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ECOSOC 3: Commission on the status of Women (CSW)

Research Report

Topic 3: Underlining the lack of availability of affordable female hygiene products for students.



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Introduction

Around 2 billion women menstruate every month. All of them need basic hygiene products to manage their periods like sanitary pads. Millions of young girls are held back from going to school due to their periods, as there is a lack of menstrual products, facilities and education on menstruation¹. They are also isolated and shamed by society because of the stigma surrounding menstruation and the lack of education about it.

This reflects the impact of limited access to affordable menstrual hygiene products and proper education. It doesn't only affect women's health; it goes further and influences their position in society by creating long-term consequences that come from missing school due to menstruation and from the emotional burden of being shamed for having a period.

There needs to be better education and improved hygiene facilities so that these girls can participate in learning without being excluded due to menstruation, as access to education and health is their right.

Key Terms

Period poverty: When an individual lacks the financial stability to afford resources to take care of their menstrual needs. This includes purchasing basic items like sanitary pads and tampons. But also includes lack of adequate facilities to change comfortably and having menstrual education to know how to take care of it².

Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH): It focuses on building systematic support for the menstrual rights to be upheld in the policies. It seeks for females to have affordable products,

¹ "Period Poverty – Why Millions of Girls and Women Cannot Afford Their Periods | UN Women – Headquarters." *UN Women – Headquarters*, 28 July 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/period-poverty-why-millions-of-girls-and-women-cannot-afford-their-periods.

² "Period Poverty – Why Millions of Girls and Women Cannot Afford Their Periods | UN Women – Headquarters." *UN Women – Headquarters*, 28 July 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/period-poverty-why-millions-of-girls-and-women-cannot-afford-their-periods.

reducing stigmas and providing health service for menstrual disorders³.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM): It focuses on the practical application of taking care of menstruation in aspects of hygiene and sanitation. It indicates the ability for women and girls to have access to clean menstrual materials, change in private, have access to soap and water and access to safe disposal facilities⁴.

Menstrual dignity: The concept that everyone who menstruates can take care of their periods safely, confidently, privately and without shame.

Dignity kits: A kit distributed by countless Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and UN programs. It contains the essentials for taking care of one's period including sanitary pads, underwear, soap and educational leaflet on menstruation⁵.

Background Information

There has always been a stigma around menstrual health and hygiene, causing it to be overlooked and leaving young girls ill-equipped to take care of their own menstruation due to lack of information, education, products and services. Many girls and women do not go to their work or school due to their periods. UN women states that in the UK 2 million girls aged 14-21 have missed a part day or a full day of school per term because of their periods⁶, leading many to drop out due to the amount of school they have miss⁷.

³ "Menstrual Health and Hygiene." *World Bank*, World Bank Group, 27 May 2025, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene.

⁴ "UNFPA-UNHCR Menstrual Hygiene Management Kit (MHM)." *United Nations Population Fund*, 2023, www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-unhcr-menstrual-hygiene-management-kit-mhm.

⁵ "Explainer: What's a Dignity Kit?" *UN News*, 2 June 2024, news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1150541

⁶ "Period Poverty – Why Millions of Girls and Women Cannot Afford Their Periods | UN Women – Headquarters." *UN Women – Headquarters*, 28 July 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/period-poverty-why-millions-of-girls-and-women-cannot-afford-their-periods.

⁷ UN Women. "Period Poverty Costs Too Much, Take Action to End It." *UN Women – Headquarters*, 24 May 2024, www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/05/period-poverty-costs-too-much-take-action-to-end-it.

This affects girls in the long term as they lose their life-long opportunities for employment and reaching their potential. This makes them economically disadvantaged to men and unable to earn an income, in turn limiting their ability to contribute to society. With so many girls being negatively affected by their periods UNICEF states that only 39% of schools provide menstrual health education, despite the importance in preventing these challenges⁸.

The causes of the problem include, but are not limited to, high product cost, taxation, stigma, poor Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, and lack of education. These issues are especially prevalent in rural areas and low-income countries. The barriers that prevent progress on this issue include funding gaps, cultural taboos, lack of political will and weak school infrastructure.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)- UN agency that focuses on protecting children in terms of their menstrual health, education access and child rights. They are one of the main UN bodies that work on menstrual health. They run programs like Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). This allows for more affordable menstrual products, proper facilities, education on menstruation and reduced stigmas. Moreover, they support governments in policy developments so that resources for menstrual support are strategically integrated into education and health policies. Furthermore, they provide WASH facilities and dignity kits in schools⁹.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)- A UN agency that focuses on sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. continuously supports students with issues on menstruation. By supporting schools with menstrual health programmes, conducting menstrual

⁸ “10 Fast Facts: Menstrual Health in Schools.” *Unicef.org*, 2024, www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-fast-facts-menstrual-health-schools.

⁹ “Menstrual Hygiene.” *Unicef.org*, 2018, www.unicef.org/wash/menstrual-hygiene

health education for teachers and students and providing dignity kits¹⁰.

UN Women- Play a part through research, advocacy and policy making that empowers women. They advocate period poverty as a global crisis and how it reinforces gender inequality. They work together with UNICEF for menstrual hygiene programmes. That allows them to distribute numerous dignity kits to those in rural areas and places in need. In addition to hygiene education and products.

World Health organisation (WHO)- As one of the most important UN agencies specializing in health they bring to global attention the gap in menstrual health for students. In addition, in partnership with UNICEF and UN-water they have raised awareness that menstrual health needs are overlooked due to the lack of products and provided substantial data to represent the urgent

UN WATER- A UN coordination mechanism that coordinates global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) efforts to have adequate facilities in schools. In addition, it supports global advocacy on menstrual health and dignity. They have also published data which highlights the extent of the school-level menstrual hygiene gap.¹¹

Relevant UN Resolutions

[Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 12 July 2021 47/4¹²](#)

The following resolution explicitly recognises the lack of water and sanitation services including for menstrual hygiene management negatively affects gender equality, empowerment of women and girls as well as the right to education. It supports the need for adequate facilities in schools. Some key clauses in the resolution include:

(b) To eliminate or reduce sales taxes on menstrual hygiene management products, including sanitary pads, and to provide support to women and girls in situations of economic vulnerability;

¹⁰ “Resources for Menstrual Health – for Students, Teachers, and Parents.” *UNFPA-Moldova*, 2025, moldova.unfpa.org/en/news/resources-menstrual-health-%E2%80%93-students-teachers-and-parents.

¹¹ “WHO/UNICEF: New Report on Menstrual Health and Hygiene in Schools.” *UN-Water*, 2024, www.unwater.org/news/who/unicef-new-report-menstrual-health-and-hygiene-schools.

¹² *Un.org*, 26 June 2021, docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/47/4.

(c) To develop safe and efficient infrastructures and means of transport for the delivery of sanitary pads and other menstrual hygiene products in rural or isolated areas, including humanitarian settings, and to reduce the digital divide among and within countries in order to increase access to information about menstrual hygiene in these areas;

(f) To conduct publicity and awareness-raising campaigns to tackle the stigma, shame, stereotypes and negative social norms surrounding menstruation and menstrual hygiene, such as the requirement that women and girls isolate themselves during menstruation or wear dark school uniforms, in order to foster a culture in which menstruation is recognized as healthy and natural, and to ensure that men and boys are also included in all educational initiatives;

[Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 12 July 2024 56/11¹³](#)

A resolution that used 47/4 as a foundation resolution. This resolution expands on that resolution and discusses universal access to affordable, safe and clear menstrual hygiene products. As well as special focus on rural and remote areas. It also goes into further details on how to improve infrastructure, which includes school infrastructures. And it recognizes menstrual health as a fundamental human right. Some of the key clauses include:

(j) To ensure that universal health coverage includes the prevention and treatment of the health risks and complications associated with menstruation, including through access at the primary health-care level;

(k) To ensure that all relevant duty bearers, such as health-care providers, teachers, religious leaders, traditional authorities, politicians and public and private employers comply with and uphold laws and regulations relating to menstrual hygiene and health care, in order to prevent and act against abuses or violations of the rights of women and girls and respect their dignity;

2. Urges States to ensure access to infrastructure and public services, including access to safe and affordable water and sanitation, as well as menstrual hygiene management, for all women and girls, and safe and affordable transportation, inter alia during humanitarian emergencies, including in rural and remote areas and informal settlements, settlements for internally displaced persons, refugee camps and migrant shelters;

¹³ “Menstrual Hygiene Management, Human Rights and Gender Equality .” *Un.org*, 2025, docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/56/11.

*Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019 74/141*¹⁴

A resolution that focuses on the right for the availability of adequate water to be used for daily purposes like drinking and sanitation. It covers the concept that having clean water available for a person going through menstruation is a right, as it is fundamental for menstrual hygiene. The resolution states as such,

(f) To address the widespread stigma and shame surrounding menstruation and menstrual hygiene by promoting educational and health practices in order to foster a culture in which menstruation is recognized as healthy and natural and by ensuring access to factual information thereon, including for men and boys, addressing the negative social norms around the issue, as well as ensuring universal access to hygienic products and gender-sensitive facilities, including disposal and waste management options for menstrual products, while recognizing that women 's and girls' attendance at school, university or, for women, work can be affected by negative perceptions of menstruation and lack of means to maintain personal hygiene, such as safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools...;

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹⁵

Article 1:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights...

Article 25:

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...

Article 26:

1. Everyone has the right to education...

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

¹⁴ "The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation." *Un.org*, 2025, docs.un.org/en/A/res/74/141.

¹⁵ Nations, United. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations." *United Nations*, 2023, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

1. Launched the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF)

In an attempt to catalyse the progress made so far in regards to sanitation and hygiene a new Sanitation and Hygiene Fund. This is an investment mechanism that was launched in 2020 when proper sanitation and hygiene was more crucial than ever. It aimed at collecting \$2 billion within 5 years. Since women and girls are disproportionately affected by poor sanitation the success resolving their issues would help bring them closer to achieving the SDG. Its main objectives include to expand household sanitation and hygiene services, addressing the gaps in menstrual health and hygiene whilst empowering women and girls, as well as to increase sustainable water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health and hygiene service in schools and health care facilities¹⁶.

2. Global movement against period poverty

The movement has been going on for 10 years and has driven women and girls worldwide to normalise conversation about menstruation and seek more access to products and facilities. Creating pressure on governments to act, developing a greater global awareness.

3. Awareness and Education campaigns

Although it has not been completely successful in many schools these programs are attempting to reduce lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools. They do this through providing improved WASH facilities, providing disposable bins and offering menstrual education.

Possible Solutions

Affordable or free menstrual products:

- One fundamental tactic to overcome period poverty is by making the menstruation products more accessible through giving it for free or at a reasonable price. This will reduce the rate of school absence, improve health and hygiene, reduce stigma and shame, reduce financial

¹⁶ “New Sanitation and Hygiene Fund Will Help Drive Billions into The...” *UNOPS*, 18 Nov. 2020, www.unops.org/news-and-stories/news/new-sanitation-and-hygiene-fund-will-help-drive-billions-into-the-sector.

burden on low-income families and most importantly break the cycle of poverty¹⁷.

Distributing dignity kits:

- Dignity kits come with the fundamental products needed to take care of menstruations in a safe manner. They are already being distributed by NGOs and UN agencies. However, there is still a gap in accessibility for those in low-income countries and rural areas. Therefore, there needs to be a greater effort to distribute these kits to reach a greater population.

¹⁷ “Period Poverty – Why Millions of Girls and Women Cannot Afford Their Periods | UN Women – Headquarters.” *UN Women – Headquarters*, 28 July 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/period-poverty-why-millions-of-girls-and-women-cannot-afford-their-periods.

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