

What does period friendliness mean to young people? Survey findings



Young people's understanding of period friendliness

High awareness of the concept of period friendliness among youth:

- 77% of respondents were familiar with the concept

Young people's understanding of period friendliness is shaped by lived experiences and barriers in managing menstruation.

Period-friendliness is mostly defined through:

- Clean toilets with all the WASH facilities (85%)
- Free menstrual products in the toilet (74%)
- Toilets that offer privacy (64%)



Social and educational dimensions are less frequently mentioned in relation to period friendliness:

- Only 39% refer to having support from teachers/staff/peers and being able to talk about periods without shame
- Only 22% mention access to information and services on menstrual health

The results show high awareness of the concept of period friendliness, as 77% of respondents were familiar with the concept. At the same time, young people's understanding of period friendliness is infrastructure-focused and shaped by lived experiences of barriers in managing menstruation.

Although 77% of young respondents are familiar with the concept of "period-friendly", their understanding is primarily rooted in immediate, practical needs. Among young people, "period-friendly" is largely understood through the lens of basic sanitary infrastructure and menstrual product access, reflecting their direct lived experience and immediate needs regarding menstrual hygiene.

While issues such as shame, stigma, and discomfort are clearly present in their narratives, the most visible and urgent framing remains the absence of adequate physical conditions (clean toilets, soap, toilet paper) which overshadows the more relational and cultural dimensions of period-friendliness.

Young people's access to period friendly environments:

Period-friendly environments are not the norm. Most young people do not experience period friendly environments in their daily life.

- Only 26% have ever experienced a space that meets all their period-related needs. 74% say they never encountered such a place.
- Only 24% describe their environment as “very period-friendly”
- Most of young people, 44% consider their environment neither friendly or unfriendly
- 32% consider their environment not friendly at all

Young people have identified the elements that are most frequently missing in their environments:

- Free menstrual products: 72%
- Clean toilets: 62%
- Affordable products: 47%
- Safe toilets: 46%



Period friendly spaces are not to be reduced to bathrooms and toilets, because they refer to the variety of spaces where youth spend time and develop such as: the school, the home and the public space.

Information and openness was identified as a missing element only by 23% and 19% mentioned the support from others. However, these results need to be interpreted in the broader context of the survey findings. Respondents identified the elements that are missing the most, referring primarily to direct physical elements such as menstrual products and clean toilets, while other aspects that sustain a period friendly environment such as access to information and support from others remained secondary.

Only 6% of respondents said that nothing is missing from their lived environment. There is a clear systemic gap between youth needs and actual infrastructure, suggesting a lack of minimum standards across schools and public spaces.

When asked about the changes they perceive would improve period friendliness in their environment, respondents mentioned again free or affordable menstrual products (74%), then better toilet conditions (68%) and third, more policies or rules supporting menstruation needs (58%). This shows that more than half of the respondents associate period friendliness with the responsibility of schools and institutions to actively implement policies to sustain menstruators' needs.

49% of respondents identified the need for menstrual education for everyone, not just menstruators as a significant change that would improve period friendliness in their environment.

The main topics related to menstruation that young people would want to know more about are:

- Period physiology and physical changes / physical health related to menstruation (acne, headaches, backaches, cramps,): 55%
- Menstruation and mental health (mood, stress, emotional changes): 54%
- Menstrual disorders (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS/SPOK), endometriosis, Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), etc.): 50%
- Managing menstrual pain: 47%

79% of respondents want to participate in improving menstrual education, showing that young people want to be part of the decision making process that directly affects their daily environment.

The primary sources the respondents mention for where they learned most about menstruation are:

- At home: 44%
- Social media: 40%
- From friends: 5%



Only 3% of respondents mention the school as a primary source of information on menstruation.

The demand for change and participation of youth in making the environments more period friendly is also reflected alongside the failure of the formal education system to serve as a primary source of information on menstruation.



Young menstruators experience

55% of young menstruators report feeling uncomfortable or unsupported in their daily environments.

Their experience is influenced by social norms, access to sanitation facilities and physical pain.

The most common themes include:

- fear of leaking
- staining or being exposed
- menstrual pain not being taken seriously by adults (mainly teachers)
- embarrassment in school/public spaces
- pressure to “function normally” despite pain.



When I'm on my period, I can barely do anything. I still went to school, but my physical education teacher, a FEMALE physical education teacher, forced me to run and do physical exercises, threatening to give me a failing grade if I didn't, even though she knew I was on my period.

female responder, 16 years old, rural area

Teachers who told us it wasn't appropriate to walk to the bathroom carrying a pad because boys might see it.

female responder, 15 years old

My menstrual pain was not understood, even though it was very severe.

female responder, 16 years old, Roma community

15% of young menstruators said they can not easily access menstrual products when needed.

25% of young menstruators say they lacked products because of cost or availability.



Young menstruators experience

When faced with barriers in accessing menstrual products young menstruators rely on:

- improvisation (for example using rolled toilet paper)
- borrowing products from peers
- staying in discomfort until they return home.

These coping strategies reflect individual resilience of young menstruators, but also point to a lack of reliable institutional support systems.



There were a few times when I did not have any products and had to ask my (girl) classmates because the school did not provide them.

female responder, 21 years old, coming from low-income background

I spent an entire day at high school without pads and had to manage until I got home.

female responder, 18 years old

My period started unexpectedly, and I was not prepared. I asked all my (girl)friends if they had a tampon, but none of them did. I had to use toilet paper instead.

female responder, 16 years old

Highlights on marginalized youth experience and understanding of period friendly environments

Marginalized youth do not define period-friendliness differently, and place the same three indicators when describing what a period-friendly environment means: clean toilets with all the wash facilities, having free menstrual products available in the toilet and toilets that offer privacy.

The majority of marginalized youth, 74% of respondents, did not encounter a place that meets all their needs regarding menstruation.

When asked what is most missing from their environment, marginalized youth highlight the same three priorities as the overall sample: access to free menstrual products, clean toilets, and affordable menstrual products.

Marginalized youth report the same main sources of menstrual knowledge as the overall sample, with social media and home being the most frequently mentioned sources.

Marginalized youth experience an increased burden of managing menstruation.

Among menstruators within the marginalized youth group:

- **72% have felt uncomfortable or unsupported because of menstruation**
 - compared to 55% in the overall sample
- **19% report difficulties accessing menstrual products when needed**
 - compared to 15% in the overall sample
- **33% have lacked menstrual products because of cost or availability**
 - compared to 25% overall in the overall sample

The experiences of marginalized youth largely mirror those of the broader sample, but with consistently worse outcomes across indicators related to support, access and affordability.

Rather than facing different challenges, they appear to experience the same challenges more frequently and more intensely.



Recap and main findings

- Young people primarily understand period-friendliness through access to adequate sanitation facilities, free menstrual products and privacy reflecting the practical challenges they encounter in their daily lives.
- Despite high awareness of the concept, only 1 in 4 respondents has encountered an environment that meets all of their period-related needs.
- More than half of menstruators (55%) have felt uncomfortable or unsupported because of menstruation, with experiences often linked to pain being dismissed, lack of flexibility, stigma, and fear of embarrassment.
- The experiences of marginalized youth largely mirror those of the broader sample. Rather than facing different challenges, they appear to experience the same challenges more frequently and more intensely.
- Marginalized youth report the same main sources of menstrual knowledge as the overall sample, with social media and home being the most frequently mentioned sources.
- Schools play only a marginal role in menstrual education. Social media appears to be one of the primary sources of information for young people.

Sample and methodology

The responses were collected through an online questionnaire created using Google Forms, consisting of 22 questions, including closed-ended questions with predefined answer options and the possibility to provide one's own answer, optional open-ended questions, and socio-demographic questions. The questionnaire was active during May–June 2026 and was promoted among groups of young people within the Iele-Sânziene organization network, on social media, and through a dedicated newsletter.

The questionnaire was addressed to young people aged 12–24, regardless of their gender identity or menstrual status. A total of 154 responses were collected, and after cleaning the database, 151 valid responses remained, which are included in the present analysis.

This questionnaire was administered simultaneously in four other European countries: France, Belgium, North Macedonia, and Poland. The overall picture regarding young people's perceptions of the need for period-friendly spaces will be analyzed and published separately within the Erasmus+ project "Becoming Period Friendly for Youth".

This analysis refers only to the Romanian sample, which included 151 respondents (aged between 12–24 years, with a mean age of 17) of whom:

- 83% menstruators
- 16% non-menstruators
- 36% belonging to a marginalized group*
- 19% living with a disability or a long-term health condition

**Within the project, belonging to a marginalized group or "marginalized youth" was described as respondents' self-identification with at least one indicator of vulnerability: living in a low-income environment and experiencing financial difficulties, experiencing or being at risk of housing loss, belonging to the Roma community, belonging to another ethnic minority, belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, having a disability, or having a long-term health condition.*

The sample is not nationally representative, as the research was conducted through voluntary online recruitment and within the limits of the available resources of the organization. The results cannot be generalized to the entire population of young people in Romania.

The study has an exploratory approach and addresses a topic that has been insufficiently researched in the Romanian context, providing one of the first insights into young people's perceptions regarding the need for period-friendly spaces. The survey results contribute significantly to identifying trends and needs that will inform the activities of the BPFY project implemented during 2026–2028 in the five partner European countries.

Full survey

Q1. How do you identify yourself?

- Female: 81% (123)
- Non-binary: 3% (5)
- Male: 14% (22)
- I don't want to answer: 0
- Other: 0.6% (1)

Q2. What is your age?

Between 12-24, average age: 17

Q3. Which answer best describes where you live?

- Large city (over 100,000 inhabitants): 13% (21)
- Medium city: 32% (49)
- Small town: 24% (37)
- Village / rural area: 29% (44)

Q4. Do you identify with any of the following?

- I come from a low-income background: 14% (22)
- I live in a household with financial difficulties: 7% (11)
- I have experienced or am at risk of homelessness: 1.9% (3)
- I belong to the Roma community: 4.6% (7)
- I belong to another ethnic minority: 0.6% (1)
- I am part of the LGBTQIA+ community: 16.5% (25)
- I have a disability or long-term health condition: 5% (8)
- I prefer not to say: 11.9% (18)
- I don't identify with any: 52.3% (79)

Q5. Do you have a disability or long-term condition that affects your daily life?

- Yes: 17% (26)
- No: 72% (109)
- I'm not sure: 7.9% (12)
- I prefer not to say: 2.6% (4)

Q6. If yes, what type of disability?

- Physical: 2.6% (4)
- Sensory (vision/hearing): 2.6% (4)
- Neurodivergence (e.g. ADHD, autism, dyslexia): 3.3% (5)
- Chronic illness: 4.6% (7)
- Mental health-related: 9% (14)
- Prefer not to say 5% (8)
- Other: 0

Q7. Are you familiar with the concept of "period-friendly"?

- Yes: 76.8% (116)
- No: 23% (35)

Q8. What does "period-friendly" mean to you?

- Access to clean toilets, toilets with "a sink with running water" and soap (+something to dry hands with), with toilet paper available, with disposal bins, etc.: 85% (129)
- Possibility to access the toilet at any time / no permission needed to go to the toilets / no need to ask for a key etc.: 47% (71)

- Toilets with functional light(s): 17.8% (27)
- Access to toilets that offer privacy (doors that close properly, with no gaps in the lower part, with functional locks): 63.5% (96)
- Toilets that have sinks in the private cabins (not in a shared space of the toilet): 13.9% (21)
- Toilets with a hook, a shelf and/or a space to put personal items and with mirrors: 25.8% (39)
- Toilets with access for people with mobility related disabilities, such as grab rails and an elevated toilet shell: 30% (46)
- Having free menstrual products available in the toilets: 73.5% (111)
- Support from teachers / staff / peers and being able to talk about periods without shame: 39% (59)
- Feeling safe and comfortable in your school / work environment during your period: 49% (74)
- Having access to information about relevant services / institutions / professionals if they have a question about their menstrual health: 21.8% (33)

Q9. Have you ever encountered a place that meets all the needs you chose above?

- Yes: 25.8% (39)
- No 74% (112)

Q10. How period-friendly do you find your daily environment?

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

(1 = Not at all friendly, 5 = Very friendly)

1 and 2: Not friendly: 32% (49)

3: Neither friendly or unfriendly: 43.7% (66)

4 and 5: Very friendly: 23.8% (36)

Q11. What is missing the most in your environment when it comes to period friendliness?

- Access to free menstrual products: 72% (109)
- Clean toilets: 62% (94)
- Safe toilets: 45.6% (69)
- Information and openness: 23% (35)
- Support from others: 19.2% (29)
- Affordable products: 47% (71)
- Proper disposal facilities: 17.8% (27)
- Nothing is missing: 5.9% (9)
- Other: 0

Q12. What changes would most improve period friendliness in your environment?

- Free or affordable menstrual products: 73.5% (111)
- Better toilet conditions: 67.5% (102)
- More open conversations about menstruation: 23% (35)
- Education for everyone (not just menstruators): 49% (74)
- Policies or rules supporting menstruation needs (e.g. breaks, flexibility): 57.6% (87)
- Campaigns to reduce stigma: 19.8% (30)
- Comfortable seating: 31% (47)
- Health professionals / physicians nearby to provide the necessary medicine: 14.5% (22)
- Other: 0

Q13. What topic related to menstruation do you really want to know about?

- Managing menstruation in everyday life (school, activities and routines): 23% (35)
- Menstruation and mental health (mood, stress, emotional changes): 53.6% (81)
- Menstrual disorders (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS/SPOK), endometriosis, Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), etc.): 50% (76)
- Period physiology and physical changes / physical health related to menstruation (acne, headaches, backaches, cramps, ...): 54.9% (83)
- Managing menstrual pain: 47% (71)
- Environmental impact of menstrual products and sustainability: 11% (17)
- Toilets and hygiene facilities in schools: 22.5% (34)
- Information related to menstrual products options: 13.2% (20)
- Puberty and body changes: 22.5% (34)
- Menstrual education for all: 22.5% (34)
- Other:_____

Q14. Do you menstruate / have you ever menstruated?

- Yes: 83.4% (126)
- No: 16.5% (25)

Q15. Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsupported because of menstruation in your daily environment?

- Yes: 54.7% (69)
- No: 38% (48)
- Prefer not to say: 7% (9)

Q16. If yes, what made you feel that way? (optional)

- My physical education teacher insisted that I participate in class.
- When I'm on my period, I can barely do anything. I still went to school, but my physical education teacher, a FEMALE physical education teacher, forced me to run and do physical exercises, threatening to give me a failing grade if I didn't, even though she knew I was on my period.
- Teachers who told us it wasn't appropriate to walk to the bathroom carrying a pad because boys might see it.
- The fact that my period often started while I was at school and I was in terrible pain, but teachers wouldn't let me go home.
- My menstrual pain was not understood, even though it was very severe.
- I leaked once and people felt the need to laugh. They didn't care that I was in so much pain I could barely walk. But I kept my head up and showed them that I'm strong and that their ignorance doesn't matter to me.
- Especially at school, I don't feel comfortable because we don't have a space designed to meet our needs.
- Stereotypes about menstruation and the lack of menstrual and hygiene products in public bathrooms.

Q17. Can you easily access menstrual products when needed?

- Yes: 84% (107)
- No: 15% (19)

Q18. Tell us about your access to menstrual products: (optional)

- I have the privilege of being able to afford menstrual products.
- I can access them easily in the sense that when I go to the store, I do not care what people think. I do not hide them; all women menstruate. They are not available for free anywhere. In fact, I was surprised a few days ago at a gas station to find out that a small pack of pads could cost 35 RON.

- I can buy them easily, but they are not available in my school.
- Unfortunately, we do not find menstrual products in schools, even though I think they are very necessary. However, if you go to a store, you can certainly find them.
- They are not available for free in places such as schools, and they are not affordable in stores either because prices are too high. I think they should be free or more affordable so that all women and girls can access them, including those facing financial difficulties.
- I have never encountered a place where they were available for free. I also think they should be much cheaper in stores because I consider myself privileged to be able to buy them whenever I need them.
- At school, we do not even have toilet paper, let alone tampons.
- They are not free at school. I either bring them from home or borrow them from other girls.
- I have never had problems buying pads because of financial reasons, only because of mobility issues caused by pain. In those situations, family members or friends would get them for me. I have also never seen menstrual products of any kind distributed for free in public spaces, schools, universities, or elsewhere. The closest example was an Always campaign where they promoted their products and gave us a pad and a leaflet about menstruation – it felt very corporate and superficial.
- Fortunately, it is not difficult for me to buy menstrual products. Although none of the places where I spend my day-to-day life provide menstrual products, I receive support from colleagues and friends in unexpected situations.
- Sometimes menstrual products seem quite expensive to me, and there are no places where I can get them for free if I happen not to have any with me.

Q19. Have you ever lacked products because of cost or availability?

- Yes: 25% (32)
- No: 74.6% (94)

Q20. Tell us about that time: (optional)

- There were a few times when I did not have any products and had to ask my classmates because the school did not provide them.
- I come from a low-income background and cannot always afford pads, tampons, or other menstrual products. At school, I leaked through my clothes, and my classmates laughed at me and mocked my father because he is older, along with many other insults.
- I spent an entire day at high school without pads and had to manage until I got home.
- I did not have enough money and had to borrow from a friend.
- I was once in a place where menstrual products were not available, not even in public restrooms. I asked my friends if they had any, but they did not. For a relatively long period of time (30 minutes to an hour), I had no way of getting any products and was left in an uncomfortable situation, without spare clothes, pads, or any other menstrual products.
- At school, when I forgot to bring menstrual products with me, and given that we do not have free pads just like we do not have toilet paper, I had to ask someone else for help.
- My period started unexpectedly, and I was not prepared. I asked all my friends if they had a tampon, but none of them did. I had to use toilet paper instead.
- My father once refused to buy me menstrual products because he did not understand why I needed them. Things have changed a lot since then.

- In the village where my grandparents live, the local store has a very limited selection of menstrual products, and I have never been able to find products suitable for my menstrual flow. The nearest supermarket is a 20–30 minute drive away, and I have not always had the possibility to make that trip.

Q21. Where have you learned most about menstruation?

- At school: 2.6% (4)
- At home: 44% (67)
- From friends: 5% (8)
- Articles (newspapers, magazines or websites): 4.6% (7)
- Social media: 40% (61)
- Other: 2.6% (4)
 - By myself
 - Information available from various sources that is concrete and accurate
 - From my mother and grandmother
 - From my own experience; no one around me knew about hormonal disorders, the causes of missing menstruation, what types of products are needed for minimum comfort; everything I received from family/school/etc. was standard information or “outdated” ideas

Q22. Do you want to participate in improving menstruation education?

- Yes: 78.8% (119)
- No: 21% (32)

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