



Menstrual health, hygiene management, and gender equality: lessons learned from North Macedonia

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What is menstrual poverty?

- Menstrual poverty is a term used to describe the **lack of access** to menstrual hygiene products, **education**, and **adequate sanitation facilities**, which can lead to significant health and economic consequences for individuals who menstruate.
- Menstrual poverty disproportionately affects those living in poverty, particularly in developing countries, but can also affect individuals in high-income countries.

What is menstrual health?

Menstrual health refers to a state of complete **physical, mental, and social well-being** related to menstruation. It includes the ability to **manage** menstrual cycles **safely and hygienically**, without **pain or discomfort**, and without **shame or stigma**.



What's was done by JHR???

- Indicators
- Tools
- Survey
- Cost benefit analyzes
- Social media campaign
- Lobbying

How to identify existing of menstrual poverty?

- Menstrual poverty can be identified through several **indicators**:
 1. **Lack of access to menstrual hygiene products**: Individuals experiencing menstrual poverty may not have access to affordable or free menstrual products, such as pads, tampons, or menstrual cups. They may resort to using unhygienic materials, such as rags or paper, which can lead to infections and other health problems.
 2. **Limited access to sanitation facilities**: Inadequate sanitation facilities, including lack of access to clean toilets and handwashing facilities, can also contribute to menstrual poverty.
 3. **Missed school or work due to menstruation**: Individuals experiencing menstrual poverty may miss school or work due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene products or inadequate sanitation facilities.
 4. **Stigma and shame surrounding menstruation**: Societal stigma and shame surrounding menstruation can prevent individuals from seeking information, education, or healthcare related to menstruation, contributing to menstrual poverty.
 5. **Lack of policies and programs supporting menstrual health**: The absence of policies and programs aimed at promoting menstrual health, including access to menstrual hygiene products, education, and healthcare, can also contribute to menstrual poverty.

Which tool can we use to identify menstrual poverty?

1. **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Needs Assessment**

This tool is used to identify the specific needs and challenges related to menstrual hygiene management in a given population. It includes questions related to menstrual product availability, sanitation facilities, and knowledge and attitudes related to menstruation.

2. **Conducting surveys or focus groups with individuals who menstruate**

These methods can help to gather information about the experiences and challenges faced by individuals who struggle to access menstrual products due to financial constraints.

3. **Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) Situational Analysis**

This tool is used to gather information about the broader context in which menstrual health and hygiene takes place, including social norms, cultural practices, and policy and programming related to menstrual health.

4. **Menstrual Health Management (MHM) Baseline Survey**

This tool is used to gather baseline information about the menstrual health and hygiene practices, knowledge, and behaviors of a given population. It can be used to inform the development of policies and programs related to menstrual health and hygiene.

5. **Menstrual Equity Index**

This tool is used to evaluate the progress of policies and programs related to menstrual equity over time. It includes indicators related to access to menstrual products, sanitation facilities, and menstrual health education.

These tools can be used by policymakers, healthcare providers, and advocates to identify the specific needs and challenges related to menstrual poverty in a given context, and to inform the development of policies and programs aimed at promoting menstrual equity and improving the overall well-being of individuals who menstruate.

Survey

We have a list of 10 questions:

1. Have you ever struggled to access menstrual products due to financial constraints?
2. How often do you change your menstrual product during a typical day of your period?
3. Have you ever had to miss school, work, or other activities due to a lack of access to menstrual products?
4. Do you feel comfortable talking about menstruation with family members, friends, or healthcare providers?
5. Have you ever experienced stigma or shame related to menstruation?
6. How do you typically dispose of menstrual products?
7. Are there any cultural or religious practices related to menstruation that affect your ability to manage your menstrual cycle?
8. How frequently do you have access to clean and private sanitation facilities during your period?
9. Have you ever experienced any health problems related to poor menstrual hygiene practices?
10. Have you received any education or information about menstrual health and hygiene in the past year?

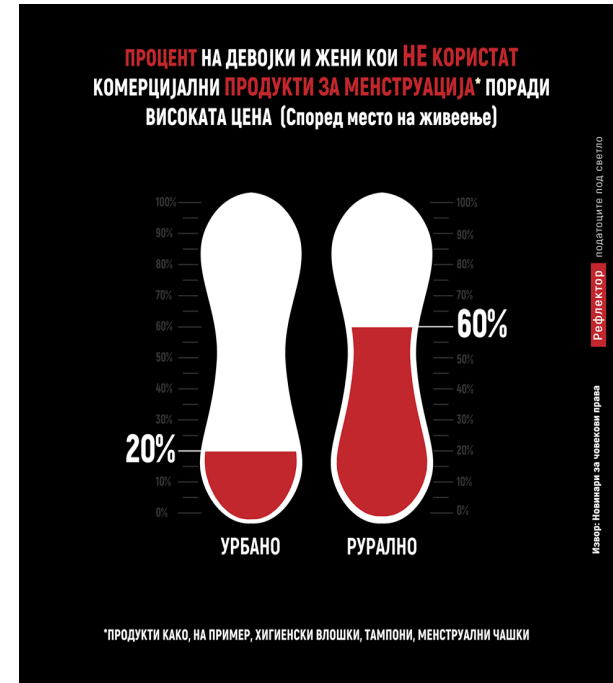
Results:

- Only one private school has conditions/facilities for MMH
- None of the schools has products for MMH (soap, toilet paper, water)
- None of the schools has appropriate facilities for removing MMH waste



15%- ~~DO NOT~~ use any hygienic products!

- They come up with alternatives as fabric pads, od pads made from paper, newspaper...



Results:

- 90% from the students in rural areas in Macedonia avoid to go in school **4 to 5 days** while they are on their period
- 75% from the students in urban areas don't visit school **2 to 3 days** while they are on their period

10. Дали поради месечниот период изостанувате од училиште / работа и ако е да колку дена?



Reasons:

Inadequate conditions for managing menstrual hygiene at school / workplace

- The **high price** for products for MMH

%



What is cost benefit analyze for menstrual products?



- Method used to compare the costs and benefits of a particular intervention, policy, or program.
- In case of MH a cost-benefit analysis is used to evaluate the economic impact of providing free or subsidized menstrual products to individuals who cannot afford them.

For survey



16 - 26 years old (300 -180 rural, 120 urban)

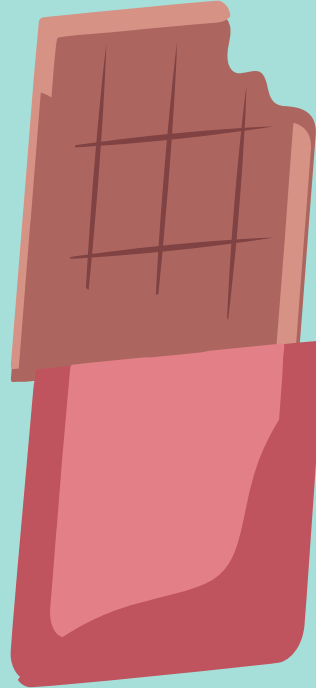
27-37 (400 -180 rural, 220 urban)

38-47 (418 - 148 from rural and 270 from urban)

In parallel with this, we had meetings and included representatives of companies, parliamentarians, representatives of municipalities and the media (50).

Instead of an introduction

Women and girls make up 50% or more of users of water and sanitation services and are the de facto stewards of surface water and sanitation - the basic tool for personal hygiene management



74 schools toilets were not renovated for 15 years, and 64 schools were not renovated for 10 to 15 years

About 52% of the female population is of reproductive age and most of them menstruate every month



29.5% of women in our country cannot afford any access to menstrual products to manage their menstrual health, so they use newspapers, paper or self-made textile pads instead of standard products

CEDAW recently recognized that rural women and girls experience even greater discrimination and violations of their human rights than urban women



75.6 percent of them answered that the reason for that is the high price of the products

(In)accessibility

33,9%

out of 1118 respondents,
380 women answered
that they do not have
access to menstrual
health management
products

75,6%

the reason for the
inaccessibility to
the products is the
high price of the
products



Expenses

1

250 mkd

In our country, women spend on average about 250 denars per month for menstruation.



125 + 125 mkd

Price of the products if you calculate the average price of 125 mcd per pack of pads, not including stomach pain medication and possible absence from work

4

2

36%

one to two days a month are absent from work due to dysmenorrhea (menstrual pain).



70%

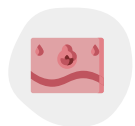
during the period they drink pain-reducing drugs, which on average increases the monthly expenditure for managing menstrual health by an additional 150 denars

3

Monthly expenses



Menstrual products



Medicines



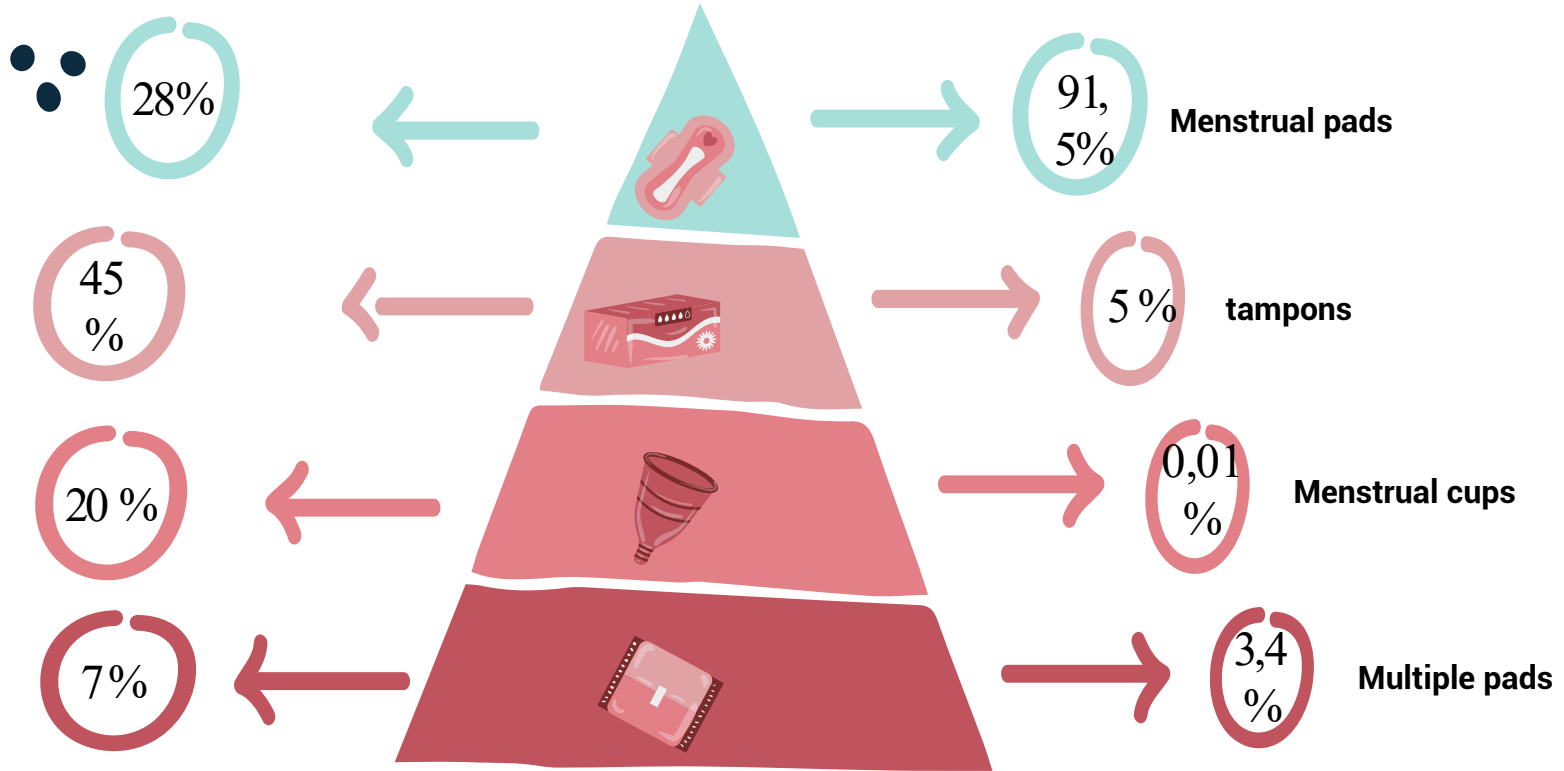
Two diaries



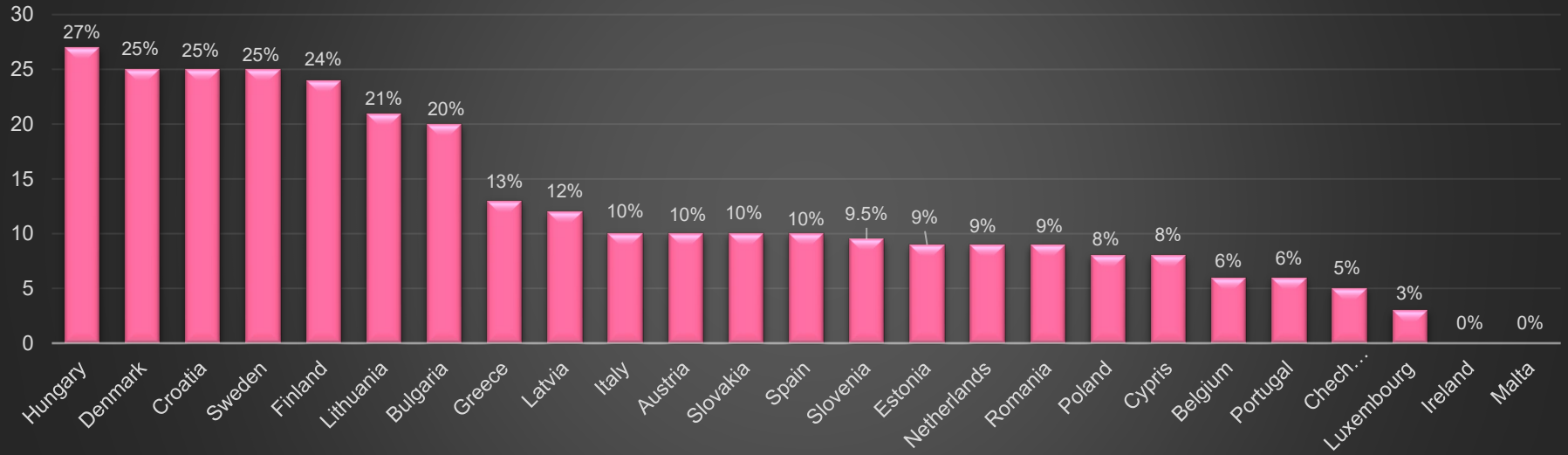
From the monthly income



Which products are used in the EU, and which in our country?



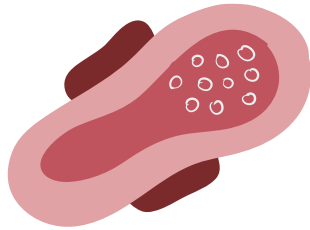
VAT on menstrual products in EU countries



VAT on menstrual products in region



How to cheaper and better management of menstrual health?



Reducing the price of menstrual products by **reducing VAT from 18 to 5%** and/or subsidizing products for MHM



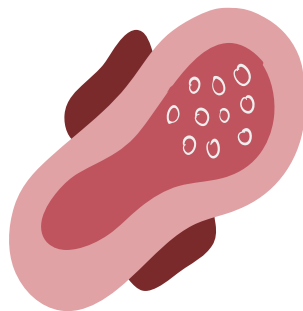
Subsidizing the menstrual cup



Free period – or access to free **reusable menstrual pads** for all schoolgirls involved in the regular educational process

Reducing the price of menstrual products by reducing the VAT from 18 to 5%

30 denar per month



360 denar per annual

- 13 million denars annually in the budget

Subsidizing the menstrual cup

500 до 2500 mkd



3-5 years of tillage life

10 times cheaper

40 years, the cost of pads and tampons is MKD 120,000



40 years will require between eight and 10 cups



If the menstrual cup costs 1,500 denars (average price), the amount for this expenditure for a period of 40 years (the age of the sexual-reproductive period in a woman) is 9,000-15,000 denars



Free period – or access to free menstrual health products to all female students involved in the regular education process

35,200 in secondary schools and
38,541 female students in
primary schools



73.741 schoolgirls

For unhindered access to menstrual products, the state needs **159,280,560** denars or **2,654,676** euros for each schoolgirl during one year

Our demands were

01

Subsidizing the price of menstrual health products and reducing or abolishing VAT on menstrual products;

02

Provision of free packages of menstrual products for schoolgirls involved in the educational process

03

In addition to toilet paper, the companies in the toilets, in the women's cabins, should also have menstrual products that will be left at the women's disposal free of charge;

04

To have free access to menstrual products in women's toilets in malls;

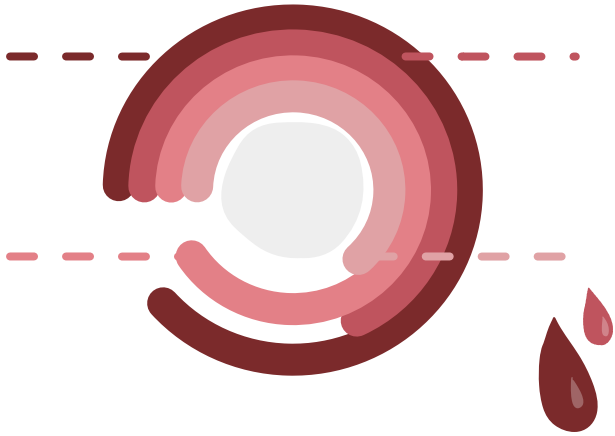
05

To have free access to menstrual products in hotel rooms;

06

Menstrual absence





We success!!!

Macedonian government reduced the tax from 18 to 5 percent,

With donations we managed to adapt 28 schools toilets according MHM standards.

We conducted 112 lectures on menstrual health and trained 93 teachers,

7 schools continuously receive free menstrual products for the students

INVESTMENT IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH IS A INVESTMENT IN HEALTHY GENERATIONS!

WatSanPlan

Water and Sanitation Safety Planning
in the Balkan Region: Albania,
Bosnia - Herzegovina, North Macedonia,
Romania, Serbia!

The collage includes the following logos and text:

- wecf**: Women Engage for a Common Future
- JHR**: ЖУРНАЛИСТИЧКА ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈА ЗА ЧОВЕКОВИ ПРАВА (Journalists for Human Rights)
- WiD**: Woman in Development
- AUADEMICA**
- MILIEUKONTAKT ALBANIA**: SERVING SOCIETY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY
- AMBADADORI ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA I ŽIVOTNE SREDINE**: ENVIRONMENTAL AMBASSADORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
- Supported by:** Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection
- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION in Germany**
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