

Liberal Democrats



**OUR PLAN FOR
EQUALITIES
AND
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Contents

Our Plan for Freedom, Rights and Equality	4
Protect Civil Liberties	4
Demand Equality	5
Promote Diversity	6
Make public services work for everyone	7
Promoting Human Rights and Equality Around the World	8



Liberal Democrats believe that in 21st century Britain discrimination is something none of us should need to fear. That we should all have the same opportunities regardless of where we come from or our circumstances. And that our children and grandchildren can be who they want to be without any fear of persecution or intrusion.

But sadly, that is not the reality of life in the UK. The Conservative's hostile environment has stripped many of their rights, rendering people second-class citizens, while inequalities persist across the country. Discrimination based on gender, race, age, sexuality, gender identity, religion, or whether someone is disabled is still widespread and reports of hate crimes still prevalent.

Both Labour and the Conservative have failed to outlaw harmful rhetoric and root out bigotry in their own parties. The Conservatives have used increasingly regressive language about migration, while making a pitiful attempt to rid their party of Islamophobia. Boris Johnson has made multiple sexist comments that throw his commitment to gender equality into doubt. At the same time, Corbyn has inexcusably failed to put a stop to anti-Semitism in Labour or to address women's claims of sexual harassment at the top of the party.

Liberal Democrats have a vision for the UK where everyone's rights and liberties are protected, and our diversity celebrated. Our vision for a brighter future is one free from discrimination and intolerance. It is a UK that is more equal, fair, and where discrimination is punished and prevented by government. We are committed to this vision. That is why every vote for the Liberal Democrats is a vote for a government with equality at the heart of its agenda and a brighter future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christine Jardine'.

Christine Jardine

Liberal Democrats Shadow Secretary of State for Equalities

Our Plan for Freedom, Rights and Equality

People should be able to live their lives free from discrimination or intrusion and without fear of having their most fundamental rights violated. But this is not the reality in the UK today. The hostile environment unacceptably tramples on people's rights and people are still discriminated against on the basis of their gender, race, age, sexuality, gender identity, religion or whether they are disabled. Inequalities are rife – children from Black households are more likely to be in persistent poverty and both hate crimes and violence against women and girls are far too prevalent.

The Conservatives and Labour have entirely failed to stand up to hatred or combat entrenched inequalities. The Conservatives have been relentlessly hostile in their rhetoric and policy around migration and have failed to take allegations of Islamophobia within their party seriously; Jeremy Corbyn has done nothing to stop members of his own party spreading anti-Semitism. For decades, both parties have seen civil liberties as an inconvenience standing in the way of other priorities, which has meant attacks on individual rights and surveillance of citizens conducted outside the law.

Our plan is for a free society where every person's rights and liberties are protected. A plan for a world where everybody's rights are respected and society is fairer and more diverse; a plan to allow everyone to get on and live as who they are, free from discrimination or state intrusion.

Protect Civil Liberties

Our rights and freedoms are under threat. Labour and Conservatives consistently vote for new laws that curtail civil liberties and Conservatives repeatedly threaten the Human Rights Act that safeguards individual freedoms. Liberal Democrats will build a society where rights and liberties are protected and where nobody has their privacy violated by prying instruments of the state. We will:

- Defend the Human Rights Act, resist any attempt to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and oppose any laws that unnecessarily erode civil liberties.
- End the bulk collection of communications data and internet connection records.
- Introduce a Lovelace Code of Ethics to govern the use of personal data and artificial intelligence to ensure it is unbiased, transparent and accurate, and respects privacy.
- Immediately halt the use of facial recognition surveillance by the police.
- Introduce a right to no-fault divorce.
- Extend limited legal rights to cohabiting couples, for example, to give them greater protection in the event of separation or a partner's death.
- Complete the introduction of equal marriage, by:
 - Removing the spousal veto.
 - Allowing those marriages that were dissolved solely due to the Gender Recognition process to be retrospectively restored.
 - Enabling the Church of England and Church of Wales to conduct same-sex marriages.
- Introduce legal recognition of humanist marriages.

Demand Equality

People should be able to go about their lives without fear of discrimination. However, hate crimes are on the rise and too many groups of people no longer feel safe. We believe that government needs to take an active role both in punishing discrimination and ensuring that it does not happen in the first place. We will:

- Tackle the rise in hate crimes by making them all aggravated offences, giving law enforcement the resources and training they need to identify and prevent them, and condemning inflammatory rhetoric – including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia – by those with public platforms.
- Provide funding for protective security measures to places of worship, schools and community centres that are vulnerable to hate crime and terror attacks.
- Complete reform of the Gender Recognition Act to remove the requirement for medical reports, scrap the fee and recognise non-binary gender identities.
- Introduce an X gender option on passports and extend equality law to cover gender identity and expression.
- Ensure accurate population data on sexual orientation and gender identity by including a question on LGBT+ status within the 2021 Census.
- Increase accessibility to public places and transport by making more stations wheelchair accessible, improving the legislative framework governing blue badges, setting up a benchmarking standard for accessible cities, and banning discrimination by private hire vehicles and taxis.
- Introduce a British Sign Language Act to give BSL full legal recognition.
- End period poverty by removing VAT on sanitary products and providing them for free in schools, hospitals, hostels, shelters, libraries, leisure centres, stadiums, GP surgeries, food banks, colleges and universities.
- Scrap the so-called 'Pink Tax', ending the gender price gap.
- Require schools to introduce gender-neutral uniform policies and breakdown outdated perceptions of gender appropriateness of certain subjects.
- Outlaw caste discrimination.

Promote Diversity

Liberal Democrats believe that in the diversity of the UK should be represented in public and working life. That means that women, ethnic minority groups, LGBT+ people and disabled people should be properly represented and paid fairly. But deep-seated and – normally – unconscious biases mean that too many workplaces lack diversity and inequalities remain entrenched. We will tackle institutional biases and promote equality by holding power to account through values of openness, transparency and accountability. We will:

- Increase statutory paternity leave from the current two weeks up to six weeks and ensure that parental leave is a day-one right, and address continuing inequalities faced by same-sex couples.
- Require organisations to publish parental leave and pay policies.
- Continue the drive for diversity in business leadership, pushing for at least 40 per cent of board members being women in FTSE 350 companies and implementing the recommendations of the Parker review to increase ethnic minority representation.
- Extend the Equality Act to all large companies with more than 250 employees, requiring them to monitor and publish data on gender, BAME, and LGBT+ employment levels and pay gaps.
- Extend the use of name-blind recruitment processes in the public sector and encourage their use in the private sector.
- Improve diversity in public appointments by setting ambitious targets, which go further than targets for the private sector, and require reporting against progress with explanations when targets are not met.
- Develop a free, comprehensive unconscious bias training toolkit and make the provision of unconscious bias training to all members of staff a condition of the receipt of public funds.
- Develop a government-wide plan to tackle BAME inequalities and review the Equality and Human Rights Commission to determine whether its funding is adequate.
- Establish a national fund for projects that work in schools to raise the aspirations of ethnic minority children and young people.

Make public services work for everyone

- Reduce the overrepresentation of people from BAME backgrounds throughout the criminal justice system, including by:
 - Uniformly recording data on ethnicity across the criminal justice system and publishing complete data to allow analysis and scrutiny.
 - Introducing a principle of “explain or reform”: if the criminal justice system cannot explain disparities between ethnic groups, then it must be reformed to address them.
 - Promoting greater diversity in the criminal justice system by ensuring that the police, prison service and judiciary all adopt ambitious targets for improving the diversity of their workforce and requiring regular reports on progress to parliament.
- End the disproportionate use of Stop and Search.
- Prevent violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, and support survivors, by:
 - Ratifying and bringing into law the Istanbul Convention.
 - Legislating for a statutory definition of domestic abuse that includes its effects on children.
 - Expanding the number of refuges and rape crisis centres.
 - Ensuring sustainable funding for specialist independent support services.
 - Giving local authorities the duty and funding to provide accommodation for survivors of abuse.
 - Establishing a national rape crisis helpline.
 - Ensuring access to special measures for survivors in all courts and preventing direct cross-examination of survivors by their abusers.
- Review on the basis of evidence any unscientific and discriminatory practices aimed solely at LGBT+ people, such as around blood donations.
- Ensure Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention is fully available to all who need it on the NHS.
- Address continuing inequalities in health services access faced by same-sex couples, and continue to improve LGBT+ healthcare overall.
- Ensure that LGBT+ inclusive mental health services receive funding and support.
- Require that a fair proportion of all public funding for health research should be focused on research into mental ill-health, including research into the different mental health needs of different communities within the UK such as BAME and LGBT+ people.
- Tackle bullying in schools, including bullying on the basis of gender, sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression, by promoting pastoral leadership in schools and delivering high-quality sex and relationships education
- Require inclusive school uniform policies that are gender-neutral and flexible enough to suit different budgets, and provide training for school staff on how to review and improve their uniform policies.
- Scrap the plans to require voters to bring identification with them to vote.
- Introduce a legal requirement for local authorities to inform citizens of the steps they must take to be successfully registered with far greater efforts in particular to register under-represented groups; and ensure that the UK has an automatic system of inclusion in elections.

Promoting Human Rights and Equality Around the World

Human rights are global. An individual's liberty should be equally respected wherever they live. However, as authoritarian regimes trample over freedom of speech and belief and LGBT+ and other people are continuing to suffer discrimination, this is far from being the case. Liberal Democrats are the only party capable of renewing international liberalism and combatting discrimination: the Conservatives' Brexit will mean prioritising trade deals over people's rights and Labour cannot hope to tackle discrimination abroad when they cannot even root out anti-Semitism in their own party. We are the only party with a credible plan to enhance the UK's soft power and to use it to promote human rights and democracy around the world. We will:

- Require UK-registered NGOs and organisations including the Armed Forces and defence contractors to report all instances of documented abuse overseas to government – reviewing, reducing, or refusing funding to organisations found in breach of these rules.
- Establish an easy and appropriate reporting mechanism for abuse that makes clear that reporters and whistleblowers will not be discriminated against for reporting abuse.
- Support free media and a free and open Internet, championing the free flow of information.
- Support the current UN initiative to protect journalists: combatting the impunity granted to those who attack reporters on the frontline. by funding UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication.
- Work to abolish the death penalty around the world and remove the power of ministers to allow security and justice assistance in cases that could result in its use.
- Work to end the use of torture around the world and conduct a full inquiry into the UK Government's involvement in torture and rendition.
- Develop proposals with the BBC for investment to grow the World Service to reach more people across the world with independent and trusted news and continue to support BBC Monitoring and the British Council.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for promoting the decriminalisation of homosexuality around the world and advancing LGBT+ rights.
- Appoint an Ambassador-level Champion for Freedom of Belief.
- Pursue a foreign agenda with gender equality at its heart, focusing on: the transformation of the position of women through economic inclusion, education and training; ensuring the lives of women and girls are not ignored in favour of trade or regional alliances; working to extend reproductive rights and end female genital mutilation; and ending sexual violence in conflict zones.
- Protect, defend, and promote human rights for all, including LGBT+ individuals who are persecuted across the world as well as those persecuted for their religion or belief.

This plan sets out Liberal Democrat policies and priorities for the United Kingdom. The Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats set their own policy on devolved matters, and for those policy areas, the proposals here apply to England only. Our sister party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, makes its own policy on devolved issues in Northern Ireland.

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