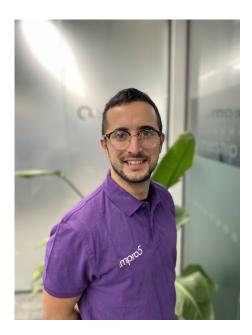# Accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity in facilities management: Challenges, best practices, and solutions

2 years ago

Insight from [Konnor Baskaran](#), FM lead at [mpro5](#)

Accessibility, inclusivity and diversity have all become equally hot topics of conversation in various contexts, including the workplace and more broadly society. Although there are plenty of overlapping concepts in this terminology, there are key differences and independent challenges that need to be addressed.

As described by [Verna Myers](#), diversity is being invited to the party: inclusion is being asked to dance. More specifically, diversity refers to empowering individuals by accepting, respecting and appreciating their differences. Workplace inclusion is equally important to consider, involving the implementation of standardised organisational practices that ensure employees of all backgrounds feel confident, accepted and valued.

With [70% to 80%](#) of disabilities invisible to the naked eye, ensuring everyone can easily enter, use, reach or obtain products, services and infrastructure is essential. Facilities management upholds a responsibility to actively acknowledge the multifaceted nature of accessibility and address the associated challenges faced.

Barriers to workplace accessibility, inclusivity and diversity

Unconscious bias is hardwired into humans, spanning various preferences in gender, race and culture. Management must employ strategies to ensure employees are educated and have access to relevant

training courses and objectively evaluate important executive decisions such as promotions.

More often than not, inaccessibility is unintentional, stemming from a lack of awareness or understanding. A common misconception is that limitations to accessibility are always related to physical barriers, however this extends beyond the provision of ramps and elevators. Whilst 44% of accessibility issues reference narrow stairs, doors or corridors, a staggering 90% of websites have been reported inaccessible to people with disabilities who rely on assistive technology. The design of physical environments should always be suitable for individuals with diverse abilities, and virtual environments must cater to everyone's needs.

Best practices

Navigating through the complex landscape of accessibility standards requires facilities managers to stay informed about the latest legislation and guidelines. Failure to comply poses legal risks and hinders the success of creating a truly accessible workplace. In promoting accessibility and inclusivity, facilities managers must adhere to best practices outlined in official guidance and take a proactive approach when checking new guidelines. This involves remaining current on the latest rules and regulations and ensuring compliance with standards like the Inclusive Mobility Guide.

Appropriate education and training are also essential, not only for staff in direct contact with the general public, but also for those involved in designing, planning, managing and maintaining facilities. Good training will ensure team members are consistently empathetic and have a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs of others. These may include identifying areas for extra support such as personalised evacuation plans and safety protocol.

Regular inspections also ensure that workplaces remain compliant with industry standards and that the correct accessibility measures are in place. By systematically reviewing the physical infrastructure, technology integrations and awareness programs, managers can identify areas that require improvement. Those representing facilities management should aspire to create an environment that is universally accessible and positive, irrespective of the organisation's services or products.

Embracing digital transformation

Facilities management has long surpassed digitisation and is now experiencing digital transformation. Assistive technologies, digital communication tools and smart building systems can all be used to improve accessibility and contribute to a more inclusive workplace. Despite their expansive offerings, a survey conducted by Mitie reported that almost half of facilities managers are missing out on the benefits of digital transformation, and only 7% are implementing new technology. By leveraging software, managers can streamline operations to be more efficient, effective, profitable and compliant.

The pursuit of enhanced accessibility in facilities management goes beyond compliance and has become a moral imperative in curating an inclusive environment. From the physical layout of the workspace to the training programs provided to employees, every aspect contributes to the overall accessibility of an environment. By addressing challenges, adhering to best practices and implementing technological solutions, the facilities management sector will succeed in delivering the highest standards for customers and employees alike.