

Social Justice and Principles of Social Justice with Strong Practical Examples

What is social justice?

This can be interpreted as a world in which societies are based on the **principles of equality and solidarity**, **understand and value human rights**, and **recognize the dignity of every human being**.

The United Nations defines social justice as an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations, based on equality, solidarity, and respect for human rights. It mandates ensuring fair distribution of resources, equal opportunities, and the removal of barriers based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or disability.

Social justice is founded on the core principles of **equity, access, participation, human rights and diversity** aimed at ensuring fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and treatment for all individuals. It focuses on reducing disparities based on identity or status, promoting inclusion, and protecting fundamental rights to foster a just, peaceful, and prosperous society.

Key Principles of Social Justice (short form - EAP R (hr) D)

E = Equity (Fairness), A = Access, P = Participation, R = Rights or Human Rights D = Diversity

Core Principles of Social Justice

Equity: Recognizing that individuals have different circumstances and allocating resources/opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome, rather than treating everyone the same.

Access: Ensuring everyone has equal access to necessities like healthcare, education, clean water, and information, regardless of income or location.

Participation: Empowering all individuals to voice opinions and take part in decisions that affect their lives, political, and economic opportunities.

Human Rights: Protecting fundamental rights, including civil, legal, and economic liberties, ensuring everyone is treated with dignity.

Diversity: Recognizing and valuing cultural differences, perspectives, and background, which helps reduce prejudice and inequality.

Equity → Access → Participation → Rights (Human Rights) → Diversity

1. E — Equity (Fairness)

Equity recognizes that people have **different needs and circumstances**, so resources and opportunities must be distributed **according to need** — not equally. It is different from equality: equality gives everyone the same thing, equity gives everyone what they need to reach the same outcome. In social work, this means a disabled child gets special education, a very poor family gets more financial aid, and an abuse survivor gets long-term counseling — because their needs are greater.

Example: Three students trying to see over a wall — the shortest gets two boxes, the medium gets one, the tallest gets none. Now all can see equally. **Same outcome, different support.**

2. A — Access

Access means it is **not enough for services to exist** — people must be able to **actually reach, afford, and use** them. Barriers can be financial (no money), physical (no transport), social (discrimination), cultural (language), or legal (no documents). Social workers identify who is being excluded and why, then remove those barriers so everyone can benefit from education, healthcare, food, shelter, and employment.

Example: An elderly woman cannot reach the hospital due to no transport and no money. A social worker enrolls her in a public health scheme and arranges community transport — now she can actually use healthcare that already existed.

3. P — Participation

Participation means people are **not just passive receivers of help** — they must be **actively involved** in the decisions, plans, and programs that affect their lives. This includes political participation, community decision-making, and program planning. It promotes empowerment, self-determination, and dignity. When people participate, they feel ownership over solutions, which makes those solutions more effective and sustainable.

Example: A government plans a water supply system without asking villagers. With social worker involvement, village meetings are held, women share their daily struggles, and

water points are placed where people actually need them.
Real needs, real solutions.

4. R(HR) — Human Rights

Human rights are the **basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person simply because they are human** — regardless of caste, religion, gender, nationality, or status. These include the right to life, liberty, dignity, equality, education, and safety. In social work, protecting human rights means defending people against abuse and exploitation, advocating for fair laws, and empowering people to claim what is already theirs by birth.

Example: A child from a marginalized community is denied school admission due to caste discrimination. The social worker advocates with school authorities and raises awareness about anti-discrimination laws — securing the child's **right to education**.

5. D — Diversity

Diversity means **recognizing, valuing, and including people from different backgrounds** — caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, language, disability, culture, and socio-economic status. It goes beyond tolerance — it means actively challenging stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice, and ensuring diverse voices are represented in governance, institutions, and media. Social workers must practice **cultural competence**, understanding and respecting different backgrounds while delivering services.

Example: A tribal community avoids hospitals because staff disrespect their healing traditions. A social worker trains healthcare providers in cultural sensitivity — building trust and improving healthcare access. **Respect for difference = better outcomes.**