

Cycling for Diverse Communities

A Guide for Local Authorities



**cycle
sisters**

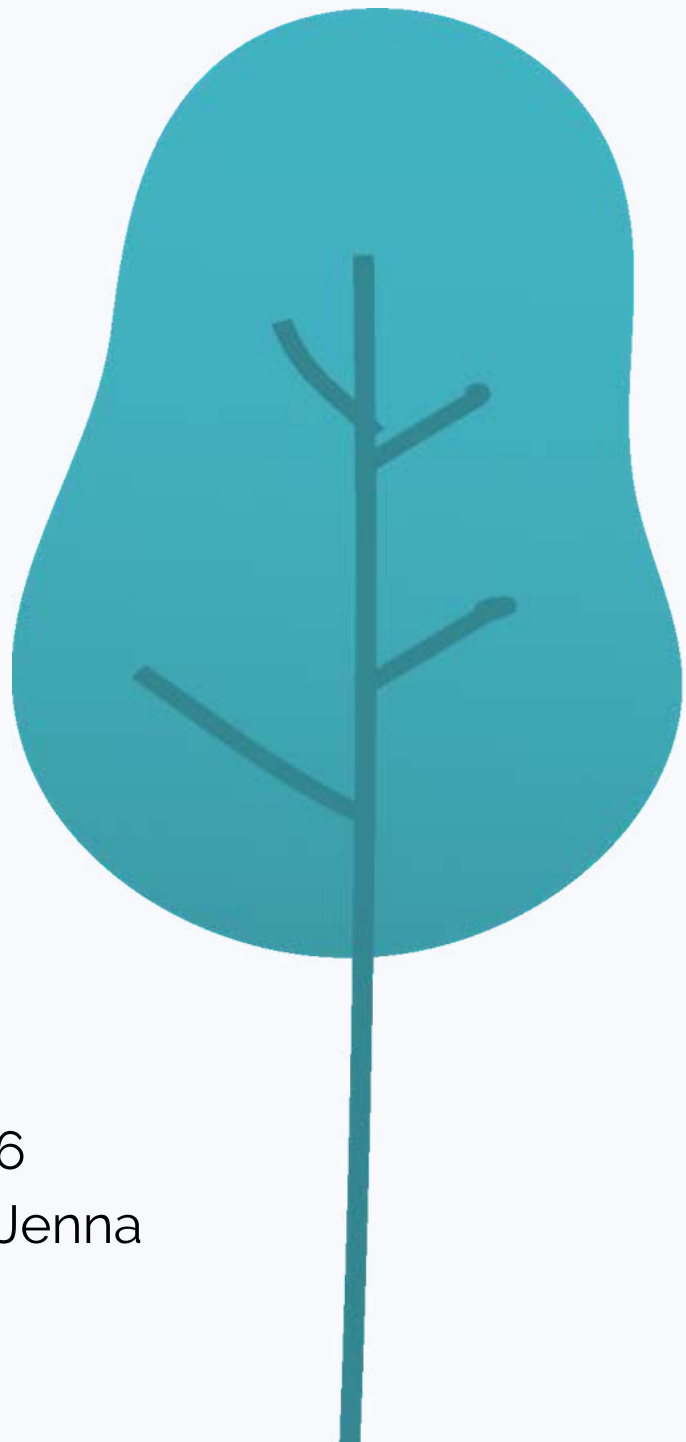
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Salam, peace be with you!

About Cycle Sisters

Cycle Sisters is a charity which aims to inspire and enable Muslim women to cycle. In 2016 we set up our first community cycle group. By 2023 we've grown to a network of **10 groups across London** as well as building a **grassroots movement of 1500+ women** to diversify cycling which has rapidly gained momentum.



About this guide

In this guide, we've shared our **key learning about how local authorities can support more people from diverse communities to cycle**. These initiatives can support local authorities to increase the take up of cycling among under-represented groups and contribute to achievements in active travel strategies.

We appreciate that currently local authority budgets are squeezed and that some of our recommendations require concrete funding commitments rather than just local willingness. Overall we hope that we've provided a mixture of suggestions; from small tweaks that can be made to suggestions of where more investment is needed.

Cycle Sisters' experience has been supporting one particular under-represented group, Muslim women, to discover cycling. Championing religious, race and gender equality within cycling is one part of the much broader area of diversity and inclusion in cycling. We are not claiming to be experts - just sharing our experience and hoping it is useful to others.

There are many other inspirational groups doing important work to increase diversity in cycling and we've included a resource list at the end of this guide where you can find out more.

Further training

We can provide further 1-to-1 training in any of the areas of this guide. Please get in touch to find out more.

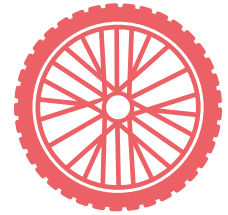
Feedback

We'd like this to be an evolving document which changes and grows with new ideas and perspectives. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

More info:

www.cyclesisters.org.uk





Beyond the infrastructure

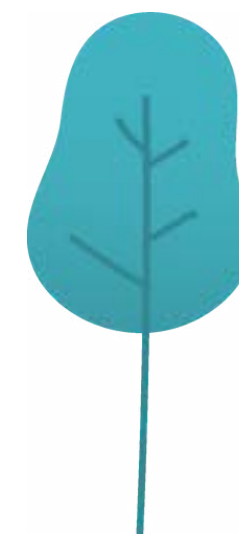
While there has rightly been much focus in recent years on improving cycle infrastructure as the primary way to increase cycling rates, **good infrastructure alone will not enable everyone to start cycling.** There are many other barriers and challenges experienced by communities currently under-represented in cycling which also require attention and investment.

TfL's research 'Cycling Potential in London's Diverse Communities' (2021) showed that **some groups experience secondary barriers** in addition to the primary concerns around safety and theft including social barriers (e.g. concern about unwanted attention) and personal barriers (e.g. don't like people seeing me cycle). We've included a summary of barriers to cycling experienced by Muslim women at the end of this guide.

The TfL research showed that Black, Asian and ethnic minority women, particularly younger women (16-34), are "strong targets to encourage into cycling."

73% of women never ride a bike and only 11% of women and 14% of ethnic minority groups cycle regularly.*

* Diversity in the Cycling Industry, Bicycle Association, 2023



Cycle Sisters' experience has shown that a **combination of community-based led group rides and cycle lessons can be highly effective** in supporting diverse communities to cycle. These community initiatives can offer the high level of tailored support which is often needed including skills development, relatable role models, access to bikes to try before you buy, advice and signposting.

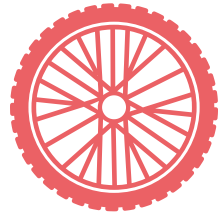
Our experience is backed up by the TfL research which indicated that guided cycle rides, cycling training, cycle hire schemes and role models would encourage more women from diverse communities to cycle.



“If it wasn't for Cycle Sisters I would never have tried cycling. The lycra-wearing, typical cyclist was so far removed from what I'd even try. I've gone from reluctant to giving it a go to cycling enthusiast and now owning my own bike and cycling with my family too. All without having to compromise what I'm wearing. Cycle Sisters has shown me how cycling can accommodate anyone.”

Aysha





Invest in Bikeability in the community

Free Bikeability cycle lessons are a crucial part of enabling under-represented communities to access cycling. Even with great cycle infrastructure in an area, many people lack the confidence to just go and get a bike and start cycling especially on the road. There are also many adults, more women than men, who did not learn to ride a bike when they were younger.

To complement the Bikeability programme in schools, it's essential to offer training for parents and other adults in the community to enable whole families to cycle together and to make travelling by bike a realistic choice.

Here's some ideas about how to make Bikeability lessons more accessible:

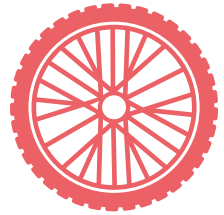
- **Look at the demographic make-up of the local instructor workforce.** In many areas there are far fewer female instructors and instructors from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Many women may feel more comfortable with a female instructor due to cultural, religious or other reasons. Make it clear that this can be requested when booking a lesson. Instructors from diverse backgrounds can be relatable role models who act as ambassadors and recruiters in their own communities to increase the take-up of cycle lessons among women and diverse communities.



“Becoming a cycle instructor was the perfect role for me. I hadn’t worked for more than 7 years due to bringing up my kids and was looking for a flexible job. Cycling has made a huge difference to my mental health and I wanted to empower other women. When they see me cycling in an abaya (full-length Islamic dress), they can relate to me because I come from the same background and they realise that they can do it too.”

Salma





Invest in Bikeability in the community

- **Offer free/subsidised and flexible instructor training** to help diversify the instructor workforce. Becoming an instructor can be a great, flexible work opportunity for different people including mums, but the cost of training to become an instructor can be prohibitive. Offering a bursary to subsidise the cost can open up the opportunity for a wider range of people. Ensuring that there are fair rates of pay and working conditions for instructors is also important to attract and retain the right people.
- For others, attending the four day training course during weekdays may clash with work, childcare or other commitments. Offer different options such as weekend courses to help to make the training more accessible and inclusive. Reach out into community groups to promote opportunities for instructor training and ask for help to identify suitable people.
- **Use diverse imagery to promote Bikeability lessons.** It's really important to use imagery which reflects the communities you would like to reach and challenges stereotypes around cycling. Feature people from different backgrounds and ages wearing everyday clothing and a mix of helmets / no helmets riding different types of bikes on different sorts of rides (leisure, commuting etc).
- **Be flexible around lesson numbers.** The standard number of two lessons is not sufficient for a complete beginner learning to ride a bike. It's also very challenging to fit levels 1, 2 and 3 into two lessons and get trainees to a point at which they can start doing independent journeys. Allowing instructors and training providers the flexibility to tailor lessons to people's needs would be much more effective and translate to higher levels of people cycling as a mode of transport.





Invest in Bikeability in the community

- **Review the data about who participates in Bikeability lessons and actively promote Bikeability lessons among communities who are under-represented.** Identify relevant social media accounts and community spaces as well as asking for support from local community leaders, cyclists and instructors. One of the most common things we hear is that people don't know that their local council offers free Bikeability lessons. People also aren't aware if there are bikes available to borrow, what the lesson will cover or how to go about arranging one. Consider sharing more detailed information, photos and videos about what cycle lessons involve to help to make the process less daunting.
- **Make free bikes available for lessons** in different parts of the borough/town. The cost and storage of a bike is one of the main

barriers to cycling. Making it possible to borrow a free bike for a lesson can help people to start their cycling journey and many people do go on to buy a bike once they know that cycling is something they enjoy and would like to do more regularly. Offering a range of sizes as well as non-standard cycles will also make the lessons more inclusive and enable people with different needs to be able to participate. Ideally these bikes would be located in parks which are accessible and well known locations for people to travel to as well as having suitable traffic-free space to teach beginners and level 1.

- **Consider offering a range of options** including 1 to 1 sessions and group sessions. We see a lot of demand for 1 to 1s due to the flexibility of organising them around

childcare and work commitments as well as being able to focus on individual needs and progress quicker. It can also feel less intimidating when learning to ride a bike from scratch if you can learn on a 1 to 1 basis. Other people really enjoy the social and motivation aspect of group sessions as well as giving more opportunity to practice their skills.



Cycle Lessons: Redbridge Council

Redbridge Council offers free 1-to-1 cycle training to residents who live, work or study in the borough.

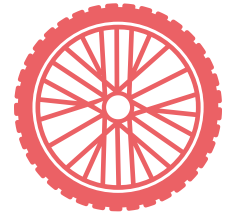
What works well:

- Pool of 10-15 well maintained adult bikes in addition to children's bikes which are available to use for lessons
- Bikes are stored at a park which is central in the borough, well known by residents and has parking available nearby
- Dedicated space at the park for instructors to use to deliver level 1 (basic bike handling skills) without having to share the space with other park users. Once trainees have mastered control of the bike, they can cycle around the paths in the park with their instructor to further build their confidence



“Exercise was never part of my upbringing and the thought of riding in the community scared me. I was not confident to cycle on the roads so joined Cycle Sisters who encouraged me to take lessons. I booked through the Council with one of Cycle Sisters’ instructors who I immediately felt comfortable with. I now feel much safer and confidently use my bike to cycle for commuting and running errands.”

Sana



Invest in schemes for bike access

The majority of women who join Cycle Sisters groups do not own a bike due to financial, storage or other reasons. Buying a bike is a big investment when you are starting out and don't know if cycling is something that you will do long term so it's important to offer different options.

Here's some ideas:

- **Operate a free hire scheme.** Invest in a pool of community bikes which can be hired out to local residents for free. You could also provide locks with the bikes and signpost hirers to free Bikeability training. These sorts of schemes give people the chance to try out a bike, figure out issues around storage at home and see how much use they get of it. By the end of the hire period, many hirers are keen to get their own bike!

- **Include non-standard cycles in the hire pool** including cargo bikes, other child-carrying equipment and cycles adapted for different needs and for people with disabilities. This opens up access to cycling for those who are unable to ride standard bikes or who have children or cargo to transport. These cycles are typically expensive to buy so being able to try different options first can help to give the confidence to invest in one.

Providing different options to access a bike is essential to open up cycling for more people.



Community Bike Hire: Waltham Forest Council

Waltham Forest Council has a free bike hire scheme for residents who are exploring the option of buying a bike.

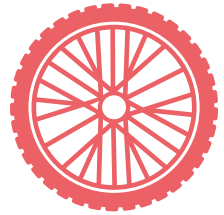
What works well:

- Bikes are free for local residents to hire (with a returnable deposit)
- Locks provided with bikes
- Hire period for 3 weeks (although longer periods are possible in the off-peak season)
- Standard bikes in adult and child sizes
- Range of electric and non-electric cargo bikes available
- Can book a free lesson with a Cycle Instructor to ride the bike home if not confident to do this independently



“Cycle Sisters told me about the council's free bike hire scheme. I wasn't working at the time so couldn't afford a bike. The hire bike was a life saver for me as I could travel easily while looking for work. After I got a new job I bought my own bike and started cycling to work. Since then I've got completely hooked and even bought a second bike last year so I can do longer rides!”

Joyce



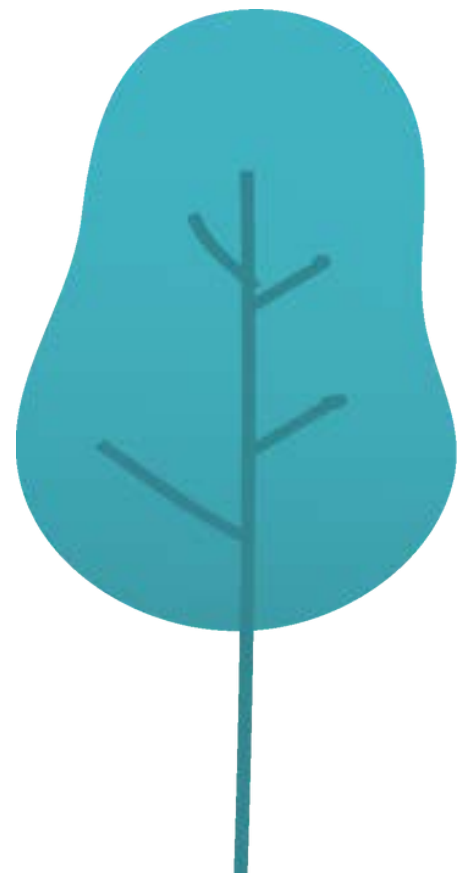
Invest in schemes for bike access

- **Run free Dr Bike sessions at community locations** so people can have their bikes checked over by trained mechanics. Simple issues can be fixed on the spot and advice given as to the likely cost for any other required work. Often a Dr Bike check can be enough to get a bike that has been lying in a shed back into working order and ready to ride. Dr Bike events can be held in community spaces such as mosque or temple car parks to make them accessible for communities that you would like to reach.
- **Help people to buy affordable and quality bikes:** Many people don't know where to start when buying a bike and access to schemes which offer good quality second hand bikes can be a big help. Peddle My Wheels partners with councils in London to run second hand bike markets where

people can donate unwanted bikes to be serviced and sold at future markets. The 'Try Before you Bike' Scheme offers the chance to hire a bike for a monthly fee which is then refunded if you decide to buy the bike which you can do in monthly installments.

- **Run free/subsidised basic bike maintenance classes** at community venues to help equip people with the confidence and skills they need to look after and maintain their bikes themselves. For many people, the fear of not knowing what to do if they get a puncture can prevent them from cycling by themselves or travelling too far from home which limits the opportunities to cycle for transport.

- **Provide on-street secure bike storage options** especially for those who live in accommodation without gardens or private outdoor space. Cycle hangar schemes, with a reasonable annual hire rate for a space, can help to overcome the barrier of storage. Bike storage is still particularly challenging for large families or those who need non-standard cycles and more thought needs to be given to how future planning can accommodate these needs.



2nd Hand Bike Market: Hounslow Council

Hounslow Council partnered with Peddle My Wheels to run a series of second hand bike markets.

What works well:

- Bike markets take place in a well known community location on a weekend
- Bikes have all been serviced and are in a good condition and priced reasonably
- Market staff give advice and support to help people choose a bike which is right for them
- Markets promoted via local community groups with some groups organising a led ride to the market on the day



“I really wanted to buy a bike but didn’t want to spend too much money as I wasn’t sure how much I’d use it. I found out about the bike market through Cycle Sisters and it was great! The team was so helpful, encouraging me to try a few different bikes and explaining the differences. The bikes were in good working order and really reasonably priced. I can’t wait to start cycling to work!”

Raafia



Support community cycle groups

Cycle groups which are led and run by communities can open up cycling for a range of people from under-represented backgrounds. These groups create a safe and empowering space for people to try cycling and access the right support.

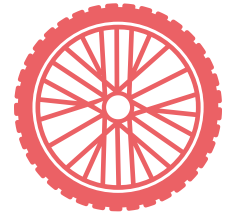
This infographic shows the key features of Cycle Sisters' community cycle groups model which could be replicated for other communities.



“Cycle Sisters being ladies-only and accommodating of Muslim women is a Godsend! I have hardly ridden a bike since I was a child and getting older it felt more awkward - I never felt comfortable, I felt self-conscious with my hijab (headscarf). I like that it's set in a park and on a Sunday morning when it is usually quieter too. The provision of bikes and helmets for free is just brilliant - the whole thing is amazing!”

Faaria





Support community cycle groups

Here's some ideas about how local authorities can support community cycle groups to develop and grow:

- **Partner with local community groups to offer cycling activities** such as organising Bikeability lessons at or near their venue. Working with community leaders and at community venues can make a significant difference in the take up of cycling activities by making them more acceptable and accessible.
- **Allow groups to be community-led** without being prescriptive about how or when they run their rides or activities. Communities know their own needs best and how to organise their activities in a way that will be most effective in engaging their audience. For example, Cycle Sisters times our rides to start after the morning school run and end before the lunchtime prayer.

- **Develop a mailing list of local cycle groups and key individuals** and use this to communicate about local cycling-related activities and signpost to useful opportunities including external funding opportunities. Offering practical support for funding applications alongside written letters of support can be really useful for groups applying for funding for the first time. Some groups may need help to connect with a community organisation who could act as the host partner to accept funds on their behalf if they aren't yet formally registered. Make sure you have a specific contact person within the council for groups to communicate with. This can be an active travel officer or any other officer in charge of cycling-related issues.



Mosque Cycle Lessons

Waltham Forest Council

Fatima Elizabeth Phrontistery secured a grant from Transport for London's Walking & Cycling Grants. In partnership with Waltham Forest Council, cycle lessons for children were facilitated at a local mosque.

What works well:

- Bikes stored at the mosque to enable children who don't have a bike to participate
- Lessons delivered by instructors from a Muslim background who built a relationship with the mosque
- Male and female instructors so the group could be split by gender to suit cultural preferences
- Lessons incorporated into established daily routines during madrasah (Islamic supplementary school) sessions so parents dropped and picked up at usual times
- Lessons delivered in a familiar and well known community space



“When the mosque offered cycle lessons during madrasah hours, I jumped at the chance! Having Muslim instructors made a big difference as they talked to the kids about how cycling is connected with Islam by looking after our health and the environment. The kids became really confident in cycling on the roads and felt inspired by what they had learnt!”

Rukaiya



Support community cycle groups

- **Make bikes available for groups to borrow for their rides** and be responsible for storing, insuring and maintaining the bikes. This is often what community groups need the most as the cost and time resource of providing bikes themselves isn't practical. We've found that 2-3 bikes is a good place to start with 6-10 bikes being ideal as groups grow. Bikes with step-through and smaller frames are particularly useful for women's cycle groups. Bike access needs to be easy (i.e. groups given their own access rather than needing to rely on a council staff member to be present) and bikes stored in an accessible location which is convenient for people to reach by public transport.
- **Support groups with essential equipment** such as helmets, pumps and Ride Leader packs (containing puncture repair equipment, spare inner tubes, first aid kits etc) which can be stored with the bikes as

well as free training to help get a group up and running such as Ride Leader training, first aid and basic bike maintenance.

- **Offer to promote and publicise the group's activities** through council channels such as website, social media and events. Bear in mind some groups may not want promotion as they may end up unable to meet the demand or may prefer to grow more slowly and organically.
- **Offer added value activities that support cycling** in the local area such as mass community bike rides or "Try Out Cycling" days (with Dr Bikes, cargo bike trials, community cycle group stalls and other fun cycling activities).

- **Consult with groups about local cycling strategy** including any new proposed infrastructure developments. Community-based cycle groups will have unique insights which are important for decision-makers to hear right from the start of the planning process. Consultation can also help secure support for any changes from within communities who are likely to be using the infrastructure. By listening to the voices of under-represented communities, local cycling strategy and investment decisions can become much more inclusive in the long-term.



Bikes for Community Groups: Lambeth Council

Lambeth Council has purchased a number of bikes which it makes available for community groups and instructors to use for lessons and rides. Buying a pool of bikes represents a relatively small investment but can yield significant impact in enabling under-represented groups to start cycling.

What works well:

- Bikes in a range of sizes available, additional smaller frames purchased when requested
- Bikes stored in an accessible unit in a well known park which serves as meeting point for rides
- Council covers cost of bike maintenance and insurance
- Volunteers from the group are given keys to access the bikes (without requiring council staff to be present)



"Being able to borrow a bike for each ride made cycling accessible for me otherwise I would never have gone along or realised that I can do it. Because of Cycle Sisters I have felt brave enough to buy my own bike and I am finally becoming more active. I am slowly gaining the confidence to go on roads on my own and hope to be cycling to work soon."

Wesam

“I always used to borrow one of the council bikes for the rides, which was a great way to get started without having to commit to buying a bike, but I needed to buy a bike with a child seat after having my daughter. I got some great advice from Cycle Sisters and finally, two years after starting cycling, I bought my first bike. I loved that bike so much!”

Maryam

Read more of Maryam's story [here](#).





Support community cycle groups

- **Use inclusive imagery on any council promotional material about cycling.** You could arrange for a professional photographer to join a community cycle group ride to take some photos which both the council and cycle group can use to create a more diverse image library.

A lack of role models is one of the key reasons that many people from diverse communities don't see cycling as something for them.

- **Identify funding to support community cycling initiatives** and run a grants scheme to give people access to funding to get their group off the ground or to keep their existing activities running. It can often be harder to find funding for existing work than to start up a new project so being open to this is helpful. The application and reporting processes should be simple and reasonable in line with the amount of funding being requested.



Grants Scheme:

Waltham Forest Council

Waltham Forest Council runs an annual grant scheme for local community groups to apply for cycling and walking projects.

What works well:

- Can apply for up to £3000 for a local project which encourages walking or cycling
- Pre-application advice offered through drop-in sessions
- Simple application and reporting process
- Groups do not have to be registered or constituted allowing for informal community groups to access funding
- Repeat applications are permitted including to fund ongoing activities
- Quick turnaround so that groups know the outcome of the funding soon after they apply
- Can include staffing and project management time



Cycle Sisters has received funding from this grant scheme for several projects including running our weekly rides for Muslim women and a 'Teen Bikers' project to offer rides for teen girls in the borough. The council's active travel team provided support to promote the projects through council social media channels.

“Cycle Sisters has given me the opportunity to become a confident cyclist, an activity I would not have been inclined toward in the past at all! It’s only because it was a free women's group and I was able to borrow a bike that I thought I'd give it a go. My children also cycle now and I've got a few other family members who are thinking of taking it up. My cycling has even made other people I know look at the 'mini Holland' scheme with a more positive outlook. Rather than seeing it as a traffic disturbance and nuisance, they can see the safety it offers to me personally.”

Salma



Barriers to cycling

In the following pages, we've shared some of the key barriers to cycling faced by Muslim women based on the experiences of our riders. When thinking about barriers, it's important to remember that everyone's individual experience is different and not to generalise or make assumptions. Many of these barriers are also shared with other communities.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Fear of cycling safely on the roads	Group rides with trained Ride Leaders give people confidence to cycle on the roads. Bikeability cycle lessons can further develop skills in road confidence. Connect with local cycling campaign groups, speak to local council and ensure that the voices of under-represented communities are heard by those planning cycling infrastructure.
Concerns around social safety, racism and Islamophobia	Ride Leaders and other group members act as role models and demonstrate that people from all backgrounds can cycle. Riding in a group can feel safer especially when starting out. Encourage riders to report any racist or Islamophobic incidents they experience.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Lack of equipment or storage facilities	Offer free bikes to borrow for group rides and signpost people to local initiatives such as bike hire and storage schemes, second hand bike shops and Dr Bike events. Make helmets optional on rides and be clear that no specialist clothing is required.
Lack of skills and confidence to cycle	Group rides provide a safe and supportive space for people to try cycling and build skills. Train and support Muslim women to become Cycle Instructors and signpost riders to Bikeability cycle lessons to learn to ride a bike or cycle on the roads.
Not seeing yourself represented in cycling	Muslim women in leadership roles such as Ride Leaders and Cycle Instructors as well as other group members act as visible role models who people can relate to. Share photos, videos and stories on social media to reach a wider audience and reinforce the message that anyone can cycle.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Concerns around what to wear to cycle and perception that you have to wear lycra and tight-fitting clothing	Groups provide a space where wearing Islamic and looser/modest clothing is the norm. Ride Leaders and other group members demonstrate that you can wear all sorts of clothing to cycle and share tips and advice.
Negative cultural attitudes towards cycling	Muslim identity of groups helps individuals and their families to feel comfortable. Work in partnership with community leaders and institutions such as mosques to promote and normalise cycling.
Don't feel comfortable to join existing cycle groups or have had negative experiences of being excluded	Logistics of rides meet needs e.g. women-only spaces, timed around prayers, cafe stops rather than pubs, shorter rides or break during Ramadan. Group provides a safe and supportive space where people don't have to compromise or justify values or lifestyle choices and women know they won't feel like an outsider.



This is not an exhaustive list - it is inspiring to see more and more diverse cycle groups starting up all the time. If there are other groups that would be useful to include on this list, please email us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

Muslim cycling initiatives

[Brothers on Bikes](#)
[Cycling Sisters Bristol](#)
[Evolve](#)
[Fasted500](#)
[Gapped Podcast](#)
[Muslim Women Cyclists Facebook group](#)
[Nuhiha](#)
[Saheli Hub](#)

Community Cycling Groups

[Black Cyclists Network](#)
[Black Women on Wheels](#)
[Black Unity Bike Ride](#)
[Colour Collective](#)
[CycleOut London](#)
[Cycle Together](#)

[Freedom50](#)
[Hop On](#)
[JoyRiders](#)
[Londra Bisiklet Kulubu](#)
[Pride Out](#)
[Ride on Sistas](#)
[Sikh Cycling Network](#)
[The Bike Project](#)
[Together We Ride](#)
[Velociposse](#)
[Wheels for All](#)
[Wheels For Wellbeing](#)
[Women of Colour Cycling Collective](#)
[Women on Wheels](#)

Reports & Research

[A Guide for Inclusive Cycling](#), Wheels for Wellbeing, 2021
[Active Travel Podcast](#) - various episodes on different diversity topics
[Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cities and towns](#), Sustrans, 2020
[Cycling Potential in London's Diverse Communities](#), TfL, 2021
[Diversity in Cycling 2nd edition](#), Andy Edwards, 2022
[Diversity in the Cycling Industry](#), Bicycle Association, 2023
[Does more cycling mean more diversity in cycling?](#) Dr Rachel Aldred, James Woodcock & Anna Goodman, 2015



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