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Scotland becomes first country to provide period products for free

Tampons, sanitary towels and other period products will have to be available free of cost in Scotland.

By Pierre-Paul Bermingham

POLITICO (25.11.2020) - <https://politi.co/2JqD0us> - Scotland became the first country in the world to make feminine hygiene products available for free as the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act on Tuesday evening.

The [law](#) requires local authorities to ensure period products such as tampons or sanitary towels are available free of cost in their area. Schools, universities, and other education institutions must also have free period products in their restrooms, as must a number of public buildings.

Scottish Labour MSP Monica Lennon introduced the bill in April 2019 and led the legislative effort. "Periods should never be a barrier to education or push anyone into poverty," said Lennon, also the spokesperson for health and sport of her party. "Women, girls and all people who menstruate deserve period dignity," she added.

A study in May by [Plan International UK](#) found that 30 percent of girls aged 14-21 struggled to access sanitary products during the lockdown in the United Kingdom.

Lennon thanked grassroots activists who played an important role in campaigning for the measure, as well as precursors such as the North Ayrshire council, which had implemented a policy of free sanitary products in 2018.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said she was "proud to vote for this groundbreaking legislation."

Though Scotland is the first nation to make feminine hygiene freely available to all, a handful of countries have banned the "tampon tax" – the levying of VAT on sanitary products.

In Europe, Ireland is the only country with no tampon tax. The EU only allows zero-rate VAT derogations on products which were zero-rated before EU legislation.

Scotland urged to better protect women's rights amid Brexit threat

Scotland must go "further, faster" on women's rights as Brexit threatens to exacerbate inequality, the Scottish Human Rights Commission has told the UN.

By Kirsteen Paterson

The National (27.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2EhucRk> - The national body delivered its new report to the UN's Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva yesterday.

The paper, which contains 24 recommendations, warns that "harmful" gender stereotypes continue to "limit opportunities" for women and girls.

And though LGBTI issues will now be covered in schools to stamp out hate-based harassment, the country's national approach to addressing bullying makes "little reference to misogyny or gender based" trouble, despite a 2018 report which found female pupils suffer "alarming levels" of sexual harassment.

Meanwhile, women's hourly earnings remain 14% below those of men, females are still underrepresented in decision-making roles in the political and public sphere and conviction rates for sexual violence remain low.

Without "appropriate training" for police and prosecutors, as well as greater public awareness, the report says new legislation will not be effective.

Moreover, UK welfare reform has had a "significant negative impact on women", with the problem more acute for single parents, those with disabilities and individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The report also states that Brexit is expected to "have more of an adverse impact on women as the primary users of, and workers within, public services", stating: "It is key that the UK Government ensures that there is no regression in the protection and realisation of women's rights."

Judith Robertson, chair of the commission, said: "Our recommendations to government include measures to ensure Brexit has no negative impact on women's rights.

"It also recommends action to mitigate the impact of austerity on women's economic and social rights; and improvements to law and policy to tackle the high prevalence of violence against women.

"While the Scottish Government is to be commended for many of its actions to progress gender equality, our latest report to the UN shows that it must now go further, faster, to ensure that all women in Scotland are able to enjoy all of their rights – economic, social, civil and political – on the same terms as their male counterparts."

FGM victims treated in Scottish city hospitals

Medics in Scotland's biggest cities have treated victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) on more than 230 occasions in the past two years.

BBC (10.02.2019) - <https://bbc.in/2Sam36m> - NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said it had identified women with FGM on at least 138 occasions in 2017 and 2018.

In NHS Lothian, which covers Edinburgh, 93 occasions were noted.

The figures were revealed by Scottish Liberal Democrat MP Jo Swinson, who said the "barbaric" practice must be wiped out entirely.

Responses to freedom of information requests from the party that were sent to Scotland's 12 other health boards showed they had recorded very low or no cases of FGM.

East Dunbartonshire MP Ms Swinson, the deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats, said: "These figures show that NHS professionals across Scotland are recording treating women who have experienced FGM.

"It is a barbaric and traumatic practice that must be completely eradicated. Nobody should be in any doubt that it is child abuse and it is against the law."

Ms Swinson said the Scottish and UK governments needed to work with police and other services to protect women and girls from FGM. She also called for more training and support services to help women and girls who are victims of FGM.

'Gender-based violence'

Dr Duncan McCormick, consultant in public health medicine at NHS Lothian, said: "We are very clear in our commitment to and responsibility for identifying and treating children and women at high risk of FGM in Lothian.

"It is a form of abuse and gender-based violence that has serious short and long term physical and psychological consequences, and if any health professional has concerns they have a responsibility to share that information to safeguard the wellbeing of women and children."

An NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde spokesman said: "We have no confirmation that FGM is being practised in Scotland, however there is intelligence that cutting does happen elsewhere in the UK.

"There is a clinic at the Princess Royal Maternity Hospital, run by the SNIPS team (Special Needs in Pregnancy Service), which sees all women who have disclosed FGM.

"For the most part, they do not need any treatment and will more than likely go on to have a normal birth.

"A small number of women are referred to the gynaecological services. Of those who are referred, some request no treatment in the antenatal period, and would rather wait for the intrapartum period, which is the recommendation from The World Health Organisation."

Minister for Older People and Equalities Christina McElvie MSP said: "Scotland already has robust laws in place to tackle this illegal practice and we are taking action to prevent and

eradicate FGM and ensure that public and third sector services stand ready to support those at risk.

"We want to strengthen protections further, introduce protection orders for women and girls at risk and place guidance for professionals on a statutory footing."

African schoolgirls help launch research project to prevent FGM

A group of African schoolgirls have helped launch a community-led research project to mark International Day of Zero Tolerance to female genital mutilation (FGM).

Leigh Journal (06.02.2019) - <https://goo.gl/dVxvw9> - Twenty teenagers from Notre Dame High School in Glasgow were involved in the Enhancing Transcultural Participation (ETP) project which aims to help prevent FGM.

The project, based at Glasgow Caledonian University, aims to develop a strategy and relationships between individuals, community groups, policymakers, researchers, government and third sector organisations.

Senior lecturer and researcher Dr Ima Jackson leads the project with PhD student and ETP researcher Judy Wasige, and she said she hopes more young people will be included in similar conversations in the future.

Ms Jackson said: "This project links into other campaigns like #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and 'decolonising the academy', giving a voice to young people and a range of perspectives, particularly young women of African descent who have very few opportunities to be heard.

"To me this is about Scotland learning how to make this happen through the ETP project.

"Representation matters in all areas of life and Scotland with its demographic changes has to develop processes in order to ensure that those who are being researched and who policy is made about are right in there. Historically this has not happened and it cannot continue.

"FGM and lack of voice for young women is a global issue. Most of the project participants come from communities who historically have practised FGM and hence have links between Scotland and the communities 'back home' where they can potentially influence internationally as well as nationally."

Funded by the Scottish Government and European Social Fund, the project is run in partnership with the African Women in Scotland Association and Glasgow City Council's English as a Second Language service.

Research data was collected through working closely with women of African descent and interviews by the schoolgirls with parents, peers and practitioners.

Researcher Ms Wasige said it had "been a great joy to watch the girls grow" through the project.

She added: "I have seen such a transformation. It is amazing. They had never before been given the formal space to meet other girls of African descent in a room on their own

to talk through issues that affect them directly in their Scottish/African lives and the challenges they face in Scotland.

"One girl said that no-one had ever spoken to her about FGM yet in her country, the prevalence is over 80% – it is really common. There is real possibility that she can now influence the conversation amongst young people here and 'back home' and that is what will lead to change.

"The girls say the project is helping them appreciate who they are and that they have an opportunity to influence their environment because before this, they have just been told what to do. Now they feel empowered. They have the skills to actually question things that happen to them and policies that affect them."

Notre Dame head teacher Rosie Martin said the school was "delighted" to be involved in the "important study".

She added: "All Glasgow schools have been engaging in staff training and awareness raising on FGM for a number of years, so the opportunity for Notre Dame's young people to help develop and participate in the research was met with great enthusiasm from our pupils."

Strengthening protection from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): consultation

We are seeking views on plans to strengthen the existing legislative framework for the protection of women and girls from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a form of gender based violence.

Gov.Scot (04.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2FUDwxE> -

Ministerial Foreword

The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a physical manifestation of deep rooted gender inequality. It is an illegal and unacceptable practice which violates the human rights of women and girls. We have made our position crystal clear - this is simply unacceptable and we are committed to protecting all girls and women who are at risk of this.

Figures from the World Health Organisation tell us that more than 200 million girls and women alive today have been subject to FGM in 30 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia[1]. This gives us a sense of the scale of the challenge and the extent to which the practice remains rooted in some parts of the world. Whilst we know that many countries have taken steps to make the practice illegal, there remains more to do – and we in Scotland need to play our part in protecting women and girls.

We know that there are no quick fixes to tackling FGM and there is no single solution to ending the practice. Therefore our approach to tackling it in Scotland is considered, collaborative and community based. In this way we can make sure that what we do helps prevent FGM, provides protection to those at risk, provides the support that those affected require and through participation gives a voice to communities affected by this practice.

We have already taken forward work in this area. In February 2016, we published a National Action Plan to Prevent and Eradicate FGM. We're making progress in

implementing the actions in the Plan, including the recent publication of multi-agency guidance for professionals. We've also provided funding for projects who are working within communities to raise awareness of FGM and support women and girls who are at risk or who have already been subject to FGM. And the Programme for Government published last month committed us to bringing forward legislation in this area.

So we know that we have more to do to ensure that those at risk are better protected and that perpetrators of this practice are held to account. The Scottish Parliament took an important step in 2005 by making the practice illegal, and in 2015 the Parliament gave legislative consent to an important provision in the Serious Crime Act 2015 to ensure that extra-territorial jurisdiction applied to the Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005.

The Serious Crime Act also included a number of additional provisions which now apply in other parts of the United Kingdom, and I am keen that we consider whether or not we should take similar further steps in in Scotland. This consultation paper therefore seeks to explore these issues further and I would welcome the views of all with an interest so that we can make further progress towards ensuring that no-one ever has to be subject to this fundamental breach of human rights.

Christina McKelvie
Minister for Older People and Equalities

[Link to publication](#)
