

Religion or belief discrimination

What the law says

Religion or belief is one of 9 'protected characteristics' covered by discrimination law (Equality Act 2010).

Religion or belief discrimination includes direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Religion or belief discrimination can happen in any area of work. It can result from decisions made at work or from how people behave towards each other.

It could be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident. It can happen in the workplace, at work social events or when people are working remotely.

What religion or belief mean by law

The Equality Act 2010 says that:

- religion means any religion
- belief means any religious or philosophical belief

Not having a religion or belief has the same legal protection as having a religion or belief.

The law does not give a list of religions or beliefs. An employment tribunal can decide if someone's beliefs are protected by the law.

Religion

A religion must have a clear structure and belief system. It could be:

- a well-known organised religion
- a smaller religion with not many followers

Belief

A philosophical belief must be all of the following:

- genuinely held
- not just an opinion or point of view based on current information
- about a significant aspect of human life and behaviour
- clear, consistent, serious and important
- acceptable in a democratic society – it must respect other people's fundamental rights

Employment tribunals have previously found some beliefs to be protected by law. For example:

- ethical veganism – a moral view that animals must not be exploited or treated badly
- environmentalism – beliefs related to the need to tackle climate change and protect the environment
- gender critical beliefs – the belief that a person cannot change their sex

Employment tribunals have previously found the following not to be protected by law:

- loyalty to a country
- supporting a sports team
- membership of a political party

Someone's political beliefs could still be protected if they meet the definition of philosophical belief.

Who is protected by religion or belief discrimination law

Religion or belief discrimination law protects:

- anyone with a religion
- anyone with a religious or philosophical belief
- those who do not hold a religion or belief

At work, the law protects the following people against discrimination:

- employees and workers
- contractors and self-employed people hired to personally do the work
- job applicants
- former employees

A person could experience discrimination from someone else with the same religion or belief. For example someone who:

- is more orthodox than them
- belongs to a different sect within the same religion

Having a religion or belief protected by law does not mean you can discriminate against someone with another protected characteristic.

Understanding more about discrimination

If you need more general discrimination advice, you can read [discrimination and the Equality Act 2010](#). This includes advice on employer responsibilities and on other protected characteristics.

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about religion or belief discrimination at work, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).