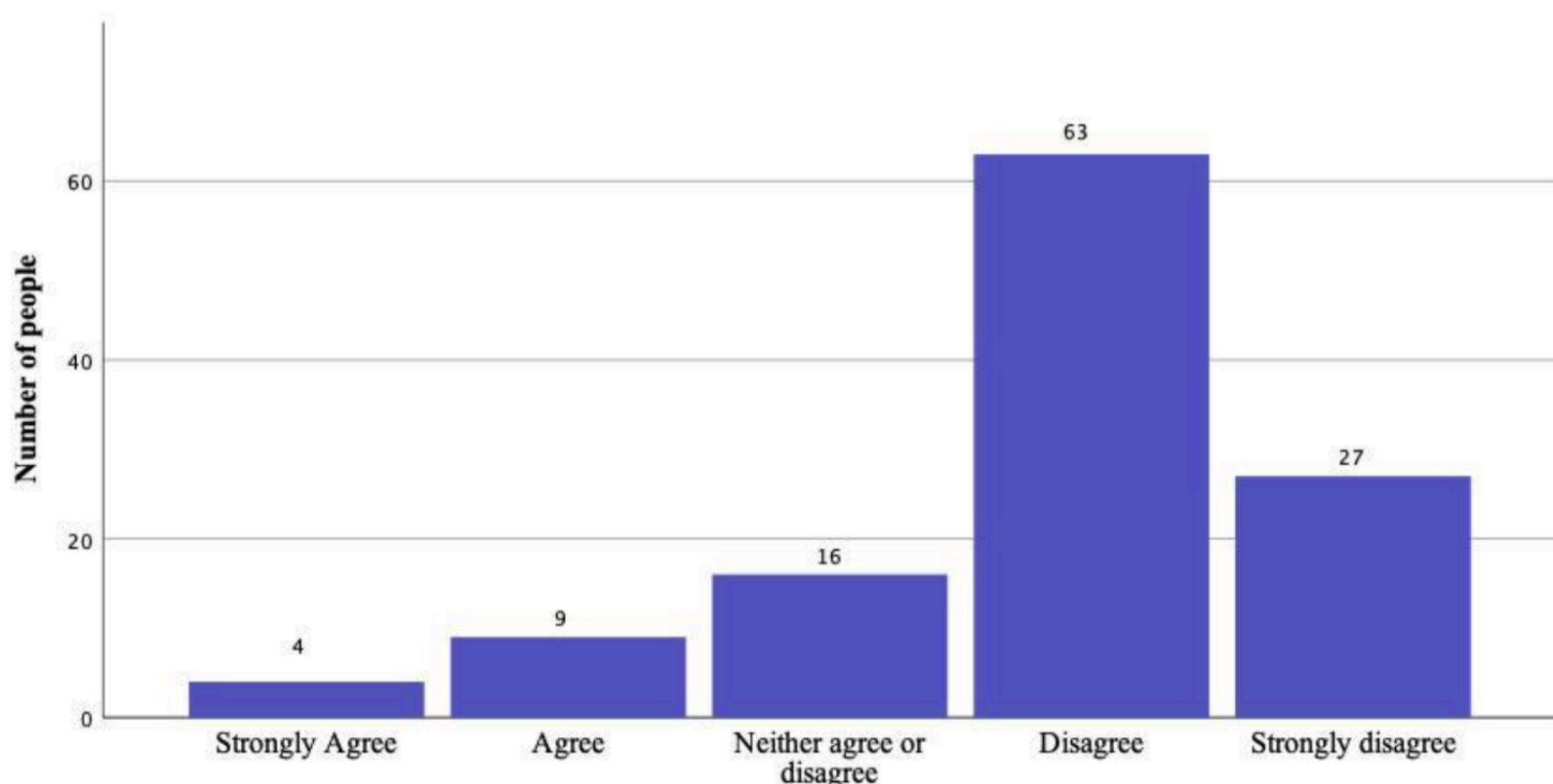
**Physical barriers**, such as not having step-free access, makes it difficult for disabled individuals and their families to attend mosques or Islamic centres.

**Social barriers** are the negative attitudes, discrimination and stigma around disability that exists in our communities. These also discourage those with disabilities and their family members from attending as it can cause them to feel shame, guilt, discomfort, disrespect and can leave them feeling unwanted and unwelcome.

Both these types of barriers make it difficult for Muslim families to attend places of worship. In a 2020 survey that Amanati conducted, it was found that **76.6% of individuals from the Muslim UK community *disagreed or strongly disagreed* with the claim that enough was being done by Muslim communities to make their places of worship accessible and inclusive to people of all abilities.** These findings are demonstrated in the bar chart below.

This lack of inclusion and accommodation for the needs of some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities is pertinent and needs addressing. This document seeks to present ways in which mosques and Islamic centres can begin to make positive changes to promote inclusion and acceptance for those with special needs and disabilities.

**The Muslim community is doing enough to make their places of worship inclusive and accessible to people of all abilities**





## WHY IS INCLUSION SO IMPORTANT?

The mosque is central to Islam, not only in providing a place to pray, but also in creating a sense of community or ummah. Mosques can also be a place of refuge and an environment that fosters inner peace in times of distress. Congregational inclusion has been shown to be of considerable value for individuals with disabilities and their families, with religion playing a key role in helping them make sense of their disability and in their psychological health. Given the importance of freely being able to attend a mosque or Islamic centre, and especially for such vulnerable people, it means implementing the changes suggested in this document is truly of utmost importance.

The lack of accommodation and the stigma present amongst Muslim communities is inconsistent with Islamic values because Islam teaches that disabled individuals must be treated with the greatest respect. Islam does not discriminate, but rather it celebrates diversity:

*“Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. There are indeed signs in that for those who know.”*

-Qur'an, 30:22

The Qur'an also highlights the right of people with disability to be included in everyday living in the community:

*“There is no blame upon the blind, nor any blame upon the lame, nor any blame upon the sick...”*

-Quran, 24:61

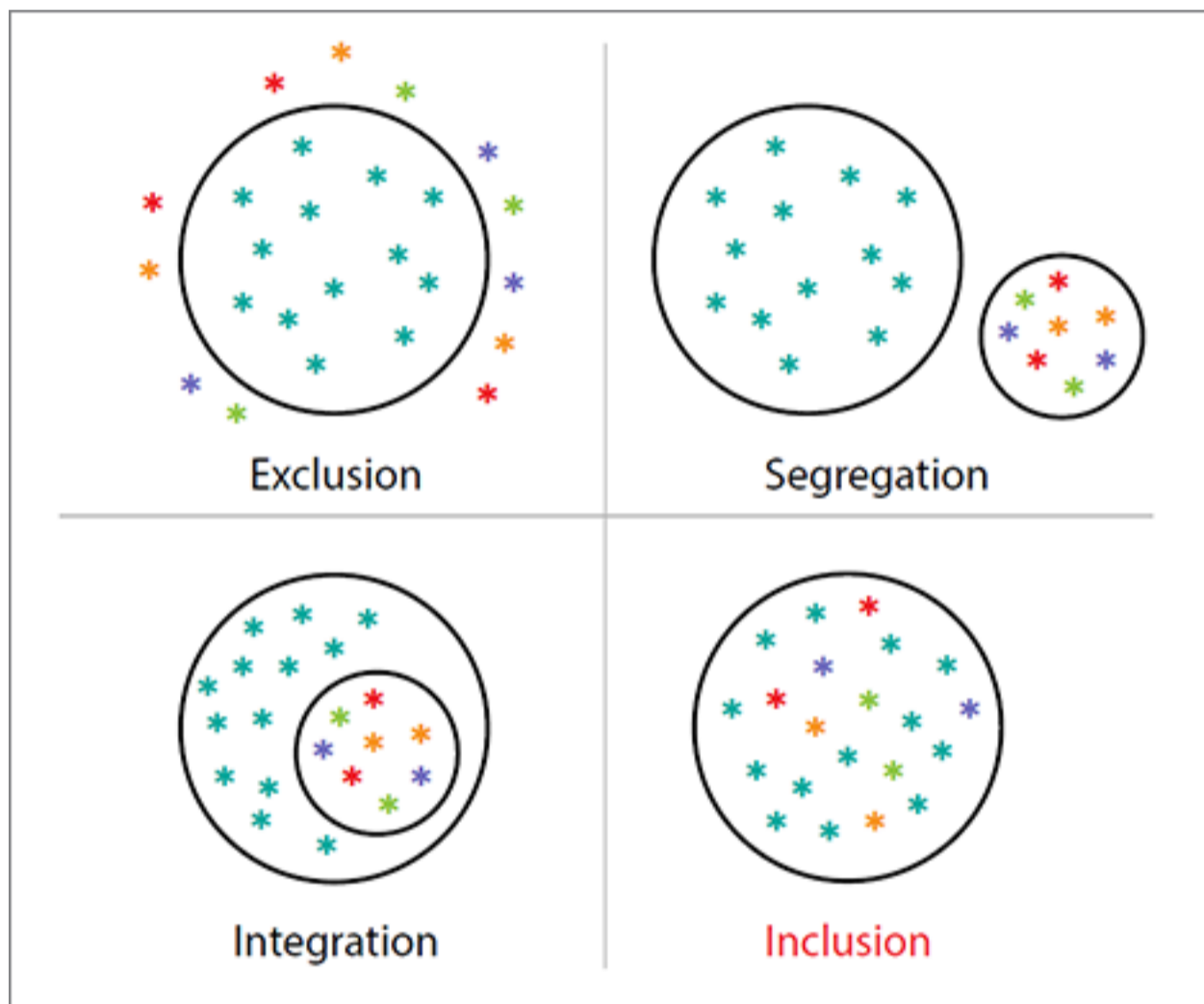
As well as an Islamic obligation, according to The Equality Act, public places of worship in the UK are required, by law, to make adjustments to reduce barriers that disabled individuals face when attending their centres.

As mentioned in the verse at the beginning of this document, true believers are those who do right by the trusts placed upon them and we should be aware that those with varying abilities have been entrusted to us and it is our duty to support them.



## WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion requires not only for mosques to open their doors for disabled people but also, for community members to make active changes on both a social and physical level to ensure their full participation in religious and social activities. Below is a simple illustration of what inclusion is, in comparison to three other terms. This division has been taken and adapted from the UNCRPD (2016).



<i>Exclusion</i>	Directly or indirectly denying disabled individuals access to places of worship.
<i>Segregation</i>	Providing a separate environment for disabled individuals that caters to their needs but is isolated from those without disabilities.
<i>Integration</i>	Welcoming those with disabilities in the standard programs within all places of worship but without adjusting or accommodating for their needs.
<i>Inclusion</i>	Making changes and modifications to the physical structures, programs and approaches within mosques to overcome any barriers.



## **CATEGORIES OF CHANGE**

In order to ensure true inclusion, the kinds of changes that mosques and centres should implement has been split into four categories. Below is an overview of this categorisation, with a detailed analysis of each category in the following section.

**1. Adjustments to  
Infrastructure**

**2. Education and  
Awareness**

**3. Programme  
accommodations  
and resources**

**4. Services  
targeted for the  
disabled and their  
families**

# 1-ADJUSTMENTS TO INFRASTRUCTURE

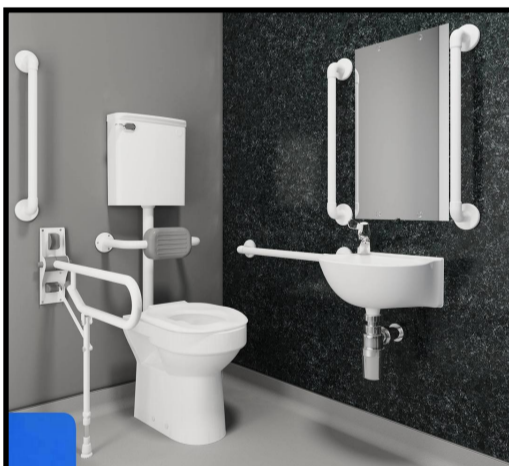
A number of physical changes can be made to the infrastructure of the mosque or Islamic centre. These changes are not just for wheelchair users, but for those with other motor difficulties and sensory difficulties. Some of these are listed below:



Disabled parking spaces



Step-free access into the centre and into each rooms/halls



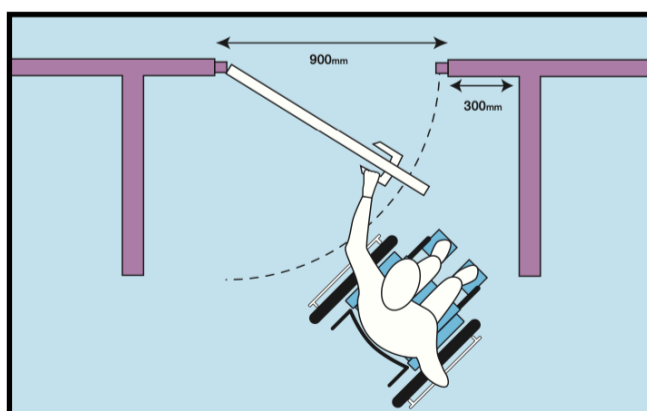
Disabled friendly toilets at your centre



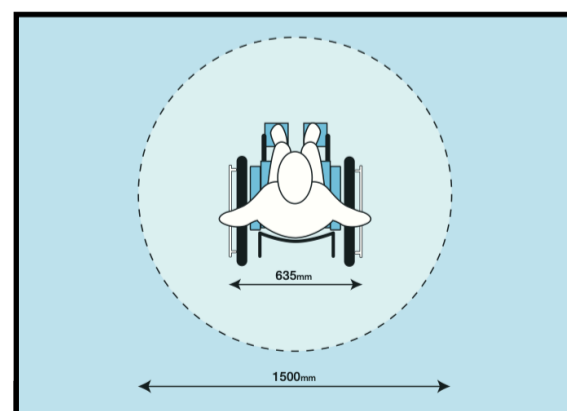
Quiet/sensory room for self-regulation



Handrails from the entrance to the halls



Larger doors to accommodate for wheelchair users



Spaces have a turning space of 150cm x 150cm



## 2-EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

One of the best ways to overcome the stigma and discrimination surrounding disability in our communities and to reduce the social barriers present, is to educate and raise awareness on disabilities and special needs within our communities.

### How can we raise awareness?

- ✓ Invite members with disabilities to share their experiences with the rest of the community.
- ✓ Organise regular conferences/workshops to cover ways that disabled members can be supported.
- ✓ Scholars and speakers to be encouraged to speak about special needs and disabilities and the importance of inclusion.
- ✓ Organise inclusive events aimed at children of various abilities.
- ✓ Run an inclusive 'Autism Hour' event with reduced noise and sensory stimulation. This allows people to understand the needs of those on the autism spectrum better.
- ✓ Use posters in your buildings to raise awareness about things such as the hidden disabilities sunflower Lanyards.
- ✓ Invite professionals (doctors, psychologists, occupational therapists, etc.) to run educational workshops.
- ✓ Use your social media platforms to raise awareness.
- ✓ Volunteers and staff at your centre can be trained on how to support those with disabilities.
- ✓ Educate the community on invisible disabilities, as not all disabilities are visible.



We are all familiar with the slogan "*Nothing about us, without us*" which the disabled community rightly advocate for. This means that these awareness initiatives should allow individuals with disabilities, as well as their carers, to take an active role in educating others about their needs, hopes and aspirations. This can be done in several ways, like including disabled members in leadership committees, giving them opportunities to educate others about their conditions, and taking their feedback using surveys or focus groups.

# 3-PROGRAMME ACCOMMODATIONS AND RESOURCES

Part of reducing physical barriers in our mosques and centres, means making adjustments to programmes and providing the necessary resources. This includes:



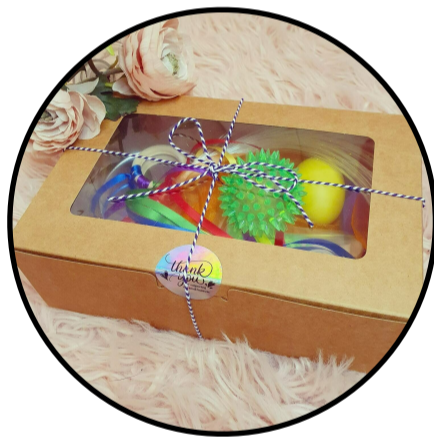
Braille Qur'an



Make wheelchairs available



Salah sujud tables



Sensory boxes for those with sensory challenges



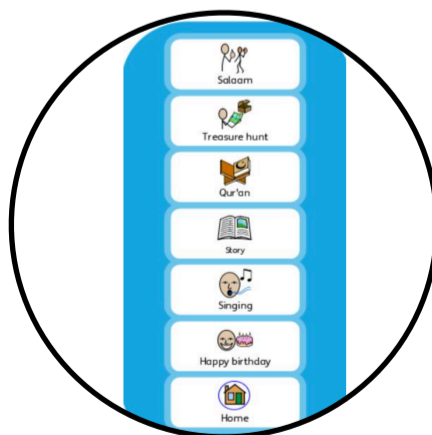
Sign language interpreters



Books that promote inclusivity



Give warnings in pre-event communication



Create visual timetables or social stories



Make sunflower lanyards readily available

## 4-SERVICES TARGETED FOR THE DISABLED AND THEIR FAMILIES

Individuals with disabilities may require additional support in order to ensure that they are able to access the same programmes, services, and spaces as the rest of the community.

The following are some examples of what these services may involve:

- ✓ Assigning a designated person in your local centre who will take the lead role of inclusion and accessibility in your centre. Their contact details need to be available to the community members. This designated person would need to learn about the community members' needs and advocate on their behalf for any necessary accommodations that is required for them.
- ✓ Trained volunteers need to be allocated during events, whose task is to support members of different abilities such as: supporting members with mobility difficulties upon arrival and departure; checking on the members during the events; and finding ways to support them during their visit.
- ✓ Setting up a buddying system for individuals with special needs or disabilities to help them build friendships and relationships with others from the community.
- ✓ Organising special events for those with disabilities and their families. This could include workshops or discussion circles on topics such as coping mechanisms, how spirituality and religious belief may aid one in their journey, and so on.





## FURTHER REFERENCES

Al-Alawi, Z. F. (2022). Perceptions of Accessibility and Inclusion of Disabled People in Islamic Places of Worship in the UK: A Preliminary Study. Available at <https://www.academia.edu/103053102/>

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UNCRPD: United Nations convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4. (2016). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc> [accessed 14 November 2023].

## USEFUL RESOURCES

**Al-Kisa Family**, Special Needs: <https://www.kisafamily.org/special-needs/>

**Al-Ma'arif Publicaions**, Special Education Program <https://al-m.ca/speced/>

**Ahlulbayt TV, Out of Sight Podcast** <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWa2HYRNFVyUQAO1SQIDnBaC4J2jBJeRt>

**Youtube Documentaries** on disability and the community

