Office for Equality and Opportunity

Easy Read

How equality laws work and how they could change

What we found out





Easy Read

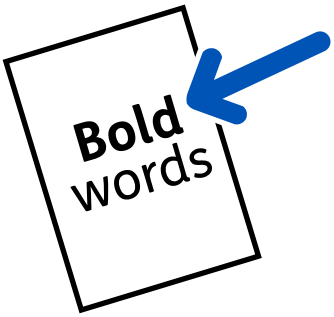


This is an Easy Read version of some information.

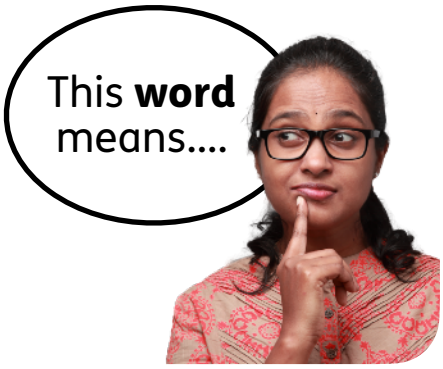
It uses easier words and pictures.



Some people may still want help to read it.



Some words are **bold** to show they are important.



We explain bold words if they are hard to understand.

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About this booklet

Office for Equality and Opportunity

This booklet is from the Office for **Equality** and **Opportunity**.
We are part of the **government**.



The **government** is in charge of running the country.



Equality means being fair and making sure everyone has the same chances in life.



Opportunity means having chances to do better in life.



We decided to look at the laws about equality to see how they work in the real world.



This booklet will tell you more about what we found out.

How we looked into the laws



We want information from lots of different types of people and organisations.

For example:



- People who do **research**.

  Research is when people collect information to help them think about problems and find ways to fix them.



- People who teach or do research at a university.

We also want information from:



- People who are interested in or affected by equality laws and barriers to work.



- **Employers**.

  An **employer** is an organisation or person that gives people jobs.



- **Public authorities**.

  Public authorities are organisations owned or run by the government.



- Organisations that support people affected by equality laws and barriers to work.



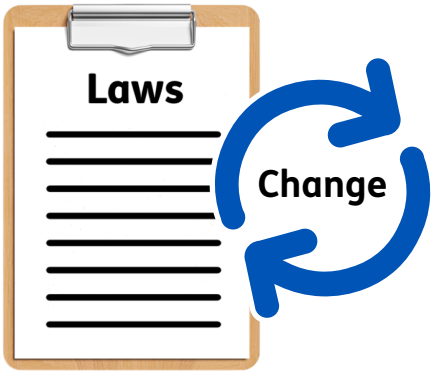
We asked people and organisations from 7 April 2025 to 30 June 2025.



A company called **Fortia Insight** wrote a report about what everyone told us.

Fortia Insight is not part of the government.

The main things we asked about



We asked people and organisations about equality laws and changes the government could make to equality laws.

The main areas were:



1. **Equal pay** - this means you are paid the same amount, or you have the same **workplace benefits**, as other people who do the same job as you, or a job that is just as important.

   Workplace benefits are things like holidays and sick leave.



The main areas were also:



2. **Pay transparency** - this is when you share information about pay with other people in your organisation or the public.



3. **Combined discrimination** - this is when you are treated worse compared to someone else because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that you have.
   For example, if you are a disabled woman.

The main areas were also:



4. **Public Sector Equality Duty** - this is a law that says **public authorities** and **non-public bodies** that do **public functions** must make sure their services are fair, and they must treat their employees fairly.



Public authorities are organisations owned or run by the government.



Non-public bodies are organisations that are not owned or run by the government.



Public functions means work that is for the public.



The main areas were also:

5. **Sexual harassment at work** - this is when someone does or says something sexual to you that you do not want.





6. How we can start using the **Socio-Economic Duty** in England.

   The **Socio-Economic Duty** is a law that says public authorities must think about how they can help people who are **socioeconomically disadvantaged** when they make plans for things like education, health services and housing.



   Socioeconomically disadvantaged means you have less support and fewer chances in life. This will affect you affording the things you need, and getting a good job or education.

How we make sure people are being paid fairly

Equal pay



We found out that some people are paid a lower amount for their work than other people who are doing the same work, or work that is just as important.



This often applies to women, disabled people and people from **ethnic minorities**.

Ethnic minorities are groups of people of the same ethnicity in a place where most other people are a different **ethnicity**.



Your **ethnicity** means where you or your family were born or what culture you are part of.
In the UK, people who are not White British are ethnic minorities.

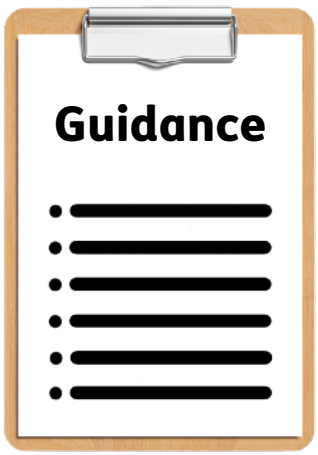


For example, more women are cleaners, and they might be paid less than other jobs that men do.

Some people and organisations told us that:



- The laws do not do enough to stop this from happening.

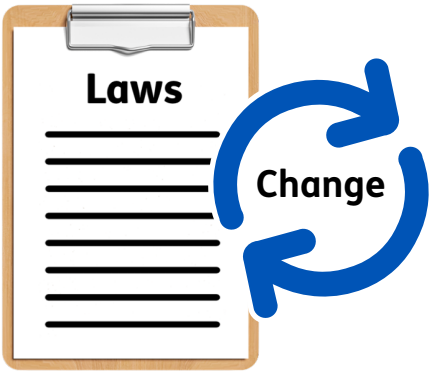


- There needs to be clearer guidance about what **employers** must do to pay people fairly.

  Employers are organisations or people who give people jobs.



Most people and organisations said that the law about **equal pay** works better for women than for disabled people or people from ethnic minorities.



They said there needs to be changes in the law about equal pay to make it clearer for everyone to understand.



Disabled people often have to spend their own money on the support they need to do their job.



This is unfair as it means some disabled people have less money than people who are not disabled.



The ways that disabled people can get support with pay are not always clear.



It should be clearer how the law can support disabled people to get equal pay.



People and organisations told us that **outsourced workers** sometimes get worse pay than staff who are not outsourced workers.

Outsourced workers are paid by another person or company to do work that could be done by staff in an organisation.



Outsourced workers are more likely to be women or from an ethnic minority background.

People and organisations told us that:



- Some organisations use outsourced workers as they can pay them less.



- We need to make it clear how much outsourced workers should be paid compared to other workers.



- We need to give outsourced workers more ways to make sure they get paid equally.

Making sure that employers give equal pay



Most people and organisations told us that no one is properly checking if companies are following the laws about equal pay.



They said the organisations that check this may not have enough money or staff.



Things which help make sure employers give equal pay are:

- The legal powers that the organisations that check equal pay have.

Things which help make sure employers give equal pay are also:



- Group claims for equal pay, which are supported by **trade unions**.

  Trade unions are groups of people who work together to try to make their workplace better for everyone.



- Challenging organisations in an **employment tribunal** or **court** to make them give equal pay.



An **employment tribunal** is a legal body that makes decisions about problems between employers and employees.



A **court** is an official place where a person called a judge decides whether laws have been broken.



People and organisations told us we should set up a special organisation called the **Equal Pay Enforcement Unit.**



This unit would help us to bring together trade unions and charities to challenge unequal pay.

Pay transparency



Remember, **pay transparency** is when you share information about pay with other people in your organisation or the public.

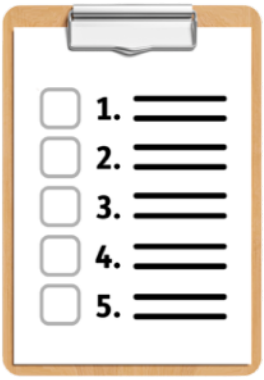


People and organisations told us that when employers tell people what they pay, it is more likely that they pay people equally.

Some good examples of this are:



- Having set pay for certain jobs, which everyone knows the amount of.



Some good examples of this are also:

- Grading jobs, so it is clear when someone should be paid more.



- Having leaders in organisations who support being open about pay.



Some people and organisations said it is hard to:

- Show all of the information about what different groups of people get paid.

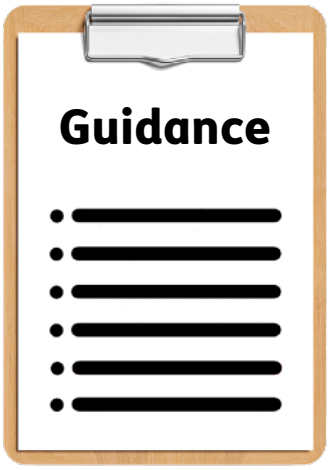


- Check equal pay in certain jobs where the pay is different depending on the employer.

People and organisations suggested that we could:



- Make employers have to tell us about how much less pay disabled people and people from ethnic minorities get.



- Give clearer guidance from the government about how employers should tell the public what they pay people.



- Do this in stages to support smaller employers to make the changes they need to.

Checking that employers give equal pay



Some people think the law about checking if employers give their staff equal pay does not work very well.



Tribunals may not want to tell employers to check what they pay people.

It is difficult to make employers do a check of their pay.

People suggested that the government could:



- Have random checks of what employers pay their workers.



- Make employers share what they pay people with the public.



- Give powers to the organisations that check pay to start checking if they think there is a **risk** of unequal pay.

  A **risk** is something that could go wrong.

Checking the pay of disabled people and people from ethnic minorities



Many people and organisations told us they supported checking how much employers pay disabled people and people from ethnic minorities.



But people and organisations also said we need to change how the whole system of checking pay works.

People and organisations said it may be difficult to check because:



- There are not good processes for how employers are checked at the moment.



- It might take more time and money to do the extra checks.

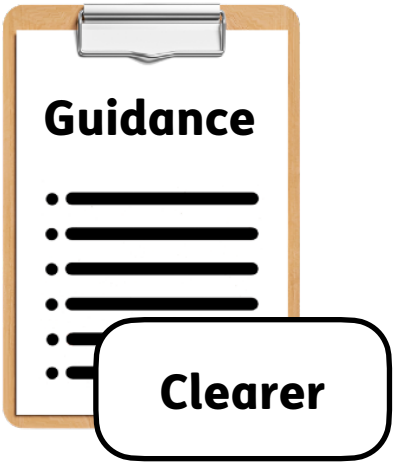


- It might be difficult to collect the information.



- Employers may not have people who know how to look into the information about equal pay.

People and organisations told us that:



- There needs to be clearer guidance on what the law says about checking pay.



- Employers should be checked in the same way.



- There should be support for certain types of employers that provide a certain type of service.

Combined discrimination



Remember, **combined discrimination** is when you are treated worse compared to someone else because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that you have. For example, if you are a disabled woman.

The protected characteristics here are:



- Sex - this is whether you are male or female.



- Disability.

The protected characteristics are also:



- Sexual orientation - this is who you are attracted to.



- Race - this is where you are from and the colour of your skin.



- Religion or belief.



- Age.



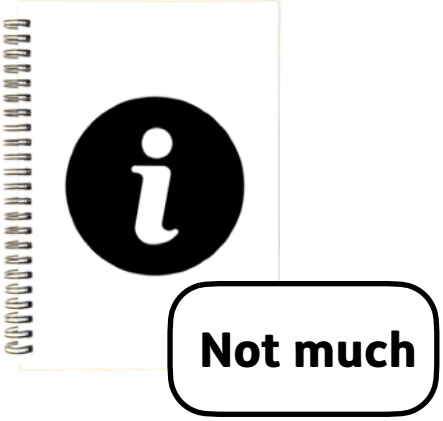
- Gender reassignment - this is when you are thinking about, are changing, or have changed the sex you were born with. This might include changes to your body but does not need to.



Most people and organisations told us that people face being treated worse because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that they have.



This is often because of ideas people have about people from certain backgrounds.



People and organisations told us that there is not very much information about this, so it is hard to deal with.



They said there needs to be ways to find out information about people being treated worse than others because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that they have.

Protection in the law



Most people and organisations told us that the law does not do enough to deal with people being treated worse than others because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that they have.



Some people believed that in reality they can only show that they were treated worse compared to other people for each protected characteristic separately.



For example, if you were treated worse because you are a disabled woman, you would need to show that you were treated worse as a disabled person and also treated worse as a woman.



So if they want to complain about being treated unfairly, they believe they have to complain more than once.



This can make it harder and more expensive for people to complain about being treated worse than others.

Getting support when unfairness happens



People and organisations told us that it is hard for someone to get support and put things right if they are treated worse than others.

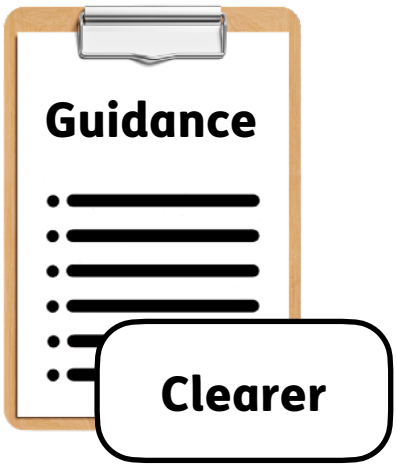


Trade unions and community services played an important part in making sure people got the support they needed.



People and organisations told us that we should improve how much **legal aid** people can get to help them go to court to put things right.

Legal aid is money from the government to help people pay for the lawyers they need in court.

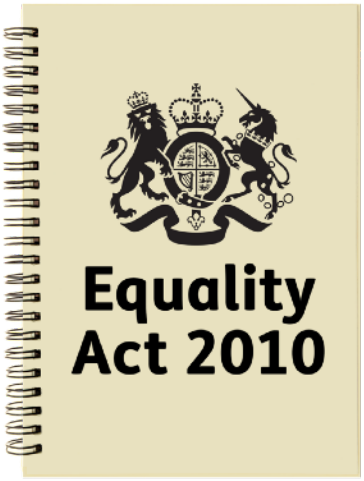


People and organisations also told us we need to:

- Make clearer guidance for people who go to tribunals to sort out problems with being treated worse than others.



- Give more information to the public about how people can be treated worse than others because of a mixture of 2 or more protected characteristics that they have.



Some people and organisations supported using part of the **Equality Act** to make it easier to put things right.

The **Equality Act** is a law that protects people from discrimination.



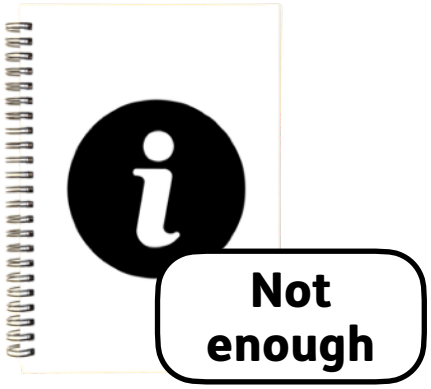
But many people and organisations think that this would only partly work, as it only covers discrimination.

Other issues people and organisations told us

Some people and organisations said they cannot complain about what they have faced in their lives because:



- Tribunals are not accessible.



- There is not enough information about the problems they face.



Some people and organisations said that services in local communities were better at putting things right than larger services.

Public Sector Equality Duty



This part is about how we can make sure that the Public Sector Equality Duty is met by everyone working in public authorities.



Remember, the **Public Sector Equality Duty** is a law that says **public authorities** and **non-public bodies** that do **public functions** must make sure their services are fair, and they must treat their employees fairly.



Public authorities are organisations owned or run by the government.



Non-public bodies are organisations that are not owned or run by the government.



Public functions means work that is for the public.



We call the Public Sector Equality Duty **PSED** for short in this booklet.

The PSED says public authorities and non-public bodies must:



- Stop discrimination - this is when you are treated badly because of one of your protected characteristics.



- Make sure everyone has the same chances.



- Help different groups get on well with each other.

They must do this for their employees and when they:



- Do their daily work.



- Write their plans.



- Run public services.

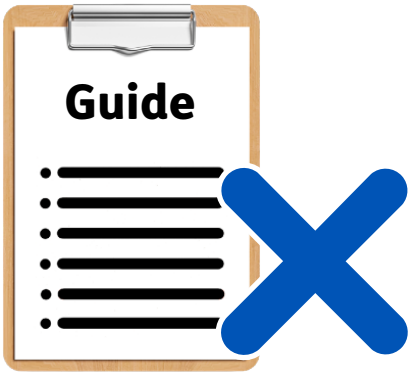


People and organisations said that non-public bodies are not all following the PSED in the same way.



When the law is not followed well, this can make people be left out from services.

Public authorities and non-public bodies told us that things which stop them from following the PSED include:

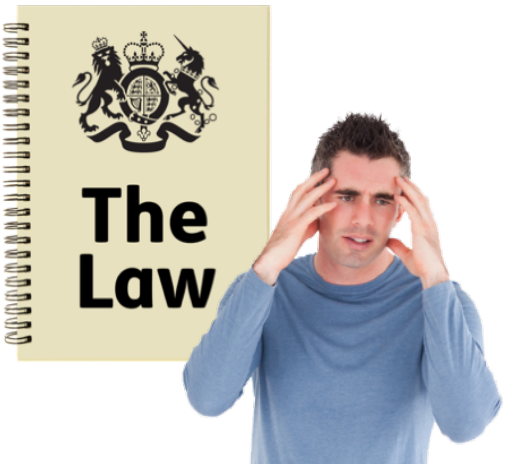


- Having no formal guide or template to follow.



- Not knowing enough about them, especially in small organisations.

Public authorities and non-public bodies told us that things which stop them from following the PSED also include:



- Not understanding the law fully.

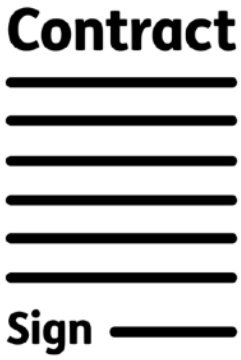


- Not being checked to see if they are following the rules.

Public authorities and non-public bodies told us that the things which could help them to follow the rules are:



- Putting clear rules in **contracts** that public authorities and non-public bodies are given.



A **contract** is a written agreement that says what organisations must do.



- Being checked to see if they are following the rules.

Public authorities and non-public bodies told us that the things which could also help them to follow the rules are:



- Having training on following the PSED.



- Stronger relationships between those who agree to a contract.



- Having staff whose job is to check equality.



Ways of checking that non-public bodies are following the PSED are said not to be working very well.

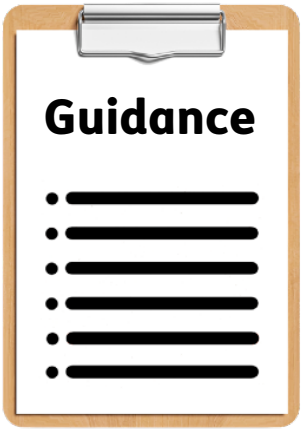


People and organisations said that non-public bodies are not usually challenged when they break the PSED.



People often do not take public authorities and non-public bodies to court because it is too expensive and difficult.

People and organisations suggested some more ways that could help non-public bodies follow the PSED, like:



- Guidance for certain types of public authorities and non-public bodies.



- Giving better ways to put things right if people have been treated unfairly.



- More training and support for smaller public authorities and non-public bodies.

People and organisations suggested some more ways that could help non-public bodies follow the PSED, like:



- Giving more support to public authorities and non-public bodies that support **vulnerable** people, like care homes or prisons.

  Vulnerable means you might need help and support to stay safe and well.

Sexual harassment at work



Sexual harassment is when someone does or says something sexual to you that you do not want.



Harassment is when someone does or says something that can make you feel scared, distressed, or very embarrassed.
Being upset or a little bit offended is not the same as harassment.

For example, sexual harassment might be:



- Saying sexual things to you or sending you sexual messages.



- Asking you questions about your body.



- Touching the private parts of your body or kiss you.



- Asking for sex.



People and organisations told us employers can help stop sexual harassment by using clear rules, introducing ways to report bad behaviour and giving their staff training.



Some people and organisations told us that **volunteers** should also be covered by these rules about sexual harassment.

Volunteers are people who work for free.



People and organisations had different ideas about how this would work.



The government might need to change the law and set up new guidance to help with this.

People and organisations told us that the government needs to do other things to protect people from sexual harassment, like:



- Improving the information they share with the public about sexual harassment.

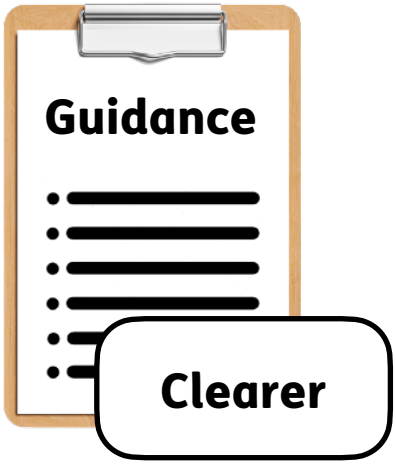


- Improving support services for people from different backgrounds.

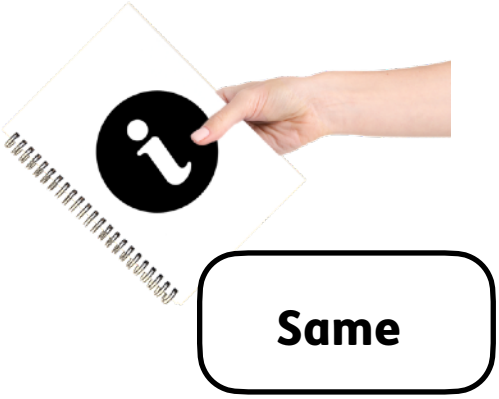
People and organisations also told us that the government needs to do other things to protect people from sexual harassment, like:



- Improving how employers work with trade unions to make workplaces safer.



- Making clearer guidance about how the law works.



- Making all companies share information about harassment in their workplace.



They also told us the government needs to change the Equality Act to make it stronger in how it protects people.



People also told us there are gaps in who the law protects from sexual harassment.



This included:

- People who work for themselves, who are called freelancers.



- Protection for employees from harassment from **third parties**.

  A **third party** is someone who does not work with you, for example, a customer in a shop or a patient in a hospital.

How we can start using the Socio-Economic Duty



Remember, the **Socio-Economic Duty** is a law that says public authorities must think about how they can help people who are **socioeconomically disadvantaged** when they make plans for things like education, health services and housing.



Remember, **Socioeconomically disadvantaged** means you have less support and fewer chances in life. This will affect you affording the things you need, and getting a good job or education.



Scotland and Wales already use the socio-economic duty.



People and organisations told us how that works with planning, contracts and following guides.



Some said that this can help to improve services and support for people.



However, some said that things like the duty not being used in the same way by all organisations mean there are mixed results when using the duty.

Organisations told us things that stop public authorities from using the duty well in Scotland and Wales include:



- That public authorities are not usually challenged when they do not follow the duty.



- Not understanding the duty or confusing it with the PSED.

People and organisations gave us ways to improve how the duty works, for example:



- Giving public authorities guidance on how to follow the law.



- Being checked to see if they are following the duty.



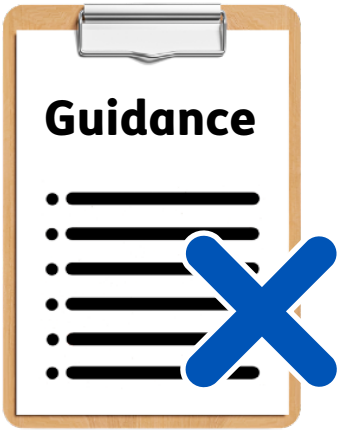
Public authorities in England do not have to use the duty yet.



But more and more are choosing to use the duty anyway.



Some people and organisations told us that public authorities may not follow the law fully and just do it for show.



It was also raised that it was difficult to apply the duty in England because there is no guidance from the government.

They said things that stop public authorities from applying the duty include:



- Where the public authority is based.



- Not being able to get the information or technology they need.



- Confusing words being used in the duty.



- People with fewer opportunities and a harder standard of living having low confidence.

People and organisations gave us ways to improve how it works, for example:



- Change the law to make all public authorities start using the duty.



- Give public authorities guidance on how to follow the law.



- Having words that are clearly explained.

People and organisations gave us other ways to improve how it works, for example:



- Better ways to get information and use technology.



- Work with people who have fewer opportunities and a harder standard of living to find the best way to follow the law.



- Tell everyone about how well we are doing and how the laws are working in real life.