

Draft #EWOA23 calls for a Menstrual Health, Dignity and Sustainability Act for England and the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

We urgently need a Menstrual Health, Dignity, and Sustainability Act in the UK. The Act should start from the premise that menstruation is a human rights and public health issue. It needs to address the health and waste impacts, equity and dignity, period equity, education and regulation, and challenge existing stigma and taboos.

There are examples of policy in other countries and states such as Catalonia, Kenya, Wales, Scotland, New York State, and in the EU. (see below for details)

Regulation

To establish effective monitoring, evaluation, compliance, and research and learning frameworks for menstruation to ensure maximum accountability in policy implementation at all levels.

- Effective regulation for all period products, single use disposables and reusables with a prohibited list of ingredients and additives.
- Requirements for industry to conduct and publish test results for all intentionally and unintentionally added chemicals and substances found in period products.
- Compulsory independent testing and publication of the results for all period products for both intentionally and unintentionally added substances.
- Recognised organic certification for the end product to include residue testing.
- Published results should include proper chemical or pesticide names and Cas numbers if applicable, along with the functionality and where in the product they have been found.
- Prohibit additives such as stay fresh, anti-microbial, anti-odour, fragrances and colourants in all period products including in continence products, this should work in conjunction with a prohibited list.
- A commitment from period product manufacturers to divest from using fossil fuel derived ingredients in their products.
- Creation of a UK ecolabel standard for all single use disposable and reusable period products.

Waste

- Targets for waste minimisation and a move to greater use of reusable/washable products.

- Flushing of period products should be prohibited and a 'Do Not Flush' symbol should be mandatory on all single use disposable packaging and displayed on shelves next to the period products.

Transparency

- All additives must be disclosed on labels including fragrances.
- Requirement to measure and publicise environmental impacts of period products.
- Companies should provide customers with detailed information on how they assure the safety of their products, including information on the safety of their ingredients, specifically for vaginal and vulvar exposure.

Stigma and taboos

- Menstruation and periods need to be fully understood, accepted and normalised.
- Stigma and taboos challenged through education and provision of information.
- Greater understanding of what happens to menstruation during perimenopause and menopause across educational, work and medical settings.
- Address myths, taboos and stigma around menstruation by providing everyone with access to information on menstruation.
- Ensure early familiarisation especially in schools with the range of period products available with particular focus on reusables and organic single use disposables.
- The language used around menstruation needs to change. Terms like 'hygiene', 'sanitary' 'feminine', 'discreet', and 'femcare' need to change to avoid stigmatising. Periods are not dirty, unhygienic or unsanitary, they are also not a marker of femininity for everyone.

Access

- Free and equitable access to safe, affordable, sustainable, and quality washable reusable and organic single use disposable period products for all who need them.
- Remove the tax from all period products including reusable products such as period pants.

Inclusivity

When we reference people who menstruate this is inclusive of gender non-binary, non conforming, intersex and trans people who experience periods.

- Period products and menstrual health services should be available to all who need them including those who are gender non-conforming, non-binary, or trans. Ensuring ease of access, which is non-judgmental or shame inducing.
- Inclusive classrooms – include boys and LGBTQ+ students.

- Recognition of the intersectional impacts on menstruation of all those who menstruate.
- Provision of period products should include the choice of gender diverse styles of period pants such as boxer shorts to suit everyone.
- Gender neutral and inclusive terms should be used in relation to all those who menstruate. Women, girls, trans and nonbinary people who menstruate, those who menstruate or people who menstruate.

Medical

- A need to redress any lack of knowledge by the medical community about what counts as 'normal' in terms of menstrual health which can lead to the late diagnosis of serious conditions such as endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), vulvodynia, gynaecological cancers, premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), PMS and fibroids.
- The medical professional should have no preconceptions or prejudices around menstruation, especially around gynaecological pain, heavy bleeding and distress.
- A new and innovative approach to menstruation, sexual health and reproductive rights is needed which is not limited to women and girls but extends to everyone irrespective of age, gender, gender identity and gender expression.
- Experiencing pain or heavy menstrual bleeding may be out of the control of those experiencing it. There needs to be an urgent redress of how racism and the lack of consideration given to intersectional impacts on menstruation and how it affects medical treatment. For Black women especially, who are not taken seriously even when symptoms do present or encounter racism along their journey to receiving appropriate treatment, there are even more barriers to adequate symptom management.

Menstruation at work

- Recognition by the Health & Safety at work regulations that chronic menstrual and gynecologically related conditions (with or without a diagnosis) such as endometriosis and heavy bleeding can have a profound effect on employment leading to disruption in work patterns.
- Urgent action on existing knowledge, and more research in relation to menstruation and occupationally related exposures to certain chemicals.
- Ensure risk assessments employed are gender sensitive and identify work-related conditions that might exacerbate menstrual or peri/menopausal symptoms.
- Awareness and better understanding of the impact of intersectionality and the diversity of menstrual experiences in the workplace.
- Health surveillance for all workers producing period products that contain chemicals and a commitment to toxic use reduction to reduce hazardous chemicals.

Education

- The national curriculum should include government funded, factually accurate, high quality and freely available period education and lessons for women, girls, and people who menstruate on how best to manage their period when it does start and to ensure it does not negatively impact on their life.
- Education for the wider public around menstruation to break down taboos and stigma and aid acceptance and normalisation of periods as a natural bodily function.
- Engage young people in education around menstruation and associated gynaecological conditions, involve influencers and a diverse range of those who do and do not menstruate to reach out via social media to others who menstruate.
- Create straightforward, understandable, and inclusive content about menstrual issues which matter especially to young people.
- Education to include information on how to access, use and care for a wide range of healthy, sustainable, and reusable period products.

Facilities

- Everyone that needs them has access to safe, clean and appropriate facilities to enable them to manage their period in privacy, with dignity and in a healthy way.
- Clean and functioning sanitation facilities need to be provided for all those who menstruate with provision of washing facilities in toilets to be a standard especially in schools, workplaces and other establishments to promote the use of reusables.
- Accessible toilets for those working in remote places and in community settings, with access to public toilets across communities.

Period Equity

- Safe and accessible provision to period products of choice should be made available to those experiencing period equity due to lack of economic resources or other issues.
- Provision should include a range of reusable and single use organic period products.
- We need to implement an intersectional approach to menstrual health and dignity to ensure equality, equity and dignity.

Councils

- Central government funding following Scotland's lead for all councils, district councils and boroughs to run their own period product schemes to increase access to affordable and sustainable period products for all.
- Central government to work with councils and schools to promote organic and reusable period products, and to prioritise products from independent and local suppliers.

Signatures

1. **&SISTERS and Mooncup® - Lucy Lettice-Cohen (Co-Founder)**
2. **Grace and Green - Frances Lucraft (Founder and CEO)**
3. **Hazards Campaign - Janet Newsham Chair UK Hazards Campaign**
4. **Natracare- Susie Hewson MBE Founder and director Natracare**
5. **Period Positive - Chella Quint (Founder, author, menstrual literacy campaigner and qualified teacher)**
6. **Wen- Kate Metcalf Wen Co-Director**
7. **WUKA - Ruby Raut (Founder and CEO)**

Sources used:

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Dr. Maria Tomlinson and Acushla Young – [Using social media to effectively communicate with young people about menstruation](#)

[Black Women's Reproductive Health](#). T.A.P. project and Freedom4Girl's. August 2022.

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BSI - 30416. [Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace](#) 2023.

Poppy Taylor - <https://planetperiod.wixsite.com/research>

[Period Proud Wales Action Plan](#) 2023

[Period Products \(free provisions\)](#) Scotland Act 2021.

New York State regulations – [Menstrual Products Right to Know Act 2019](#)

Zero Waste Europe – [The Bloody Manifesto](#) 2021.

Scheaffer Okore – [Why's menstruation a human rights issue.](#)

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Rezero Catalonia – [Nou Period work](#)

Catalonia to distribute free, universally available, [reusable menstrual products.](#)

United Nations - [Menstrual Hygiene Management, Human Rights and Gender Equality](#) 2021.

Period Positive - [A Period Positive National Curriculum](#) 2022.

The Period Positive Pledge - www.periodpositive.com 2020.

*When we talk about women – We may refer to the different effects of chemical exposure and environmental impacts on bodies with female versus male anatomy. When using terms e.g., 'women', it should be noted that this describes those with female anatomy because there is a lack of data regarding trans, gender non-conforming or gender diverse or intersex people. We need to recognise this gap in the research and in using the terms women, feminists, men, female, or male we make no assumption about the gender identity of individuals and place no normative assumptions on bodies.