

The EU Equal Treatment Directive 2000/78/EC

Costs to the economy – first year implementation costs of £310 million, with subsequent annual costs of £84.5 million. ([Government Impact Assessment](#))

Talking Points

Freedom of expression, thought and speech are at risk

As the directive provides equal treatment for ‘religion and belief’, it will criminalise certain views and belief systems. Defining harassment as “the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment” ([Christian Legal Centre](#)), means one can be criminalised for espousing a belief that can make someone feel uncomfortable. This will undoubtedly affect Christian organisations that object to certain types of behaviour, e.g. homosexuality. It could also extend to political parties and campaign groups.

The presumption of innocence is removed

The Equality Bill extends the law of ‘indirect discrimination’, including the presumption of guilt, to far more cases, including age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. (David Green, Director of Civitas, the [Telegraph](#) 11 May 2009)

What is it?

A directive to ensure equal treatment for all citizens in the European Union. This follows on from equal treatment provisions laid down in the Equal Treatment Directive 2000/78/EC.

There are already EU Directives prohibiting discrimination and harassment on all the equality grounds in employment and vocational training; and on grounds of race and gender in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The directive proposes extending protection from discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services to cover disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief outside of employment.

The UK is transposing the directive into law through the Equality Bill. The [bill aims](#) to:

- Compel companies to be aware of socio-economic disadvantage when taking strategic decisions.
- Extend the protection for people against *victimisation* and *harassment*.
- Extend the exemption of political parties from the bill, so as to allow all women and ethnic minority shortlists for parliamentary candidate selection.
- Ban secrecy clauses so companies reveal how much they pay men and women.
- Monitor the gender, ethnic, socio-economic make up of public bodies.

Third Party Opinions

“As the Directive covers religion, belief, disability, age and sexual orientation, it is inevitable that circumstances will arise where the right to equal treatment under the directive will involve competing rights, either within a protected characteristic or between them, given the incompatibility of some of the beliefs concerned.” [The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales](#)

“In each case we have quoted a range of figures because it is difficult to accurately estimate what changes in legislation might cost.” [UK Government Impact Assessment](#) on the Equality Bill