

INTERNATIONAL VEGAN RIGHTS ALLIANCE



Tips for European vegans to find out if and how their national law supports veganism.

1. The facts and principles

- Your country is required by the EU to have an independent human rights and equality organisation. This organisation is known as an Equality Body. It will have as a title something like “Equality Commission” or “Human Rights and Equality Commission”.

You can find your country’s organisation on the list provided on the following website:
<http://www.equineteurope.org/-Member-organisations->

- Your equality and human rights commission is required to oversee the implementation of equality and human rights provisions. It must be careful to learn the outcomes of cases at the European Court of Human Rights and must be careful to take note of European Council Directives. These commissions typically have an advisory role and make information about rights and equality available to governments and wider society, such as employers and service providers.
- European rights and equality measures include protection for a category known as “religion and belief”.
- The word “belief” in human rights has a very broad scope and the Commission of the European Court and the UK Government have agreed that veganism is a “belief” that comes within the scope of protection. This is because Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights reflects a wider United Nations requirement to interpret the word “belief” as a term that describes a lifestyle lived with deep convictions. In this regard, the United Kingdom is complying with its obligations broadly and in the spirit of the original right as

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expressed in intentional human rights law. This example should be followed by all member-states.

- The word “belief” is included in many European rights and equality frameworks. Particularly the Equality Directive of 2000 (Council Directive 2000/78/EC) requires member-states to implement a principle of non-discrimination. It is a requirement extremely broad in scope. The UK has interpreted its obligations under this Directive very broadly and the Equality and Human Rights Commission for England, Scotland and Wales publicly states on its website that veganism has to be taken seriously in rights and equality matters. This example of how the Directive has been implanted is also within the spirit of equality, diversity and inclusion and should be followed by other member-states.

2. What you can do

- Write to your Equality Commission and ask what their interpretation of the meaning of “belief” is for the purposes of monitoring equality and human rights matters and disseminating information to wider society.
- You can explain that the Commission of the European Court of Human Rights acknowledged veganism in 1993 and has also supported a range of other minority “beliefs” such as Pacifism and Druidism.
- You can explain that the Court’s decisions recognise wider human rights obligations that stem from the International Bill of Rights. A useful reference is Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states that:

Article 18 ICCPR

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Take particular note of the following:

- This right is about your choice.
- It exists so that you can find meaning in your life and live according to your own moral convictions without being coerced (feel forced into) a dominant way of life you object to.

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Also take note of the following:

- The Special Rapporteur for this right (Heiner Bielefeldt) has said it concerns religion and other beliefs with deep convictions equally.
- The general guidance to this right (General Comment 22) makes it very clear that it is not limited to traditional or historical beliefs and that it accommodates new and emerging beliefs. This guidance also requires states to observe that there must be no policies or practices imposed by governments that make people feel assimilated into dominant practices they object to.

3. Examples of what can you claim under this right

You can claim

- that all government institutions provide appropriate food. This applies to state education, hospitals, prisons, care homes, etc.
- that the education system takes veganism seriously.
- that you are protected from discrimination in employment contexts.
- that you are not excluded in the provision of goods and services.

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