What are protected characteristics?

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of:

* [age](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#age)
* [disability](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#disability)
* [gender reassignment](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#reassignment)
* [marriage and civil partnership](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#marriage)
* [pregnancy and maternity](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#pregmat)
* [race](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#race)
* [religion or belief](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#rob)
* [sex](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#sex)
* [sexual orientation](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics#lgb)

These are called protected characteristics.

**You are protected under the**[**Equality Act 2010**](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010)**from these types of discrimination.**

Age

A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).

See our advice and guidance on [age discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/age-discrimination).

Disability

A person has a disability if she or he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

See our [disability advice and guidance](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/disability-advice-and-guidance) section.

Gender reassignment

The process of transitioning from one gender to another.

See our advice and guidance on [gender reassignment discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/gender-reassignment-discrimination).

Marriage and civil partnership

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple.

Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

See our advice and guidance on [marriage and civil partnership discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/marriage-and-civil-partnership-discrimination).

Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Find out more about our work on [pregnancy and maternity in the workplace](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/node/5916).

Race

Refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

See our advice and guidance on [race discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/race-discrimination).

Religion and belief

Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.

See our guidance on [religion or belief at work](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/religion-or-belief-work).

Sex

A man or a woman.

See our [guidance on sex discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/sex-discrimination).

Sexual orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

See our advice and guidance on [sexual orientation discrimination](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/sexual-orientation-discrimination).

Equality Act

Find out more about the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010), which provides the legal framework to tackle disadvantage and discrimination.