

# Is Britain Fairer?

The state of equality and  
human rights 2015

Executive summary



Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission



# About this publication

## What is the purpose of this publication?

This is an executive summary of *Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2015*, the Commission's five-yearly statutory report on equality and human rights progress in England, Scotland and Wales.

The executive summary allows readers to become rapidly acquainted with the main points of the report.

## Who is it for?

The executive summary is for individuals and organisations, public and private, who may require a succinct overview of the *Is Britain Fairer?* report, which is significantly longer.

## What is inside?

The executive summary covers:

- our methodology
- key findings related to:
  - education and learning
  - work, income and the economy
  - health and care
  - justice, security and the right to life
  - the individual and society
- eight key equality and human rights challenges for Great Britain.

## When was it published?

This executive summary was first published in October 2015.

## Why did the Commission produce the report?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission promotes and enforces the laws that protect our rights to fairness, dignity and respect. As part of its duties, the Commission provides Parliament and the nation with periodic reports on equality and human rights progress in England, Scotland and Wales. In 2010, the Commission produced its first report on equality, *How fair is Britain?*. This was followed in 2012 by a companion report on human rights, the *Human Rights Review*. *Is Britain Fairer?* is the Commission's follow-up report on both equality and human rights.

## What formats are available?

This executive summary is available in English (PDF and Word), Welsh (PDF and Word), Easy Read (PDF) and British Sign Language (video) formats at: [www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsBritainFairer](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsBritainFairer)



# Executive summary

**The Equality Act 2006 gave the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) the duty to report regularly on the extent to which equality and human rights are improving in Britain. We published *How fair is Britain?* (a review of equality) in 2010, followed by the *Human Rights Review* in 2012.**

This, in 2015, is our first report on progress. We hope that this report will be of value to policy makers and influencers across all sectors. Our purpose is to report our findings, set out the challenges for the future, and invite those who have the statutory responsibilities or an interest in these areas to address the issues by identifying and implementing the necessary solutions. We do not speculate on the impact of proposed future legislative or policy changes, nor do we try to explain the causes of differences, or set policy solutions.

We have gathered data and evidence based around 10 domains: education; standard of living; productive and valued activities; health; life; physical security; legal security; individual, family and social life; identity, expression and self-respect; and participation, influence and voice. Within each of these domains, there is a set of indicators and measures that we have used in order to evaluate progress. Produced in parallel with this report are 10 detailed evidence papers (one for each domain), available on our website.

When deciding what (from the 10 evidence papers) to include in this report, we used three criteria:

- the degree to which there has been change over time
- the proportion of the specific population group that the issue affects, and
- the scale of impact on life chances.

The quantitative evidence we used draws from major surveys and administrative data compiled by public bodies. Given the time lag between gathering the data and analysing and checking it, most of our core quantitative data covers the period from 2008 to 2013. This has been supplemented by some more recent data drawn from other published analysis that meets our strict criteria. The qualitative data we used is more recent and includes reports by inspectorates and regulators, international organisations, parliamentary committees, the UK and devolved governments, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).



# Education and learning

## Areas of progress over the review period include:

- general improvements in educational attainment in schools; in England, a narrowing of the attainment gap between White pupils and Pakistani/Bangladeshi and African/Caribbean/Black pupils
- more effective use of pupil premium funds
- good educational outcomes in secure training centres
- rising levels of participation of 16–18 year olds in education and training, and
- falling percentages of men and women with no qualifications of any kind.

## Challenges include:

- some persistent and in some cases widening educational attainment gaps (for example, among Gypsy and Traveller pupils, children from poorer backgrounds and particularly White boys, children with special educational needs and children in the care system); within the context of an overall fall, higher exclusion rates for some children (for example, children with special educational needs)
- higher rates of bullying carried out against some children (for example, disabled children and lesbian, gay and bisexual children)
- lower participation of disabled young people in education, employment and training

- women were more likely to have no qualifications than men, in contrast with the situation in higher education, where women more than closed the gap with men,<sup>1</sup> and
- while more Black pupils in England went on to study at a higher education institution, they were less likely than White, mixed and Asian pupils to go to higher-ranked institutions.

<sup>1</sup> In this context, a qualification covers: academic qualifications from GCSE (or equivalent) and above; vocational qualifications; and other awards, certificates and diplomas at any level. An individual with no qualifications holds none of these.



# Work, income and the economy

## Areas of progress include:

- increasing recognition (in, for example, the Modern Slavery Act 2015) of the human rights violations arising as a result of trafficking, forced labour, servitude and exploitation
- a narrowing of the gender gap in employment rates
- a voluntary target for the FTSE 100 of 25% female board representation was met, and
- in England, fewer adults and children lived in substandard accommodation; homelessness in Wales and Scotland fell.

## Challenges include:

- a rise in reported trafficking (and an increase in the proportion of victims who were UK nationals)
- a lower overall employment rate<sup>2</sup>
- men were more likely to be unemployed than women, but women were more likely to be in part-time work; the numbers of women in part-time work who wanted to be in full-time work increased
- women and people from some ethnic minorities remained less likely to be in both executive and non-executive directorships
- 16–24 year olds had the lowest employment rates, and the employment gap between the oldest and the youngest age groups increased;<sup>3</sup> unemployment rates increased for disabled people;<sup>4</sup>

unemployment rates were significantly higher for ethnic minorities; Pakistani/Bangladeshi women were less than half as likely to be employed compared with average female employment rates; Muslims experienced the highest unemployment rates, lowest employment rates and lowest (and decreasing) hourly pay rates over the period

- all age groups below the age of 55 experienced significant reductions in average hourly pay, with the biggest declines in the younger age groups; there were persistent gender pay gaps among graduates; employment and earnings premiums for training and qualifications among graduates were higher for men than for women; some ethnic minorities and disabled people experienced greater declines in average pay, and
- poverty rates were higher for children in households headed by someone from an ethnic minority; material deprivation for disabled people above the poverty level increased and the gap between disabled and non-disabled people of working age widened.

<sup>2</sup> Employment rate: the number of people in employment as a percentage of the population (EHRC analysis uses the working age population, aged 16–64).

<sup>3</sup> Increases in young people's participation in full-time education only explain some of the falls in employment and increases in unemployment. Even accounting for this increased participation, the employment rate for young people has fallen and the unemployment rate risen over the review period.

<sup>4</sup> Unemployment rate: the number of people not currently in a job as a percentage of the 'economically active population' (those who are able to work and have adequate availability to work; this does not include those not working through sickness, disability or because they are studying).



# Health and care

## Areas of progress include:

- a narrowing of the gender gap in life expectancy
- a fall in the infant mortality rate in England and Wales for White, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and African/Caribbean children
- a decrease in the proportion of men and women who currently smoke in England, and in men who exceed low-risk drinking guidelines
- a decrease in the suicide rate in Scotland (although the overall rate in Scotland remained higher than in England and Wales), and
- in England and Wales, substantial funding available for psychological therapies; Scotland was the first country in Britain to introduce a target to ensure faster access to psychological therapies; positive developments in the availability of high-quality mental health care.

## Challenges include:

- self-reported health status for some people with specific characteristics (for example, Gypsies and Travellers and disabled people) was worse (in the 2011 Census); lower life expectancy for people with serious mental illness or a learning disability, Gypsies and Travellers and homeless people
- increased suicide rate in England and Wales, resulting in a widening of the gap between men and women, with middle-aged men particularly at risk
- worse end of life outcomes for people in more disadvantaged socioeconomic positions

- concerns about access to palliative care for children with cancer
- increased risk of poor mental health among adults in England, with high risk for people identifying as gay/lesbian/bisexual/other; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British people had the highest rate of contact with specialist mental health services; Black people were more likely to have been compulsorily detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 as part of an inpatient stay in a mental health unit; serious concerns about access to mental health services for children and young people; care of prisoners with mental health needs was inconsistent across establishments
- increased number of people in England with health problems requiring both health and social care and with 'complex health needs', within a context of an overall fall in social care provision
- people with learning disabilities and/or autism placed in inappropriate settings for too long and a long distance from their family and home
- some people – for example, transgender people and people from migrant communities – experienced problems accessing healthcare services, and
- legal safeguards provided by the Human Rights Act 1998 to prevent inhuman or degrading treatment were not as widely used as they should have been; a number of inquiries highlighted serious flaws (and sometimes abuse) in the care of vulnerable patients, such as those with learning disabilities, older people and patients with dementia.



# Justice, security and the right to life

## Areas of progress include:

- a fall in several serious crimes affecting personal safety and the right to life across or in parts of Britain, and
- a number of significant legislative reforms and policy initiatives, including an increase in the volume of referrals from the police of ‘honour-based’ violence-related offences for prosecution; increased legal protection for 17 year olds in police custody and increases in the number of applications for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards; a strengthened procedural obligation to investigate any deaths for which the State may have a degree of responsibility; and the setting of international human rights standards for the treatment of women prisoners, which were incorporated into the regulatory inspection framework.
- the Home Secretary announced an independent review of deaths and serious incidents in police custody in England and Wales. There have been 133 deaths during or following police custody in England and Wales between 2007/08 and 2014/15, and 444 apparent suicides following police custody
- concerns voiced by regulators about overcrowding in prisons across Britain, rising violence in some men’s prisons in England and Wales, and the treatment of children and torture victims subject to immigration controls, and
- the lack of an immigration detention time limit in the UK remains in contrast to other European Union member countries.

## Challenges include:

- a rising incidence of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate crime
- serious issues in relation to child sexual abuse and exploitation in England and Wales
- flaws in the police response to domestic abuse and in the use of stop and search powers
- the potential impact of legal aid reforms in England and Wales on the access of vulnerable individuals to civil and family justice
- serious concerns were expressed by regulators about the operation of safeguards to protect people from being unlawfully deprived of their liberty across Britain, and about the use of restraint affecting detained individuals in health, care and detention settings



# The individual and society

## Areas of progress include:

- the introduction of equal marriage legislation across Britain; a continued rise in public acceptance of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across Britain; and evidence of decreased stigma around mental health in England and Wales
- clarification by case law of the capacity of people with learning disabilities to make their own decisions about relationships, and the freedom of individuals to express their religion or beliefs
- a number of important changes to the legal framework, including new duties and responsibilities given to local authorities in England that affect the care and support of adults, and new legislation across Britain extending the support available to young people leaving the care system
- the creation of new criminal offences relating to forced marriage, emotional and financial domestic abuse and controlling or coercive behaviour
- the strengthening of the Information Commissioner's powers to regulate the Data Protection Act 1998
- legislation introduced to encourage participation in civil society across Britain
- improvements in the diversity of the UK Parliament following the 2015 general election; though the gender balance remains better in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, and
- an increase in Scotland of political participation, including by young people, and the proportion of people perceiving that they can influence local decisions.

## Challenges include:

- a rise in public unease about the use of people's personal data by organisations, after a number of cases of loss/misuse
- placements far from home being allocated to people with learning disabilities, children in custody and children in care, which affect their access to social networks (as do reductions in public transport)
- bias/hostility continued to be experienced by disabled people, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, transgender people and immigrants
- the political under-representation of young people, women and people from some ethnic minorities persisted
- young people and those from some ethnic minorities remained less likely to be politically active; compared with those in managerial and professional groups, all other sub-groups were also less politically active
- the blanket ban on prisoners voting remained in place, in violation of Convention rights
- there were concerns about covert police operations and intrusive surveillance of protests, and
- disabled people, some ethnic minorities and people aged 75 and over were less likely than others to perceive that they could influence local decisions.





# Conclusion

**Drawing on our collected evidence, we have identified eight key equality and human rights challenges for Great Britain over the coming years:**

1. **Improve the evidence** and the ability to assess how fair society is.
2. Raise standards and close attainment gaps in **education**.
3. Encourage fair recruitment, development and reward in **employment**.
4. Support improved **living conditions** in cohesive communities.
5. Encourage **democratic participation** and ensure **access to justice**.
6. Improve access to **mental health** services and support for those experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) poor mental health.
7. Prevent **abuse, neglect and ill-treatment in care and detention**.
8. Tackle targeted **harassment and abuse** of people who share particular protected characteristics.

# Contacts

*Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2015: Executive summary* was published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This publication is available from the Commission's website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsBritainFairer](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/IsBritainFairer)

**For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service, a free and independent service.**

**Web:** [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

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The Commission welcomes your feedback.