

[\[https://gegen-kapital-und-nation.org/en/brief-critique-of-the-demand-for-equal-opportunities/\]](https://gegen-kapital-und-nation.org/en/brief-critique-of-the-demand-for-equal-opportunities/)

# **Brief critique of the demand for equal opportunities**

Equality of opportunity means that participants in a competition have a level playing field. Hence when we talk about equal opportunities, competition is a prerequisite. Competition means winners and losers. Opportunity in itself means the possibility of realising something - in contrast to the certainty. If a number of people have the opportunity to get or achieve something by competing against each other, this means that some of these people will not get it. Whatever happens, some of them will go away empty-handed.

Trade unions, for example, often demand equal opportunities in the conviction that they are doing something against "injustice". This refers primarily to the education system and the labour market. The aim is to give disadvantaged people better opportunities for advancement and success. To this end, they should be supported, and discrimination should be eliminated or redressed.

In doing so, there may be the idea that everyone can somehow win. However this is not possible given a selective education system and a capitalist labour market. It is certain that certain proportions of people will be excluded from opportunities for education; it is also certain that there will be work, and thus wages, at most for as many people as are demanded by companies according to their interests. If one advocates equal opportunities in the sense of 'leveling the playing field' or offering additional support to counter discrimination, this means that there will still be losers, but they should be those who genuinely deserve to lose according to the standards of the respective competition - because they are the inferior ones according to these standards. Only those who "deserve" to win should win.

In addition, with this demand, the competition in question - with its purpose, and how it works - is endorsed. For schools, this means that children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be supported so that they have equal opportunities to achieve higher qualifications. This means implicitly accepting that learning at school is based on competition and selection. Topics are portioned out and taken for granted as learning goals. They have to be memorised or understood within a certain time.

Such an education system makes sense for a society in which there is a occupational hierarchy ranging from numerous poorly paid, hard jobs, up to a few well-paid ones, and in which young people are sooner or later distributed between the top and bottom. This is bad for learning and human development. Pressure to perform and fear of failure are part and parcel of it. This system is set up by the state, which has an interest in the sorting of young people necessary for economic and social life.

And in the labour market: companies look for employees in line with their profitable use of capital and their growth. They hire whoever is suitable for the profit calculation; they dismiss if this is not the case, either on the part of the employee or on the part of the company. But even if they have a job, the wage-earners still come off badly in the companies' calculations. They are a dependent variable of the profit motive and can escape neither poverty (or the danger of poverty) nor stress.

Advocating for equal opportunities supports this very suboptimal situation in which most find themselves, even if there is no awareness or intention that this is the case. After all, the demand for equal opportunities here means that "improper" criteria such as skin colour or gender should be irrelevant for employment. What is supposed to count, on the other hand, is only the ability to fulfil the work requirements defined by the employer according to their profit calculation. That is the essence of competition for a job, and that is what it is supposed to be for people who are committed to equal opportunities.

So when it comes to school and work, it is not only the losers who are in a very unfavourable position; the relative "winners" also have to struggle with this system and bad luck within it.

Finally: Discrimination e.g. on the basis of skin colour or gender is bad because people suffer extra hardship in competition and are subjected to hostility. That is why it is right to defend oneself against negative treatment, exclusion and harassment and to take action. However, this is possible without adopting the goal of equal opportunities and thus advocating for a "fair" or "just" competitive society. It is capitalism, with its corresponding education system and labour market, that is fundamentally deserving of abolition.