

Article

#1forEquality: The Story of an Unlikely Victorious Campaign in the Making

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Abstract

The UK government proudly affirms that the country has some of the strongest equalities legislation in the world, including the Equality Act 2010. For it to be true, however, the government should implement the legislation in its entirety, including the socio-economic duty (section 1 of the Act). That duty would require public authorities to actively consider how their decisions and policies of the highest strategic importance can increase or decrease inequalities of outcome. Regrettably, successive governments have failed to commence the duty, and therefore it is not technically binding on public authorities. It is encouraging that the duty was brought to life in Scotland in 2018 and the Welsh Government has announced they will follow suit in 2020. The socio-economic duty is potentially a useful lever to understand and address the structural causes of material inequalities and their negative effects on human rights and well-being. This article presents and draws conclusions from the strategic choices made by the people running #1forEquality, the national campaign to bring the socio-economic duty to life. The article introduces four key factors that contributed to making progress between 2017 and 2019, despite the limited resources available: a) the added value of merging advocacy and epistemic communities working on equality and on human rights; b) the engagement with political actors at key stages of the process; c) the combination of ‘naming and shaming’ and best practice; and d) the celebration of smaller victories along the way.

Keywords: advocacy; campaigning; Equality Act 2010; non-discrimination; socio-economic status; United Kingdom

1. Introduction: what is the socio-economic duty, and why has the UK government chosen to ignore it?

Weeks before the general election that put an end to 13 years of New Labour government, the [Equality Act 2010](#) brought together a wide array of pieces of legislation into a single

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instrument to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of ‘protected characteristics’, namely, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (section 4). The Act also contains a ‘public sector equality duty’ to ‘have due regard’ to the need to eliminate unlawful ‘discrimination, harassment (and) victimization’, ‘advance equality of opportunity’ and ‘foster good relations’ (section 149).

Socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic in the UK. That means that being rejected because of a socio-economic disadvantage related to the lack of economic and financial means, education, employment or family connections, or because of a health condition, place of residence or origin, or social class, does not amount to discrimination, unless it is connected to any of the characteristics already recognized in the [Equality Act 2010](#). The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination keep track of at least 20 European countries that, unlike the UK, provide some legal protection against discrimination on grounds related to socio-economic status in different forms: social origin, status, position, condition, class, wealth, income, property, economic situation, financial prowess or education ([European Commission 2017: 12–14](#)). For example, since 2016, being in a socially precarious situation and vulnerability due to the economic situation is a protected characteristic in France, and housing benefit claimants in Ireland are protected from discrimination in the provision of accommodation ([EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2017: 64](#)).

Stating clearly that individuals should not be discriminated against because of their social class, their income or their wealth would favour real equality of opportunity, contributing to reconcile ‘status recognition’ and ‘resource distribution’ ([Fraser 2000](#)). In the words of Sandra Fredman, ‘the role of anti-discrimination law would be to prohibit stigma and hostility, to affirm individual dignity and worth, and to redress disadvantage resulting from past prejudice and social exclusion’ ([Fredman 2007: 228](#)). The legal acknowledgement of the socio-economic dimension of discrimination would provide an intersectional understanding that is context-specific, including material conditions, and more interested in the effects of unequal treatment than in the identity or identities of the victim ([Malleon 2018; Atrey 2018](#)).

Much as it can be desirable to modify the [Equality Act 2010](#) in that direction, for now it does not protect from discrimination based on socio-economic status. However, the Act contains a potentially powerful lever to address the inequalities that derive from socio-economic disadvantage. Right at the beginning of the Act (sections 1–3), the socio-economic duty would require that a public authority

when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. (section 1)

In other words, the socio-economic duty would mean that public authorities have to actively and systematically consider the effects that their most important decisions have on increasing or decreasing material inequalities of outcome stemming from socio-economic disadvantage. At first, it was hyperbolically described by one Labour cabinet member as ‘socialism in one clause’ ([Toynbee 2009](#)), but the truth is that the consequences would be much less magnificent, but perhaps more impactful in practice. The Labour government made the case for the duty giving assurances that it would ‘provide a statutory foundation to ongoing work to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and to ensure that the need to

address entrenched inequalities is considered in a systematic way by all government departments and key public bodies' ([Government Equalities Office 2010: 4](#)). The duty would not impose the legal obligation to reduce material inequalities, which could be deemed too intrusive in the political arena, but it would constitute a significant step forward in terms of transparency, accountability and evidence-based policymaking at all levels of government.

All this is conditional (hence, the use above of 'would') because successive governments after the general election of 2010—a Liberal Democrat–Conservative coalition until 2015 and a series of Conservative governments since then—have failed to commence the socio-economic duty, that is, they have not yet brought it to life in legal terms, which means that it is not technically binding on public authorities. Perhaps recalling what she would see as the threat of 'socialism in one clause', in November 2010 the then Home Secretary Theresa May revealed the government's intention to 'scrap' the duty, and announced 'plans to tackle inequality by treating people as individuals rather than labelling them in groups, and ending the top-down approach' of the previous Labour cabinet ([Home Office 2010](#)). One full decade later, we know that, far from declining, local government funding cuts and austerity-inspired welfare reforms only made income and wealth inequality worse in socio-economic and geographical terms ([Dorling 2018](#); [Gray and Barford 2018](#); [ONS 2018](#)).

To this day, the socio-economic duty is one of the few clauses of the [Equality Act 2010](#) that remain uncommenced, together with the principle of intersectionality (section 14) and the requirement of publication of information about diversity of political party candidates (section 106) (Statutory Instrument 2017/403, Commencement Order No. 13, Note as to earlier commencement orders). If triggered, the socio-economic duty would provide focus on key strategic decisions, drawing on existing or newly required evidence, to examine how public authorities can help better those who are at greater disadvantage in society. The duty would transparently balance the goal of equality with other legitimate objectives, always within the resources available to public authorities. The socio-economic duty could have made a difference in, for example, the case of Grenfell Tower, a residential social housing block in north Kensington, London, where in June 2017 over 70 people died in a fire ([Casla and Burton 2018](#)); had it been in force, the duty would have required Kensington and Chelsea Council to consider whether its policies in relation to council tax, social housing, homelessness and disaster planning were adequate to address the enormous inequalities in the richest and yet also 'the most unequal borough in Britain', as labelled by the local Member of Parliament (MP) ([Dent Coad 2017](#)).

Although the socio-economic duty is not yet binding on all public authorities, certain positive changes have occurred in recent years. The duty is force in Scotland since April 2018, and the Welsh Government is planning to follow suit in 2020. Some local authorities are voluntarily implementing the duty. More than 160 civil society groups, academics and MPs from five different parties have asked the government to reconsider their position in relation to the socio-economic duty, as have several international human rights bodies. This article presents the story of #1forEquality, the national campaign to urge the UK government to activate the socio-economic duty. The article is not an in-depth examination of the duty; instead, it focuses on the strategic choices of the campaign to bring it to life. The article introduces four key factors that contributed to making progress between 2017 and 2019, despite the limited resources available: a) the added value of merging advocacy and epistemic communities working on equality and on human rights; b) the engagement with political actors at key stages of the process; c) the combination of 'naming and shaming' and best practice; and d) the celebration of smaller victories along the way.

2. The strategic choices of #1forEquality, the campaign to bring the socio-economic duty to life

2.1 Merging epistemic and advocacy communities: equality and human rights

#1forEquality (<https://1forequality.com>) was launched in January 2017 as a joint enterprise between two small organizations that had never worked together before. Just Fair is a leading human rights NGO that uses international human rights law to monitor and advocate for economic and social rights in the UK, with a particular focus in England. The Equality Trust, as its name suggests, campaigns against economic and social inequality in the UK. With the former claiming that socio-economic rights are a good idea, and the latter claiming that inequality is bad for society, the socio-economic duty was a natural point in common between both groups.

The combined effort of Just Fair and the Equality Trust resulted in important opportunities in terms of ‘mobilizing structures’ and ‘framing processes’ (McAdam *et al.* 1996). Together they reached out to a wide array of academics in public health, sociology, law and politics, and to local and national groups working on fair taxation and food justice, as well as feminist organizations, groups led by persons with disabilities and people with lived experience of poverty, trade unions, human rights organizations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and others (for a full list of supporters see <https://1forequality.com/supporters>). The expanded mobilizing structures led to new framing opportunities. The fact that these organizations come from different advocacy and epistemic traditions meant that the language they used to build the argument was richer than it would have been if they had acted separately.

The socio-economic duty goes to the core of the principle of non-discrimination and equality before the law, proclaimed among others in Articles 2(1) and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (incorporated through the Human Rights Act 1998), and its Protocol No. 12, although the last of these has not yet been signed by the UK. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has affirmed that socio-economic status is one of the ‘other statuses’ alluded to in Article 2(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

Individuals and groups of individuals must not be arbitrarily treated on account of belonging to a certain economic or social group or strata within society. A person’s social and economic situation when living in poverty or being homeless may result in pervasive discrimination, stigmatization and negative stereotyping which can lead to the refusal of, or unequal access to, the same quality of education and health care as others, as well as the denial of or unequal access to public places. (UN CESCR 2009: para. 35)

On two occasions the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the UK ‘bring into force’ the socio-economic duty of section 1 and the principle of intersectionality of section 14 of the [Equality Act 2010](#) (UN CEDAW 2013: paras 16–17; 2019: paras 15–16). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued the same recommendation as a means ‘to enhance and guarantee full and effective protection against discrimination in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights’ (UN CESCR 2016: para. 23). The main national human rights institution of Great Britain

(that is, England, Scotland and Wales), the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has also repeatedly recommended the government to implement the socio-economic duty.

The campaign #1forEquality embodied a process of 'vernacularization' where international human rights 'adapted to local institutions and meanings' (Merry 2006: 39). Campaigners called for imagining how a more egalitarian society would have positive social and economic effects for the vast majority of people. They spoke about how inequality never pays off because it is asymmetrical, as the negative consequences for those at the bottom are far greater than the possible net benefits for those at the top (Kolbert 2018). They referred to the abundant international empirical research that shows that inequality is directly correlated with worse performance in terms of general educational attainment, life expectancy, self-esteem and trust in society (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009, 2018). Campaigners echoed the words of unlikely allies, like Bill Gates or Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, and spoke about 'class', 'social mobility', inequality 'harming the economy', 'autonomy' and 'agency', 'evidence-based policy', or about reducing inequality as a mechanism so everyone can 'take back control' of their lives, thereby co-opting the favourite expression of the 'Brexiteers' (those calling for the UK to leave the European Union) (see the rationale of the campaign at <https://1forequality.com/why>). These are expressions that are not contradictory to the principles underpinning human rights, but are at the very least uncommon in the conventional handbook of human rights activism. The leading campaigners drew on publicly available polling data, particularly the British Attitudes Survey (Curtime 2018), and insights from cognitive linguistics and strategic communications (FrameWorks Institute 2018; NEON et al. 2018; Shenker-Osorio 2018), and they reached the following conclusion: in order to maximize their effectiveness, campaigners need to vernacularize international human rights to make them resonate with the values, interests and ideology of a larger proportion of the local population. By doing so they also showed that human rights research and advocacy can have something meaningful to offer to the cause of material equality, contradicting Samuel Moyn's widely known critique (2018).

Campaigners did not neglect the importance of international human rights law and institutions. In fact, Just Fair put the socio-economic duty right at the centre of the chapter they wrote on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 10 (reducing inequalities) in the first-ever review of the UK's compliance with the SDGs (UKSSD 2018: 77–82). The organization set out the policy position that, in an advanced economy like the UK, rising inequalities suggest that the maximum of available resources are not being used towards the progressive realization of all socio-economic rights, in breach of Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, by and large, most of the arguments by the leading campaigners were not legal or international in nature, but empirically grounded, politically calculated, and carefully framed to sound right in the specific local and national context.

2.2 Seizing political opportunities

The snap election of June 2017 gave the first chance to bring the forgotten socio-economic duty back to the political world of the living. In their manifestos, the Conservatives vowed that they 'abhor social division, injustice, unfairness and inequality'; Labour proclaimed itself 'the party of equality'; the Liberal Democrats said they would focus on 'breaking down the barriers that hold people back'; the Welsh nationalist Plaid Cymru wanted a country

based on ‘fairness and equal opportunity’; the Green Party promised to ‘fight for equality, and for a society where nobody is left behind’; and the Scottish National Party (SNP) asserted that ‘tackling rising inequality must be one of the key priorities of the next parliament’ (Shaddock and Casla 2017). A few months earlier, the SNP-ruled Scottish Government had announced their intention of commencing the socio-economic duty north of the border (Scottish Government 2016: 22), and the SNP was the only party that clearly pledged in the 2017 general election to ‘seek an early opportunity to pursue a Bill at Westminster to ensure the UK government commences this important duty’; the Liberal Democrats promised to bring more of the Equality Act’s neglected provisions into force, but they did not mention the socio-economic duty specifically; Labour’s manifesto was not clear about their intentions in relation to the Equality Act, but their policy team assured Just Fair and the Equality Trust that the party would ‘reinstate the legal requirement forcing public bodies to try to reduce inequalities’ (Shaddock and Casla 2017).

The general election resulted in a minority Conservative government that would have to rely on Northern Irish unionists to attempt to deliver the UK’s exit from the EU and to rule the country. This perhaps unexpected outcome of no overall control opened a window of opportunity to seek cross-party support for the socio-economic duty. After a meeting between the campaigners and the Labour MP Harriet Harman, who had led the Government Equality Office when the duty was introduced in 2010, she tabled [Early Day Motion \(EDM\) No. 591](#) in November 2017, which reads like this:

That this House notes with great concern the high levels of income and particularly wealth inequality in our society; further notes the recommendation in the 2016 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to bring into force the outstanding provisions of the [Equality Act 2010](#); commends the efforts of some councils to implement the Socio-economic Duty (Part 1 of the [Equality Act 2010](#)) in their budgets and strategic planning; welcomes the Scottish Government’s decision to commence the Socio-economic Duty; encourages the Welsh Government to make use of the powers of the [Wales Act 2017](#) to bring the Duty to life; and calls on the Government to bring section 1 of the Equality Act into effect.

While a small number of EDMs get to be debated in the House of Commons, their main function is to have a brief text with a clear ask that can unite MPs from different parties. The text was drafted by the campaigners making sure that it referred to the recommendation from the UN Committee as well as to the initial steps taken in Scotland and Wales, where progress seemed more likely. Just Fair and the Equality Trust set up an online petition using freely accessible tools so constituents could get in touch with their MPs to ask them to support EDM No. 591. Whenever a new MP did so, social media channels would celebrate it by saying that ‘XY is #1forEquality’ and adding a link so followers could continue taking part in the online action. Just Fair and the Equality Trust also printed postcards that were distributed at events around the country. Up to October 2019, 83 MPs from five different parties plus some independents had expressed their support for the EDM; 81 of them did so in the first six months, when the campaign action was most intense. The number of supporters of #1forEquality from civil society and academia continued growing as well, and it is now more than 80.

EDM No. 591 (2017–19) was accompanied by a series of Parliamentary Questions asked in the first few weeks of 2018 by some of the EDM signatories, including SNP MP Martyn Day ([UK Parliament Written question 121866](#)), the Green MP Caroline Lucas ([Written question 119910](#)), and Harriet Harman herself ([Written question 121020](#)). The

government's response line was that they preferred to focus on specific programmes that would address 'social mobility problems' better; they did not intend to commence section 1 but they kept the implementation of the Equality Act under review. There were also some questions from peers in the House of Lords with similar responses from the government (for example, [UK Parliament written question HL5426](#)).

The situation and prospects in Scotland and Wales were central to the strategy in the UK Parliament in Westminster. Campaigners realized that both nations could set a valuable example of what could be achieved with the right amount of political will. The most recent devolution Acts (the [Scotland Act 2016](#), and the [Wales Act 2017](#)) gave them powers to implement the duty, and despite the political support from some allies in the UK Parliament, it was clear that the duty would bear more fruit in the devolved administrations than in London.

As mentioned earlier, in 2016 Scotland announced their determination to use their reinvigorated powers to bring the socio-economic duty to life. The devolved administration launched a consultation and over three months they received 123 responses ([Scottish Government 2017](#): 3), including one from the [Equality Trust and Just Fair \(2017b\)](#). In November 2017, the Scottish Government issued an order of commencement of the socio-economic duty, which entered into force in April 2018 (Statutory Instrument 2017/403, Commencement Order No. 13). In March 2018, the government published a useful guidance for public authorities with practical suggestions to implement the duty, which was renamed 'Fairer Scotland Duty' ([Scottish Government 2018](#)).

The situation was less straightforward in Wales. The [Wales Act 2017](#) (section 45) handed over to the devolved administration the powers to trigger the socio-economic duty. However, the Labour-led Welsh Government held the position that it was redundant because the [Well-Being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) imposed equivalent responsibilities on Welsh authorities. In this context, the prospect of the UK leaving the European Union (Brexit) created an ironic opportunity at the discursive level. Embedding EU law adequately in domestic legislation and making sure equality law was used to its fullest potential was more urgent than ever in light of Brexit. Against this backdrop, soon after the campaign began, the [Equality Trust and Just Fair \(2017a\)](#) made a written submission to a human rights inquiry led by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee of the Senedd, the National Assembly for Wales. In February 2018, Just Fair gave oral evidence before the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee. Both committees were interested in the equality and human rights implications of Brexit. Aware of the Welsh Government's reliance on the Well-Being of Future Generations Act to resist section 1 of the Equality Act, during oral evidence Just Fair pointed out that Scotland had decided to implement section 1 despite having multiple duties in place for local authorities, duties that were complementary to each other. This inquiry was also an opportunity to appeal to patriotism: Wales could set an example for the rest of the UK and become a 'world leader' for equality and human rights by incorporating international treaties and bringing the socio-economic duty to life ([National Assembly for Wales, External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee 2018](#)). Both ideas were endorsed by the committees in their report, including the reference to Wales as a world leader ([National Assembly for Wales, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, and External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee 2018](#): 5–6). In their response, the Welsh Government still held that they remained unconvinced about the added value of the socio-economic duty on top of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act; however, 'in light of the Scottish Government's

decision to implement the socio-economic duty', they were now ready to 'review' their position (ibid: 13–14).

And that is when politics changed things. Labour, the party in power in Wales, chose a new leader at the end of 2018. During the campaign the contender Mark Drakeford announced he would activate the socio-economic duty if he was appointed leader. Mr Drakeford won the contest and he became First Minister of Wales in December 2018. At a public event with academics and civil society in Cardiff in February 2019, the Welsh Government presented a timeline to gather legal advice and prepare the necessary guidance to implement section 1 with a view to bringing it into force in Wales in 2020.

As noted earlier, the UK government claimed in their responses to Parliamentary Questions that their 'social mobility approach' was different and indeed better than the socio-economic duty. That position was nonetheless politically harder to sustain when all members of the Social Mobility Commission resigned in December 2017 alleging fundamental disagreements with the government. The positions on the Commission, an advisory body appointed by the government and sponsored by the Department of Education, were vacant for most of 2018. Campaigners kept regular contact with senior civil servants assigned to the temporarily non-existent body until new Commission members were announced in October 2018. Published in April 2019, the Social Mobility Commission's annual report on the state of the nation 'welcomed' the introduction of the socio-economic duty in Scotland, noted the Welsh announcement, and 'encouraged' the UK government to follow their example for England ([Social Mobility Commission 2019: 137–8](#)). It helped that in his latest book, one of the new Commission members, Sam Friedman, had explicitly urged readers to contact their MP and support the #1forEquality campaign ([Friedman and Laurison 2019: 237–8](#)).

2.3 A slight change in the strategy: from 'naming and shaming' to the identification of best practices

The day after Theresa May's speech against the socio-economic duty in November 2010, the then Equalities Minister, Lynne (now Baroness) Featherstone, was questioned in Parliament. Ms Featherstone defended the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition government's position arguing that the duty

would only have been a bureaucratic box to tick—another form to fill in. It would have distracted hard-pressed council staff and other public sector workers away from coming up with the right policies that will make a real difference to people's chances in life. ([Hansard 2010: Column 1057–58](#))

In 2011, the then Prime Minister David Cameron commissioned a study to review overall domestic regulation with the view of simplifying procedures (known as the 'Red Tape Challenge'); that review concluded that the socio-economic duty did not need to be repealed because it had 'no impact on business' ([HM Government 2014: spreadsheet line 672](#)). However, to this day successive governments have resisted activating the duty.

By the time the campaign #1forEquality was launched, the ruling Conservative Party had been elevating the tone against human rights for a number of years, threatening to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 and even denouncing the European Convention on Human Rights. The referendum of June 2016, when a majority voted for the UK to leave the EU, had epitomised the rising nationalism in England, where there was widespread scepticism towards anything international, let alone European. It was clear that attempting

to name and shame the government for not meeting international human rights standards on equality and socio-economic rights was not going to carry much weight with a relatively large part of the population, even with many leaning to the left politically.

A different strategy was required. As discussed earlier, devolution made it possible to pursue a path in Scotland that could be explored later in Wales, and potentially in England. Furthermore, although section 1 of the [Equality Act 2010](#) was not technically binding, there was no reason why a local authority could not decide to incorporate the socio-economic duty into its strategic planning and integrated impact assessments.

That is why in the first half of 2018 Just Fair commissioned field research that led to the publication of the report 'Tackling Socio-Economic Inequalities Locally: Good Practices in the Implementation of the Socio-Economic Duty by Local Authorities in England' ([Just Fair 2018](#)). That study proved that, where there was political will, the prophecy made in 2010 by the Equalities Minister of the Coalition government was not being fulfilled: the socio-economic duty did not have to become 'a bureaucratic box to tick' or a 'distraction' for local council staff.

The report showed what the duty could look like in practice. The researchers interviewed 20 elected members of local councils, senior officers and voluntary sector groups, and identified 13 potentially good practices in seven local authorities around England: Manchester, Newcastle, Oldham, Wigan, Bristol, York and the London Borough of Islington. Respondents did not necessarily use the socio-economic duty explicitly; instead, they had different frames and agendas to articulate their policies: fairness, inclusive growth, impact assessment, equality budgeting, economic disadvantage, social exclusion, and so on. But all of them were clear that austerity had prompted them to react both because of the way social security reforms were affecting their residents and because of the limitations on local government funds. Estimated at 49 per cent between 2010 and 2018 ([National Audit Office 2018](#)), cuts in funding from central government to local authorities made efficiency in the delivery of local social services an ever more pressing issue. The socio-economic duty could be helpful in that regard because it is meant to assess the actual impact of specific policies on the reduction of inequalities.

All seven local councils showed a combination of visible leadership, meaningful impact assessments, data transparency, and engagement with residents and the voluntary sector. The research evinced that it is vital for someone senior, the leader or an executive member of the local authority, to champion its work, ideally with local cross-party support. The commitment to tackling socio-economic disadvantage must trickle down all levels of decision-making to ensure that election results or staff turnover do not compromise the local council's work. A systematic and transparent assessment of the cumulative impact of political decisions is of paramount importance; councils that see equality impact assessments as a mere box-ticking exercise are unlikely to provide best practices. All seven local authorities used a wide range of data on residents' standard of living as well as a significant number of sources shared with health services and other stakeholders. Residents and organized civil society were considered both critical challengers and creators of innovative ideas. The research also showed that council officials were eager to learn from the experience and best practice explored and implemented in other local authorities. After the adoption of the Fairer Scotland Duty, #1forEquality campaigners were invited to present their findings from the research in England at a series of workshops for local civil servants in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 2018 and 2019.

The leading organizations behind #1forEquality continued arguing for the socio-economic duty as a matter of principle and with frequent references to international human rights law. However, the good local practice gave human rights campaigners the chance to go beyond denouncing what they are against to show what they are for.

2.4 Celebrating victories along the way

The progress made in Scotland and Wales has been significant, and the campaign is contributing to it, although by no means can it be attributed only to the two organizations leading #1forEquality. The growing list of MPs who signed [Early Day Motion No. 591 \(2017–19\)](#) is a cause for cautious celebration, because it is an indication of the level of support in Parliament.

Every new addition to the list of academics and civil society groups supporting the call for implementing the socio-economic duty, currently more than 80, has been treated as a step forward. For example, in its report on the negative impact of austerity policies on social security in the UK, the first of its kind for the organization at a global level, [Human Rights Watch](#) urged the government to use the socio-economic duty as a way of ensuring the right to food for everyone without discrimination (2019: 101). Human Rights Watch joined #1forEquality in August 2019.

Poverty2Solutions is also supporting the commencement and implementation of the socio-economic duty. Poverty2Solutions is a coalition of groups of people with lived experience of poverty, including Thrive in Teesside and ATD Fourth World in London. Through a process of active participation of people who live and have lived in poverty, the groups reached the conclusion that the socio-economic duty can be one of the policies they need to address the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality in their communities. Regarding active participation, it is worth pointing out that the Scottish guidance for public authorities is more inclusive than the more limited approach of section 1:

[I]t will be important to involve relevant communities, particularly people with direct experience of poverty and disadvantage. Note too that the costs of involving some groups—for example, disabled people—can often be higher, as barriers to their participation need to be overcome. (Scottish Government 2018: 18)

The endorsement of Thrive and ATD Fourth World reassured Just Fair and the Equality Trust that the issue they were campaigning on was also important for activists who know what poverty and social exclusion feel like. After a meeting with Poverty2Solutions, in March 2019 Harriet Harman MP tabled [Early Day Motion No. 2249](#) to re-energize the House of Commons' support for the socio-economic duty. She also committed to explore a possible pilot project to implement the socio-economic duty in the London Borough of Southwark, where she is the local Labour MP, and in Stockton-on-Tees, where Thrive Teesside is based. Stockton is also one of the most unequal places in the country (Garthwaite and Bamba 2018).

After the publication of Just Fair's report on the voluntary implementation of the duty by local authorities in England, the Fairness Commission of Haringey in London and the local council of Gateshead in North East England expressed an interest in exploring what the duty could mean in policy development locally. With financial support from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Just Fair, Thrive Teesside and other local charities and community groups secured the commitment of 58 candidates from North East England standing in the local elections of May 2019 to support the voluntary implementation of the

socio-economic duty if they were elected as councillors or council leaders ([The Chronicle 2019](#)); at least four of the 12 local councils in the region have adopted motions in favour of social rights and the socio-economic duty. (For motions, supporters and more details about Just Fair's Social Rights Alliance of the North East, see <http://justfair.org.uk/north-east>.)

Ultimately, the goal of #1forEquality is to see the socio-economic duty in place in the whole of Great Britain, the geographical scope of the [Equality Act 2010](#), since Northern Ireland has its own anti-discrimination legislation. That vision has not yet materialized, and at the time of writing, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson, nothing indicates it will happen in the near future. However, in order to succeed, a human rights campaign must give reasons to hope that change is possible. And so far #1forEquality has not been short of victorious battles.

3. Conclusions

This article has assessed the progress made by the UK campaign in favour of the socio-economic duty as the combination of four key factors: the fusion of two advocacy communities that do not always work together, equality and human rights; the engagement with relevant political actors and processes at key stages of the campaign; the strategic shift from 'naming and shaming' to the identification of best practices; and the celebration of smaller victories even when the ultimate objective of having the duty in force in the whole of Great Britain has not been achieved yet.

#1forEquality is an example of successful 'vernacularization' ([Merry 2006](#)) and 'localization' ([de Feyter 2007](#)) of human rights, where the needs of the community and the language that makes sense locally are taken as the starting point of human rights advocacy. The campaign is also an expression of the expansion of the human rights frame of analysis to other epistemic and advocacy groups that either have not considered human rights or have discarded them because they see them as too legalistic, bureaucratic, distant or confrontational. The campaign also adopts a more political and less legalistic tone, while keeping the call in line with the standards of international human rights law. This conscious decision responds to the need to synergize the local and the international, broaden the base of the mobilizing structures, and combine instrumentalist and principled arguments to be more persuasive and successful against the growing demagoguery of right-wing populism ([Alston 2017](#)).

#1forEquality contributes to making the case that human rights can help to address and reduce material inequalities. Bringing the socio-economic duty to life nationally would require the government to make a significant U-turn, which is not foreseeable at the moment. But stating the linkage between human rights and equality conceptually is a significant policy development in itself. By connecting human rights with equality, campaigners win even when they lose.

The work in Scotland and Wales and with some local authorities in England shows the value of federalist or semi-federalist models like the UK for policy development. The process of decentralization known as 'devolution' provides an opportunity for public authorities to collaborate and learn from each other, and to test and explore new ideas that could later be implemented by other administrations. Decentralized countries provide human rights campaigners with a scenario where they do not need to simply point the finger to denounce the lack of compliance with certain international standards; they can also make specific proposals that may be working reasonably well somewhere else in the country itself.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference ‘The Kaleidoscope of Exclusion’ at King’s College London on 7 June 2019. The author is grateful to champions of equality and socio-economic rights in the UK.

Conflict of interest

At the time of writing and during the period covered in this article (2017–2019), the author was also the Policy Director of Just Fair, an organization that monitors and campaigns for economic and social rights in the UK. Just Fair co-leads the campaign #1forEquality together with the Equality Trust.

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