

# INPLASY

## Menstrual health under constraint: a meta-synthesis of refugee women's experiences

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### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

**Support** - This research received no external funding.

**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Completed but not published.

**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.

**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202650040

**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 7 May 2026 and was last updated on 7 May 2026.

### INTRODUCTION

**Review question / Objective** The aim of this meta-synthesis is to systematically synthesise qualitative evidence on the lived experiences, barriers, and facilitators of menstrual health and menarche among refugee women and girls across the migration journey.

**Condition being studied** Refugee women and girls face significant barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, with important implications for menstrual health. Limited access to menstrual products, safe sanitation facilities, privacy, and appropriate information contributes to period poverty and undermines health, dignity, and well-being during displacement and migration. Menstrual health in humanitarian settings is shaped by structural inequalities, socio-cultural norms, stigma, and constrained access to healthcare and support services. Understanding the lived experiences of refugee women and girls is essential to inform equitable, rights-based, and context-sensitive interventions.

### METHODS

**Participant or population** Women and girls who were refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.

**Intervention** Not applicable.

**Comparator** Not applicable.

**Study designs to be included** Qualitative and mixed-method studies.

**Eligibility criteria** Qualitative and mixed-method primary studies focusing on menstruation, menarche, or menstrual health among refugee women and girls, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and undocumented migrants in migration, transit, or reception settings were included. Studies involving stable migrant populations, unrelated sexual and reproductive health topics, quantitative designs, and secondary or grey literature were excluded.

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**Information sources** MEDLINE (PubMed), Scopus and the Cochrane Library databases.

**Main outcome(s)** The review explores experiences related to menstrual health and menarche among refugee women and girls during migration and displacement. Outcomes of interest include barriers to menstrual health management, access to menstrual products and healthcare services, menstrual health literacy, stigma and socio-cultural norms, coping strategies, support networks, and the physical and psychological impacts of inadequate menstrual health management.

**Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis** Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal checklist for qualitative research.

**Strategy of data synthesis** Thematic synthesis approach, informed by the principles of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke.

**Subgroup analysis** Not applicable.

**Sensitivity analysis** Not applicable.

**Country(ies) involved** Italy.

**Keywords** Menstrual health; Refugee women and girls; Menstrual equity; Menstrual hygiene management; Qualitative meta-synthesis.

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