

The following legislation protects veganism in the UK and Great Britain:

1. Human Rights Act 1998 (covers United Kingdom)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>

This Act makes available the rights contained in the European Convention of Human Rights. Freedom of religion and belief comes under Article 9. Article 9 of the Human Rights Act takes its wording from Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It guarantees absolute freedom of belief and the right to live according to your beliefs without state interference. This right is a “qualified right”. This means that you have freedom to live according to your vegan beliefs without interference from government bodies as long as your veganism does not interfere with the rights of other people and you are not affecting public safety, health or public morality. The state may also be able to limit your veganism where there is a law that requires you to do something that is against your beliefs. This situation is highly unlikely to occur. An example of something like this would be if you were employed by the NHS and were required to be vaccinated. Situations where there is a claim for justified interference with someone’s lifestyle often present complex issues which cannot be explored further here.

The Human Rights Act concerns your relationship with the government or state institutions. If the state interferes with your veganism in a way not allowed under Article 9 then it will be acting unlawfully. State organisations are institutions such as the education authority, the police force, the fire service, the health service and so on. If these organisations interfere with your ability to live according to your vegan beliefs then you may have a claim under Article 9. In hospital you should be given a good vegan diet. In school your vegan beliefs should be respected in art, cooking, sports and, of course, if food is provided for you.

The Human Rights Act requires public authorities to ensure that people’s rights are respected.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have given assurance that Article 9 protects veganism. You can read more here: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/what-are-human-rights/the-human-rights-act/freedom-of-thought-belief-and-religion/>

2. The Equality Act 2010. (Great Britain only)

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

This legislation states protected categories. It lists them as “protected characteristics”. For example, “age”, “disability” and “race”. The protected characteristic that protects veganism is “religion and belief”. This is because both the European Court of Human Rights and the UK Government consider veganism to be a “belief” under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (*H v UK 1993*). International law also requires governments to respect different “beliefs” in addition to different religions. There is no priority in law. A non-religious belief is equal to a religious belief as long as it meets special defining criteria. Veganism meets these criteria.

Under the Equality Act 2010 vegans have the right to be treated fairly in provision of goods and services and to be treated equally in the workplace. There should be no prioritising of religions and beliefs in the workplace. There should be no bullying, victimisation or harassment. Examples of what vegans have achieved by discussing the Equality Act in the UK include safety/uniform footwear (for example post office staff, police and industrial site workers), accessories made using skin from other species - often provided by default - have been replaced by ethical alternatives: ipad cover for example. Where a school provided pupils with a free drink (derived from female cows) and biscuits made with derivatives of other species, discussions about the Equality

Act ensured that the school also obtained suitable vegan alternatives despite initially requesting that the parents bring their own vegan refreshments in for their children. This was an unfair under the Equality Act.

Employers are slowly beginning to understand their duties under equality provisions. Provision for vegans would have been understood much better if the Equality and Human Rights Commission had not removed the examples explaining how to provide for vegans from the Code of Practice for Employers. There are still obstacles for vegans. For example, vegan school children have experienced bullying and victimisation and public sector employers, who spend money on building a prayer room for a religious employee, whilst ignoring the needs of vegans, inadvertently overlook their duties under equality provisions.

In addition, the developments that led to the creation of the Equality Act stem from a European Council Directive (Council directive 2000/78/EC), known as the principle of non-discrimination. This Declaration is applicable throughout Europe but is notoriously inconsistent in application. The UK has a long history of recognizing equality, diversity and inclusion and, on this basis, takes its obligations under this Directive very seriously, making it very clear that the term "belief" includes "philosophical, non-religious" beliefs. Legal process, since then, has also shown a liberal approach to accommodating non-religious, secular beliefs. The cases of Grainger (protected belief in climate change Grainger PLC v T Nicholson UKEAT 0219_09_0311 Appeal No. UKEAT/0219/09) and Hashman (moral stance against hunting Hashman v Milton Park (Dorset) Limited t/a Orchard Park [2011]) both indicate the way the United Kingdom applies a very broad interpretation of the word "belief".

A note about the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission:

This organisation has a statutory duty to monitor human rights and to protect, enforce and promote equality of belief. From time to time the Commission will send out press releases highlighting veganism as a protected belief. However, journalists often dismiss the Commission and ridicule veganism. This is often a result of a lack of knowledge about veganism in human rights history and poor research skills regarding European Court jurisprudence and the status of veganism in law. When journalists create sensational headlines in the UK press, it is unlikely that there is anything new going on about veganism. It is more likely that the Commission is again acting properly according to its statutory duty to monitor human rights and equality provisions and giving information to general society and employers. Unfortunately, the press often use information released by the EHRC to generate hostility towards vegans.

The Commission has indicated on numerous occasions that veganism is a protected belief. It does not say this simply because it picks ideas out of thin air. It makes this statement because the European Court and the UK government agreed in 1993 that veganism was protected under the European Convention of Human Rights. The Commission does not favour veganism. It will also from time to time remind society and employers that other minority "beliefs" are protected too such as Druidism, Krishna consciousness, pacifism and atheism, for example, as is required by its statutory obligation to oversee fair treatment under human rights and equality provisions.

When you see sensational press headlines concerning the Commission, try to keep in mind that journalists want to create a fuss about veganism and give the impression that the Commission is a ridiculous organisation. You can be assured that if there is anything new to report about veganism in British law it will be reported here.

In addition to the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act, the UK government is also under a specific duty to aid development of the cultural practices of minority cultures.