



Irise International
Empowering
People through
Period Equality.



**Menstrual Hygiene
Day (28th May)
2022**

What's next for Period Equality in the UK?

The latest research

Despite significant progress to reduce the stigma around periods and strong commitments from young people to normalise menstruation- the movement to end period poverty and shame for all faces challenges:

Period poverty is getting worse due to the combined impacts of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis:

- The Periods in a Pandemic Research Project found that new groups of people were experiencing period poverty during the pandemic including students and NHS staff
- Latest survey data from Plan International UK found that 1 in 5 girls now struggle to access period products compared to 1 in 10 before the pandemic
- The increase in cost of living means that the benefits of scrapping 5% VAT on period products at the start of 2021 has largely been lost.
- The Department for Education's opt-in Period Product Scheme, launched in 2020, has not been evaluated but only 50% of eligible institutions enrolled in 2021.

Menstrual health education has been deprioritised:

- Despite Menstrual Health Education being made part of mandatory Relationships, Sex and Health Education in 2020 it remains a low priority with no resources or dedicated training provided by the Department for Education.
- In 2021, a poll by the Sex Education Forum found that 61% of young people reported receiving no or not enough menstruation education.

The Periods in Pandemic research study found increased barriers to accessing healthcare for menstrual related issues on a backdrop of urgent need:

- Only 8% of girls (aged 15 to 19) know what the common gynaecological condition endometriosis is, a rate significantly lower than in other countries (24% in Australia and 19% in Italy).
- Despite the condition affecting 1 in 10 women, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Endometriosis 2020 inquiry found that the average length of time for an endometriosis diagnosis was 8 years and this had not changed in over a decade.

The issue intersects with other forms of inequality and disadvantage:

- Recent research found that black women experience higher rates of period poverty compared to white women and are underrepresented in menstrual advocacy and in the media's portrayal of periods.
- Asylum seekers struggle to pay for period products out of their £40.85 weekly allowance.



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What's Next

- Support Bloody Good Period's 'Paying for a Period' Campaign, calling for the government to act on and renew its commitment to end period poverty and shame in the UK by 2025, alongside active monitoring of the issue.
- Reform the Period Equality All Party Parliamentary Group to help co-ordinate cross sector action on these challenges. This coalition could reform this group and further conversation should take place.
- Increase use of the resources that are already available to help services and organisations support people experiencing period poverty and shame including:
- Promoting and supporting uptake of the Department of Education's Period Product Scheme including the possibility of regional meetings to help schools to act on this issue- South Yorkshire suggested as a starting point for this due to strong partnerships in the area.
- Promoting the Let's Talk Period Learning Briefings, which summarise best practice, to improve service provision
- Advocate for evaluation of the Period Product Scheme and of inclusion of menstruation in RSHE to make improvements.
- Advocate for Period Product provision to be legislated for, in a similar way to Scotland's 'The Period Products Act' 2021.
- Conduct further research on black women's menstrual experiences and other overlooked groups to address gaps in evidence and advocacy.
- Continue to work together to form a strong cross-sector coalition to rise to the challenges we face.

References

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