

Sex discrimination

The law on sex discrimination

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

Sex discrimination includes direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Sex discrimination can happen in any area of work. It can result from decisions made at work or from sexist behaviour.

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.

How the law defines sex

Important: In April 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that sex in the Equality Act 2010 refers to 'biological sex'. This will usually mean the sex recorded on someone's original birth certificate. We'll update this section of our advice when the legal position is clearer.

The law (Equality Act 2010) defines sex using the terms man and woman.

Someone's legal sex is the sex recorded on their birth certificate or a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC).

Who is protected by sex discrimination law

Sex discrimination can happen to both men and women.

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 – usually around providing references

Understanding more about discrimination

[Find out about the different types of sex 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 sex discrimination at work, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).