

5. Karnataka Government Menstrual Leave Policy – Polity

Karnataka's menstrual leave policy – progressive step or symbolic gesture? The Government of Karnataka has approved a new policy granting 12 days of paid menstrual leave per year (one per month) to all women employees in both government and private sectors. This policy, supported by constitutional provisions like Article 15(3) and 42, aims to destigmatize menstruation and joins similar initiatives by states like Bihar (for government staff) and Kerala (for students).

Karnataka Government Approves Menstrual Leave Policy

The Government of Karnataka has formally approved a Menstrual Leave Policy for all women employees within the state.

About the Policy

Primary Aim – The policy is designed to formally recognise menstrual health as a legitimate workplace concern.

Broader Goal – It seeks to promote and implement gender-sensitive employment practices across all sectors.

Scope of Application – The policy applies comprehensively to all women employees in –

1. Government offices
2. Educational institutions
3. Factories
4. Private organisations

Leave Provision – The policy provides a total of 12 days of menstrual leave per year, structured as one day per month.

Development Process – This policy was formulated after extensive consultations with a diverse group of stakeholders, including –

1. Gynaecologists
2. Psychiatrists
3. Professors
4. Employers and employees
5. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
6. Trade unions

Menstrual Leave

Definition – Menstrual leave is a specific paid or unpaid leave option made available to women and transgender individuals.

Purpose – It serves to acknowledge the significant physical and psychological discomfort (such as pain, fatigue, and emotional distress) that can be associated with the menstrual cycle.

Core Objective – The policy seeks to legitimize menstrual health, treating it as a valid workplace and public health concern rather than a taboo subject.

Need for Implementation of Menstrual Leave Policy in India

There are several compelling reasons—constitutional, medical, and social—driving the need for such policies in India.

Constitutional Mandate

Article 15(3) – Aligns with the provision allowing the state to make special provisions for women.

Article 46 – Supports the promotion of weaker sections of society.

Article 42 – Upholds the mandate for ensuring just and humane working conditions.

Article 21 (Right to Life) – Supports the Right to Health and Dignity by formally recognising menstruation as a legitimate health concern.

Addresses Health and Biological Needs – Menstruation is often accompanied by symptoms like cramps, fatigue, nausea, and hormonal changes that can impair a person's ability to work. Medical conditions like endometriosis, adenomyosis, and dysmenorrhea can cause severe, debilitating pain, impacting daily functioning and productivity.

Enhances Productivity – When employees attend work despite severe discomfort, it can lead to reduced efficiency and effectiveness, a phenomenon known as "presenteeism". Allowing necessary rest is shown to improve overall workplace morale and long-term performance.

Breaking Stereotypes and Stigma – Such policies encourage open conversation and awareness about menstruation. This directly challenges centuries-old social conditioning and actively promotes menstrual literacy. It is a significant step to break taboos that have historically perceived menstruation as "impure" or "dirty."

Status of Menstrual Leave Policy in India

While a national policy is not yet in place, several states and private companies have taken the lead.

At the National Level – There is no national law currently mandating menstrual leave across India.

Draft Menstrual Hygiene Policy (2023) – This draft document recognises the need for gender-sensitive workplaces that support leave and flexible work options.

The Right of Women to Menstrual Leave... Bill, 2022 – This was a Private Member's Bill introduced in Parliament. It proposed three days of paid leave monthly and free access to menstrual products in workplaces and educational institutions.

At the State Level

Bihar (1992) – Has a long-standing policy providing two days of paid menstrual leave each month for government employees.

Kerala (2023) – Granted menstrual leave to female students in all State universities operating under the Higher Education Department.

Private Sector Initiatives – A number of private firms have implemented menstrual leave policies, setting examples for industry self-regulation. Notable companies include Zomato, Swiggy, Byju's, Culture Machine, and Gozoop, all of which provide paid menstrual leave.

Global Initiatives on Menstrual Leave Policy

Several countries have legally recognized the need for menstrual leave, though the specifics of their policies differ.

Country	Year Enacted	Policy Details
Japan	1947	Women are entitled to menstrual leave upon request (as part of the Labour Standards Act).
South Korea	2001	Provides one day of paid "physiological leave" monthly. Unused days can be encashed by the employee.
Spain	2023	Became the first European Union nation to provide state-backed, paid menstrual leave.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/karnatakas-menstrual-leave-policy-progressive-step-or-symbolic-gesture/article70245569.ece>