



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

## Disfigurement must be seen as a human rights issue: Charities and activists call for greater protection for the facial difference community

- Over 100 million people worldwide have facial disfigurements, but the charity Face Equality International (FEI) has found that existing laws are failing to adequately protect them from discrimination and human rights violations.
- Global law firm, Reed Smith LLP collaborated with Bank of America to support Face Equality International on a pro bono basis to produce a report, to help provide guidance on how disability law and human rights law can be applied to prevent facial discrimination and to understand the gaps in existing legislation.
- The team of lawyers also produced a series of factsheets for people with disfigurements to better understand their rights and how to apply them via the UK Equality Act 2010, the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- An Alliance of 36 worldwide NGOs making up the FEI membership mark the fourth annual International Face Equality Week, with the theme 'Face Equality is a Human Right'.
- This campaign will act as the launch of a new strategic focus to assert face equality as a social justice issue. FEI is calling for independent recognition of facial difference as an equality issue, alongside issues such as race, gender, and disability.

May 17-24 2022.

Charities launch this campaign today alongside research that indicates existing disability-specific laws are failing the facial and visible difference community on several levels, often due to facial differences not being universally regarded as a disability. The barriers experienced by someone with a facial difference are largely attitudinal rather than physical and because facial difference is regarded as an identity that sits alongside disability, not always within it.

Discrimination and indignities are a daily occurrence for the facial difference community. This is a hidden community that has continued to be marginalised, abused and neglected, throughout history. To this day FEI and its members believe the injustice experienced by this unique community has not been adequately recognised or addressed by global society.

FEI and its members, after 18 months of consultation and research, will be repositioning disfigurement as an independent equality and human rights issue, with a view to gathering recognition for the facial difference community both legally and socially. [This report](#) summarises the findings of the consultation process, which involved experts, FEI's 36 member NGOs, their respective communities, and a steering group made up of a panel of people with lived experience of facial difference.

**Phyllida Swift, CEO of Face Equality International said:**

*“Disfigurement goes hand in hand with poverty, prejudice and exclusion. So enabling our communities to understand their rights when they are subject to injustice is paramount. We are devoted to raising the profile of disfigurement as a social justice issue, and improving the rights and protections of people with disfigurements, whilst counteracting stigma and championing inclusion.”*

**Carolyn Pepper, the co-chair of Reed Smith's Disability Business Inclusion Group [LEADRS](#), commented:**

*“We believe in the importance of fostering diversity, equity and inclusion and so we were absolutely delighted when Face Equality International asked us to assist with the important work being done to support its members. We hope that the work that our lawyers and the team at Bank of America have done will be a catalyst for change and will help to combat discrimination against people with facial disfigurements.”*

**Ike Osaki, EMEA General Counsel at Bank of America said:**

*“Individuals with facial disfigurement are subject to discrimination on a daily basis. By partnering with Face Equality International and Reed Smith on this report, we are working to fundamentally change this. Our aligned ambition is to tackle prejudice, enable people with facial disfigurements and differences to understand their rights and to help drive systemic change.”*

The FEI Alliance are repositioning facial difference, both legally and socially, in an effort to validate the unique experiences of this particular community. Some living with a facial difference will also qualify and identify as disabled, along with any other marginalised characteristic. The Alliance believes all aspects are worthy of independent recognition and protections that recognise the unique prejudices experienced by individual and intersecting identities.

It is the long-term ambition of the charity to create a space for facial difference to be recognised as an independent equality and human rights issue, because the root of the discrimination, abuse and stigma experienced by the global facial difference community must be effectively addressed.

**Phyllida Swift, CEO of FEI said:**

*“Together, we can create a world where anyone with a facial difference is free to be unapologetically themselves. In order to celebrate what makes us ‘different’, first we must recognise that it is society that must change, not us. It is the limiting perceptions placed on faces and bodies that do not conform to the ‘norm’ that we must change.”*

**Jono Lancaster, FEI Ambassador said:**

*“It’s still clear to see that hate crime and inequality for those living with a facial difference is happening on a DAILY basis across all aspects of life, from school playgrounds to social media, it’s happening and it’s near impossible to escape. Depression, self-harm, self-hate and suicide, are all things that have followed on from these kinds of situations.*

*So, I will continue to fight, fueled by this, fueled by the love from others and fueled by the epic self-love that I have for myself.”*

**Carly Findlay, FEI Ambassador said:**

*“Face Equality is a human right. And so discrimination against people with facial differences needs to be supported by a human rights framework. We need to be able to report discrimination and hate speech and for it be taken seriously - worldwide.”*

FEI has [produced a report](#) summarising their new focus to position facial difference as a social justice issue. The report includes a list of recommendations for policymakers, healthcare professionals, the media, businesses and for wider society.

- **ENDS -**

#### **Notes to editors**

- International Face Equality Week runs from 17-24 May and is currently in its fourth year, having started in the UK in 2017.
- For more information, visit Face Equality International’s [website](#).

#### **Media inquiries**

Case studies and interviews with FEI’s Ambassadors and CEO available upon request [info@facequalityinternational.org](mailto:info@facequalityinternational.org)

#### **About Face Equality International (FEI)**

FEI’s vision is for the global facial difference community to live freely, without indignity or discrimination.

In order to achieve that vision, their **mission** is to position face equality as a social justice movement.

Face Equality International was created by Dr James Partridge OBE, founder of Changing Faces UK, with the support of nine founding members. The alliance was launched in November 2018 and now has over thirty world-wide members.

Most member NGOs are condition-specific (i.e. for people with clefts, burns, cranio-facial conditions, psoriasis and other conditions) and their members have very different medical and surgical needs and treatments. But their members also face very similar psychological, cultural and social barriers to living fulfilling lives.

We embrace and create space for facial differences of any kind, be they acquired, from birth, or temporary.

FEI has member organisations in the following countries:

- Australia
- Belgium
- Canada
- Czech Republic
- France
- Italy
- Nepal
- Nicaragua
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Switzerland
- Taiwan
- Turkey
- The Netherlands
- USA
- UK