# Labour cancels women’s conference amid turmoil over Supreme Court’s trans rights ruling



Labour's recent decision to cancel its annual women's conference highlights the deep divisions within the party regarding the rights of transgender individuals and the implications of a recent UK Supreme Court ruling. The ruling, which defined 'woman' strictly as a biological female under the 2010 Equality Act, has prompted significant debate and controversy, forcing the Labour Party to reassess its policies.

The Supreme Court ruling, announced on April 16, 2025, marked a watershed moment in the discourse surrounding gender identity in the UK. It arose from a legal battle between the feminist group For Women Scotland and the Scottish government, which previously adopted a more inclusive interpretation of representation on public boards. This judicial clarification has significant ramifications for transgender rights, as it allows organisations to legally exclude transgender women from female-designated spaces if deemed appropriate, raising concerns among trans advocates about potential discrimination and vulnerability.

In the wake of the ruling, Labour Party discussions unfolded with increasing urgency. Facing internal pressures from both women’s rights activists and transgender advocates, the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) opted to reformulate its policies aimed at promoting women's participation in politics, now restricting eligibility to those born biologically female. A Labour spokesperson stated, “Labour must ensure all party procedures comply with the Supreme Court's clear ruling,” reinforcing the party's obligation to adhere to legal standards. However, this shift has ignited backlash from different factions within the party.

The Labour Women’s Declaration applauded the party for aligning with the court’s guidance but expressed dismay over the cancellation of the conference, describing it as "ridiculous and unnecessary." They argue that the conference cancellation removes a vital space for women to engage in political discourse and diminish their representation.

The NEC's decision to postpone the conference was rooted not only in legal prudence but also in concerns about the potential for protests and heightened security risks. Background documents warned of the substantial risk of direct and indirect discrimination claims if the event proceeded under its current format. Consequently, the absence of a conference looms as a setback for women's activism within the party, which traditionally has served as a platform for discussing strategies to combat gender inequality.

Labour has faced growing scrutiny over its stance on trans rights, particularly from MPs who now openly advocate for self-identification laws for transgender individuals, indicating a significant schism within the party. Despite the leadership's alignment with the ruling, voices like Cat Arnold from the NEC have publicly declared their support for trans rights, underscoring the internal conflict. Arnold stated, “Trans women are women and trans rights are human rights,” reaffirming a commitment to inclusivity that stands in contrast to the recent policy changes.

Outside of party politics, the Supreme Court ruling has broader implications for the international discourse surrounding gender identity. With increasing pressure from women’s rights groups claiming biological definitions should prevail, the ruling could have a ripple effect, influencing legal interpretations in other jurisdictions, including the United States, where discussions around gender and sex-based protections are similarly contentious.

As Labour navigates these tumultuous waters, the party must confront the realities of its divided membership and the broader societal implications of these legal definitions. The cancellation of the women's conference may be viewed as a retreat from an opportunity for dialogue and solidarity among women, leaving many in the party pondering the future of women’s rights alongside the recognition of transgender identities.

The Labour party's grappling with the implications of the Supreme Court ruling is not just a matter of legal compliance; it reflects the complex interplay of feminism and transgender rights, leaving both groups questioning how best to advocate for their respective rights in an increasingly polarised environment.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14733551/Labour-decide-woman-trans-ruling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/9f4feaeb-44ba-42d2-8187-aa3760443d53> - Following a recent UK Supreme Court ruling stating that the legal definition of 'woman' is based on biological sex, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer publicly revised his stance on the issue. Previously, Starmer had expressed the view that 'trans women are women,' citing the Equalities Act. However, he now affirms that 'a woman is an adult female,' aligning with the court's interpretation. This marks another shift in his evolving position over recent years. The ruling has prompted the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to draft new guidance for public institutions, while Equalities Minister Bridget Phillipson pledged to end mixed-sex hospital wards based on biological sex. She clarified that although biological sex will determine access to single-sex services, providers can still opt for inclusive services. The Supreme Court also ruled that organizations can exclude transgender individuals from single-sex spaces if it is proportionate, potentially affecting access to restrooms, changing areas, and healthcare settings. Critics, including MPs, have voiced concerns that the ruling could expose trans individuals to increased vulnerability. The EHRC plans to release updated statutory guidance by summer 2025. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/9f4feaeb-44ba-42d2-8187-aa3760443d53?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/1a61bea0c26c13cf34864f696a1a5f0c> - On April 16, 2025, the U.K. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the legal definition of 'woman' under the Equality Act refers to biological females, thereby excluding transgender women. This decision emerged from a dispute between the feminist group For Women Scotland and the Scottish government over a 2018 law mandating 50% female representation on public boards, which had included transgender women with gender recognition certificates in the count. The Court emphasized that the ruling does not strip transgender people of protections against discrimination under U.K. law, but certain female-designated spaces and services may lawfully exclude transgender women. Women's rights groups welcomed the ruling as affirming biological realities, while transgender advocacy groups and politicians criticized it as a setback to human rights, warning it could erode trans protections and recognition. High-profile supporters like J.K. Rowling celebrated the decision, whereas Amnesty International argued it risks violating trans individuals' human rights. The British government endorsed the ruling for providing legal clarity, and Scotland’s government acknowledged the decision, pledging to assess its implications. The case reflects broader international debates over gender identity and legal definitions, similar to controversial developments in the United States. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/1a61bea0c26c13cf34864f696a1a5f0c?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://time.com/7278363/what-to-know-uk-supreme-court-transgender-women-ruling/> - On April 16, 2025, the U.K. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that transgender women are not included under the legal definition of 'women' in the 2010 Equality Act, interpreting 'sex' to mean 'biological sex' only. This decision, driven by the For Women Scotland group, limits transgender women's access to women-only spaces and services. While transgender individuals with Gender Recognition Certificates (GRCs) can still access certain legal recognitions, they are now excluded from certain sex-based protections. The ruling has been criticized by trans activists and organizations like Amnesty International, who argue it reflects and strengthens global anti-trans sentiment. Critics worry this precedent could influence U.S. legal approaches, where protections for trans people are also under threat. Notably, former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration issued policies recognizing only birth-assigned sex and restricting gender-affirming care and sports participation for trans individuals. Despite the U.K. ruling, transgender individuals still have legal protections under gender reassignment provisions of the Equality Act. U.S. advocates emphasize that federal law continues to protect transgender rights, with rulings like Bostock v. Clayton County affirming such protections under U.S. law. ([time.com](https://time.com/7278363/what-to-know-uk-supreme-court-transgender-women-ruling/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/17/trans-women-arent-legally-women-what-the-uk-supreme-court-ruling-means> - On April 16, 2025, the U.K. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the term 'woman' in the existing UK Equality Act should be interpreted as only people born biologically female, and that trans women, even those with GRCs, should be excluded from that definition. The ruling further clarified that trans women can be excluded from certain single-sex spaces and groups designated for women, such as changing rooms, homeless and domestic violence shelters, swimming areas, and medical or counselling services. The court added that the ruling was not a 'triumph' of one side over the other and emphasized that transgender people are still protected from discrimination under UK law. However, some protections, the judges clarified, should only apply to biological females and not transgender women. ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/17/trans-women-arent-legally-women-what-the-uk-supreme-court-ruling-means?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://labourlist.org/2025/04/supreme-court-ruling-labour-women-nec/> - A new member of Labour’s national executive committee has expressed solidarity with the trans community following a ruling in the Supreme Court on the definition of a woman. Cat Arnold, a member of Labour’s national executive committee, expressed her 'love and solidarity' with trans people following the ruling on Wednesday. Arnold, elected to the NEC as part of a new Labour Women slate last year, told LabourList: 'Trans women are women and trans rights are human rights. I am fully supportive of the trans community. I send complete love and solidarity to our trans community.' It comes after another member of the party’s governing body, youth rep Elsie Greenwood, also spoke out against the ruling, in contrast with the government’s position. Fresh tensions have resurfaced within the party on the issue of trans rights and single-sex spaces following the ruling. ([labourlist.org](https://labourlist.org/2025/04/supreme-court-ruling-labour-women-nec/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.itv.com/news/2025-04-24/mp-hounded-out-of-labour-for-trans-views-feels-vindicated-at-gender-ruling> - A former Labour MP who resigned from the party over her gender-critical views has told ITV News there's no way back with Sir Keir Starmer in charge. Rosie Duffield, a gender-critical MP who quit Labour, said she feels 'vindicated' by the Supreme Court's ruling and vowed she would never rejoin the party under Sir Keir Starmer's leadership. In an interview with ITV News' Deputy Political Editor Anushka Asthana, Duffield claimed she was 'hounded out' of the party last year after being subjected to a 'whispering campaign' due to her views on trans rights. Though she suggested rejoining Labour in the future was not completely off the cards, she said it would never happen under the prime minister's tenure. The Canterbury MP's comments come after the UK’s highest court confirmed in a long-awaited decision that the terms 'woman' and 'sex' in the 2010 Equality Act 'refer to a biological woman and biological sex'. It means transgender women with a gender recognition certificate can be excluded from single-sex spaces if 'proportionate'. ([itv.com](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-04-24/mp-hounded-out-of-labour-for-trans-views-feels-vindicated-at-gender-ruling?utm_source=openai))