



# WE Party Conference

Kettering 7 – 9 September 2018

**Title:** Update the Equality Act to include socio-economic status as a protected characteristic

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**Type of motion:** Policy motion

**Motion text:**

- 1 WE call upon the government to update the Equality Act 2010 to include 'socio-economic status' as
- 2 a protected characteristic through the introduction of a Socio-economic Status bill in Parliament.
  
- 3 At present there are nine characteristics which are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Socio-
- 4 economic status was due to be included in the Equality Act under Part 1 but was not enacted by the
- 5 Conservative Party. Updating the Equality Act to include socio-economic status will improve upon
- 6 Part 1 as it will have a vast impact – both legally and culturally – on women's lives, as women
- 7 experience more societal discrimination and therefore the barrier due to class status is even harder
- 8 to overcome.
  
- 9 Having 'socio-economic status' as a protected characteristic means it would be illegal to discriminate
- 10 against someone based on their income or class status – but not only that, it would help to change
- 11 culture. It puts class status on the table as something which should be discussed and considered and
- 12 will help us to critique systemic classism and institutions that are still part of the 'old boys club'.
  
- 13 Occupational segregation vastly affects women. For example, in the NHS women make up 89% of
- 14 nurses and 90% of support staff – roles which pay lower wages. A study coordinated from Imperial
- 15 College London revealed that 'low socio-economic status has almost the same impact on health as
- 16 smoking or a sedentary lifestyle and is associated with a reduced life expectancy'. Having a law that
- 17 really considers the effect of socio-economic status on our society will mean that women who are at
- 18 a higher risk of experiencing socio-economic discrimination will receive support both legally and
- 19 culturally.



## Motion rationale:

20 This motion will also have the potential to impact positively on other areas of discrimination such as  
21 race and is vital to our commitment as a party to an intersectional feminist approach. We live in a  
22 nation that doesn't really like to talk about class. People get uncomfortable when it is mentioned. But  
23 we at the Women's Equality Party know how important it is. It is important because it is an  
24 intersectional issue – and if you have a low socio-economic status, this compounds other protected  
25 characteristics and creates further barriers.

26 This change in law will help race relations amongst the working classes because it will highlight the  
27 intersectional difference between someone systemically disadvantaged due to their socio-economic  
28 status and because of their race – something that is often blurred in discussions about 'gang culture'  
29 or 'urban communities'.

30 So many institutions, organisations and professions are conscious of the significance of socio-  
31 economic background and the barriers that having a low socio-economic status can have on social  
32 mobility. In response, many organisations have set up outreach departments to encourage social  
33 mobility. This includes institutions such as King's College London, Oxford University etc. Society is  
34 reacting to this area of inequality, but our current legislation does not show the same support for it.

35 As countries like Ireland work to improve their equality laws by introducing the Equality  
36 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017, this is a step that the UK should also be taking to support people  
37 from disadvantaged backgrounds. We therefore ask for socio-economic status to be included in  
38 legislation as a protected characteristic. This will help to support a world of equal opportunity and to  
39 reduce discrimination and social barriers. It will also put more of an onus on all organisations and  
40 institutions to consider socio-economic barriers.

41 This policy will help WE achieve its objectives for Equal Pay and Opportunity and Equality in  
42 Healthcare.

## References

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<http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/proposal-to-make-disadvantaged-socio-economic-status-a-prohibited-ground-of-discrimination-under-irish-law/>

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<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/05/its-time-to-get-real-about-gang-violence-in-london/>

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/177249/early-death-health-linked-socioeconomic-status/>