

TACKLING PERIOD POVERTY IN THE EU: CURRENT CHALLENGES, PATHWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



FOREWORD

Period poverty is a direct violation of equality, dignity, and the right to health. Across Europe, millions of menstruating people face significant barriers in accessing safe products, adequate information, and appropriate facilities that respect their needs. This reality, long rendered invisible, is no longer tolerable.

As Members of the European Parliament committed to gender equality, social justice, and fundamental rights, we – Saskia Bricmont, Mélissa Camara and Diana Riba I Giner – are determined to bring this issue to the forefront of the European political agenda.

We commissioned this study with a clear conviction: period poverty is not a marginal, private, or individual problem. It is profoundly political. It is a visible symptom of systemic inequalities that must be challenged and dismantled.

This report presents an unambiguous reality:

- It highlights the scale of inequalities in access to menstrual products, education, and suitable facilities.
- It exposes the persistence of taboos and discrimination surrounding menstruation, even within public policies.
- It shows that positive initiatives already exist, and that scaling them up across Europe is both necessary and possible.

Beyond this diagnosis, the study proposes concrete, immediate, and ambitious solutions: free access to menstrual products, comprehensive menstrual education starting at an early age for all genders, adaptation of public infrastructures, strict regulation of product safety, and systematic data collection to inform public action.

We affirm that fighting period poverty is a democratic imperative.

It means guaranteeing that every menstruating person can live their bodily experience without shame, without risk, and without barriers.

It means recognizing that rights to health, education, and dignity must apply universally and without exception.

We warmly thank the researchers and the NGO Règles élémentaires for their rigorous and committed work. This report provides a powerful tool to drive strong political action.

We call on our fellow Members of Parliament, European institutions, and national governments to seize it fully and act.

Saskia Bricmont, Mélissa Camara and Diana Riba I Giner
Greens/EFA Members of the European Parliament



AUTHORS

Maria Carmen Punzi - Researcher

Maria Carmen Punzi is a PhD researcher and consultant. Since 2017, she has bridged the academic, non-profit, and corporate worlds to champion menstrual health as a critical yet overlooked component of gender equality. Her work has been published in leading academic journals, including the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Contraception*, and *Women’s Health*, as well as the first *Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. She actively translates research into advocacy and social change, contributing to public debates on femtech, menstrual equity and reproductive rights. Her insights have been featured in national and international media, such as France24, Times Radio UK and AD.nl (Netherlands). As a consultant, Maria Carmen conducts research and advises organizations on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, (workplace) menstrual equity, and social impact evaluations. Her past clients include PwC, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Vodafone, and the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (UN).

Nicole Spohr - Researcher

Nicole Spohr holds a Doctorate in Business and a Master’s in Contemporary Menstrual Studies, with over eight years of academic and research experience in the fields of human rights, social justice, and gender studies. Her interest lies in exploring how cultural and socioeconomic factors shape the lived experiences of people who menstruate across diverse global contexts. She volunteers as a research advisor at Neighborhood Feminists in Amsterdam, supporting community-based efforts to combat period poverty. As a certified menstrual educator, she promotes menstrual health literacy and empowers individuals through education. Her work focuses on advancing understanding of the menstrual cycle as a key component of individual well-being, workplace inclusion, and gender equity.

Justine Okolodkoff - Coordinator

Justine Okolodkoff has spent the past 10 years working professionally on women’s rights, gender equality, and broader social justice issues. As Deputy Director of Règles Élémentaires—France’s leading NGO dedicated to menstrual health—Justine oversees strategic advocacy efforts and leads awareness-raising initiatives on menstruation both in France and across Europe. Since its founding in 2016, Règles Élémentaires has addressed period poverty through a multidimensional approach: providing direct support to organizations supporting individuals affected by menstrual insecurity, conducting in-depth analysis to inform public policy, and developing comprehensive educational materials to break taboos and foster understanding.

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Language disclaimer

The authors recognize that not all women menstruate and not all people who menstruate identify as women. Nonbinary and transgender people may also menstruate and thus be affected by period poverty, while there are a number of cis-women that do not menstruate due to surgical causes (e.g. hysterectomy), hormonal or induced menopause (e.g. linked to certain medication and therapies), chronic illnesses and other health conditions. Throughout the report, we use the terms women, girls, people who menstruate, menstruators and menstruating individuals to account for the variety of identities of those who menstruate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Period poverty is defined as the inability to regularly afford and access menstrual products, adequate sanitation facilities, and stigma-free menstrual education.

Data on period poverty: The research report shows a starring lack of high quality data on period poverty across many EU Member States. Lack of national data complicates comprehensive analysis and risks underreporting the scale of the issue.

Prevalence of period poverty and most affected groups

Prevalence: In all European countries with available data, women and girls experience period poverty. The rates range from 10% to 50%. In 15 countries, i.e. Hungary, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Denmark, Slovenia, Finland, Cyprus, Slovakia, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Malta, Luxembourg, Poland, between 10% and 19% of the menstruating population experiences period poverty. In another 9 countries—Greece, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Spain, Germany, Portugal and the Netherlands —20% or more are affected. The situation is especially severe in Belgium (30%), France (31%), and Ireland (50%).

Affected Groups: Period poverty disproportionately affects people who belong to vulnerable groups, such as refugees, migrants, Roma people, people with disabilities, unemployed individuals, low-income individuals, single parents, victims of abuse, women in detention, young people, orphans, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, women experiencing homelessness and widows.

Coping Strategies & Consequences of Period Poverty

Trade-offs and Sacrifices: Menstruators often face difficult trade-offs, such as needing to purchase lower-quality or cheaper menstrual products, cutting back on food or skipping meals due to a lack of access to menstrual products. Many are forced to borrow money or forgo other basic essentials like groceries or resort to using inadequate alternatives such as toilet paper, fabric scraps or used clothing.

Impact on School Attendance, Work and Social Life: Many women, girls and people who menstruate stay home from work or school because of the lack of menstrual products, sanitation facilities and enabling environment. For example, girls miss school days in countries like Poland (1 in 5 girls), Portugal (1 in 10) and Denmark (1 in 10). In Greece, girls skip up to 30 days per year because of menstruation.

Menstrual Stigma and Lack of Menstrual Education

Widespread Stigma: Menstruation remains taboo in many EU countries, creating feelings of discomfort and social isolation for women and people who menstruate. Women across the European Union feel distressed by visible blood stains (9 in 10 in Austria) and fear public staining (8 in 10 in Spain); feel uncomfortable mentioning menstruation (4 in 10 in Italy) and think discussing it at work is unprofessional (3 in 10 in Italy).

Education gaps: Menstrual education across the EU remains inadequate, leaving many individuals unprepared, uninformed, and overwhelmed at the onset of menstruation. Surveys from countries such as Austria, Belgium, France, Spain, Germany, and Sweden highlight widespread gaps in knowledge and low rates of formal education. These deficits contribute to confusion, stigma, and emotional distress. Despite this, there is strong public support—especially among young people—for comprehensive, inclusive menstrual education in schools, underscoring the urgent need for early, factual, and stigma-free programs across Member States.

Lack of Adequate Sanitation Facilities

Inadequate Facilities: Many restrooms in schools, universities, public spaces and workplaces lack privacy (e.g. lockable doors) and essential hygiene resources (e.g. soap, toilet paper, and disposal bins). Across Europe, menstruating individuals avoid public restrooms during menstruation

(3 in 10 in Austria); lack adequate space to care for their needs (8 in 10 in Germany); report overusing products due to inadequate facilities (7 in 10 in Spain); and find particularly school toilets unsafe or unclean (4 in 10 in Italy). Inadequate privacy and hygiene conditions lead to delayed changes and force individuals to use menstrual products for longer than it is safe, increasing risks of infections and discomfort.

Initiatives to Tackle Period Poverty

Existing initiatives: Across the EU, most initiatives tackling period poverty focus on providing free menstrual products, particularly in schools. Some initiatives target vulnerable groups, and a minority include educational programs. Holistic interventions are still lacking, although virtuous examples exist, like Catalunya's menstrual equity strategy.

Key challenges: The research report identified several key challenges undermining effective action on period poverty across the EU. These include a lack of central ownership and sustained funding, a narrow and fragmented approach to both research and interventions, and the absence of systematic evaluation mechanisms. Questions also remain around the long-term effectiveness of VAT reduction policies and the ethical implications of relying on corporate partnerships to address a fundamental public health issue.

Key Recommendations

Data & Research: Fund regular EU-wide data collection on period poverty; prioritize inclusive, gender-sensitive research involving vulnerable groups; monitor and evaluate projects and initiatives over time.

Menstrual Products: Make safe disposable and reusable options regularly available in key community spaces, and implement reimbursement or subsidy schemes to reduce financial barriers and uphold dignity.

Education & Awareness: Implement inclusive, stigma-free menstrual education starting early and accessible to all genders, alongside a pan-European public awareness campaign that promotes accurate media representation, reflects diverse experiences, and leverages regulatory frameworks to ensure respectful and empowering portrayals of menstruation.

Sanitation Facilities: Set EU standards for period-friendly toilets (privacy, product disposal, water access); ensure inclusivity and regular maintenance.

Regulation & Tax: Abolish VAT on menstrual products, prevent price increases by manufacturers and retailers, and reinvest tax savings into menstrual equity programs.



1. INTRODUCTION

As of 2024, the European Union has a population of approximately 449 million people, with women representing just over half of it. This translates to roughly 229 million women. Narrowing this down to the typical reproductive age range of 14 to 52, and including the estimate of other people who menstruate, this group represents roughly **26% of the EU population**, or an estimated **100 million women and people who menstruate**. These women and people who menstruate navigate their menstrual cycles every month, in nearly every aspect of life: at school, in the workplace, during travel, while caregiving, or attending social events.

Menstruation is a natural biological process that occurs for roughly 40 years of a menstruator's life—amounting to about **seven consecutive years spent managing periods** (1). Yet, despite its constancy and impact, menstruation is still shrouded in stigma and silence, often neglected in public discourse on health, education, and equality.

In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council (Resolution 33/10) affirmed that inadequate menstrual health management and the stigma surrounding it are not just health issues—they are violations of **basic human rights** and significant obstacles to gender equality (2). **Period poverty**—defined as the **inability to regularly afford and access menstrual products, adequate sanitation facilities, and stigma-free menstrual education**—is a growing public health and social equity issue across the European Union. In both global and European contexts marked by economic hardship, addressing period poverty has become a critical issue for public policy and social justice.

The European Union has taken a growing interest in addressing period poverty as part of its broader commitment to gender equality and public health. A significant milestone came in January 2019, when the European Parliament passed a resolution urging Member States to eliminate the so-called **«tampon tax»**—a practice of taxing menstrual products as non-essential goods (3). The resolution encouraged governments to use the flexibility provided by the Community VAT Directive to reduce or eliminate VAT on menstrual products, paving the way for more equitable tax policies across the EU.

In June 2021, the European Parliament adopted a comprehensive resolution on sexual and reproductive health and rights (4). This resolution called on Member States to ensure **free access to menstrual products** for all who need them, to promote **awareness-raising initiatives**, and to encourage the use of **non-toxic and reusable menstrual product options**. It also underscored the importance of delivering accurate, **stigma-free menstrual education** from childhood, while again urging Member States to use the VAT Directive's flexibility to abolish the tampon tax.

More recently, in March 2025, 50 Members of the European Parliament submitted **formal questions to the European Commission**, calling for a more integrated EU strategy on menstrual health (5). They emphasized the need to go beyond tax reform by addressing the impact of period poverty on mental health, promoting cross-country knowledge sharing, and ensuring proper regulation of menstrual products. Their appeal highlighted the need for public health measures that support safe product use and recognize menstrual health as a critical component of well-being, equity, and inclusion across the EU (6).

Despite growing political attention, reliable and comprehensive data on period poverty in the European Union remains scarce. Existing information is often fragmented, derived from disparate sources such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), polling agencies, grassroots initiatives, and a limited number of academic studies. This lack of systematic and comparable data across Member States presents a significant barrier to designing effective, evidence-based public policies. **This study aims to address these gaps by consolidating and critically assessing the available data on period poverty across the EU.** By mapping current challenges, highlighting best practices, and identifying persistent barriers, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, civil society, and institutions committed to advancing menstrual equity across Europe.

2. METHODOLOGY

To assess the state of period poverty within the European Union, this study relied exclusively on **secondary data sources**. The data collection was primarily conducted by *Règles Élémentaires*, a French NGO working towards menstrual equity, which received support and insights from several NGOs working on period poverty across EU member states. The research team strengthened the database by including additional sources where gaps were identified.

Throughout the research process, the team encountered a significant **scarcity of data** on European women's experience of menstruation and period poverty, with most available sources dating between 2020 and 2024. The lack of longitudinal and comprehensive data underscores how **overlooked and under-researched** this issue remains, despite its widespread impact. To address these gaps, the recommendations section of this report outlines methodologies and target groups for improved data collection.

The analyzed **documents varied significantly** in sample size, methodology, research rigor, authorship, and thematic focus, making cross-country comparisons challenging. Reports were written by organizations as diverse as governmental bodies (e.g., ministries), NGOs, and menstrual product companies. In some countries, the only data available was found in news articles and NGO websites. In a few cases, comprehensive reports were referenced in articles, but despite extensive efforts, the research team could not access the original sources. Some high-quality studies provided valuable insights about changes in period poverty over time, notably three reports from France and two from the Netherlands, which enabled a more thorough assessment of changing trends and program effectiveness.

To assist readers in **navigating data reliability**, the research team categorized sources based on authorship, data type (primary or secondary), and methodological transparency, providing insight into the source's quality, generalizability, and reliability. Sources are classified as follows:

GREEN: Academic publications or reports by recognized institutions that use clearly outlined methodologies and present data collected specifically for their own study (primary sources).

ORANGE: Sources that rely on secondary data or primary data with small sample sizes, and that use less transparent and/or rigorous methodologies.

BLUE: Websites or news articles.

BLACK: Sources not used to directly obtain data on period poverty, but instead used to support or deepen the thematic analysis presented in the report.

“When I was at my worst, I would pick out less-used pads in public restrooms.» – anonymous social services client (8)

Throughout the report, each data source is identified by a coloured number—GREEN, ORANGE, BLUE, or BLACK—enabling readers to easily assess the reliability of the information presented.

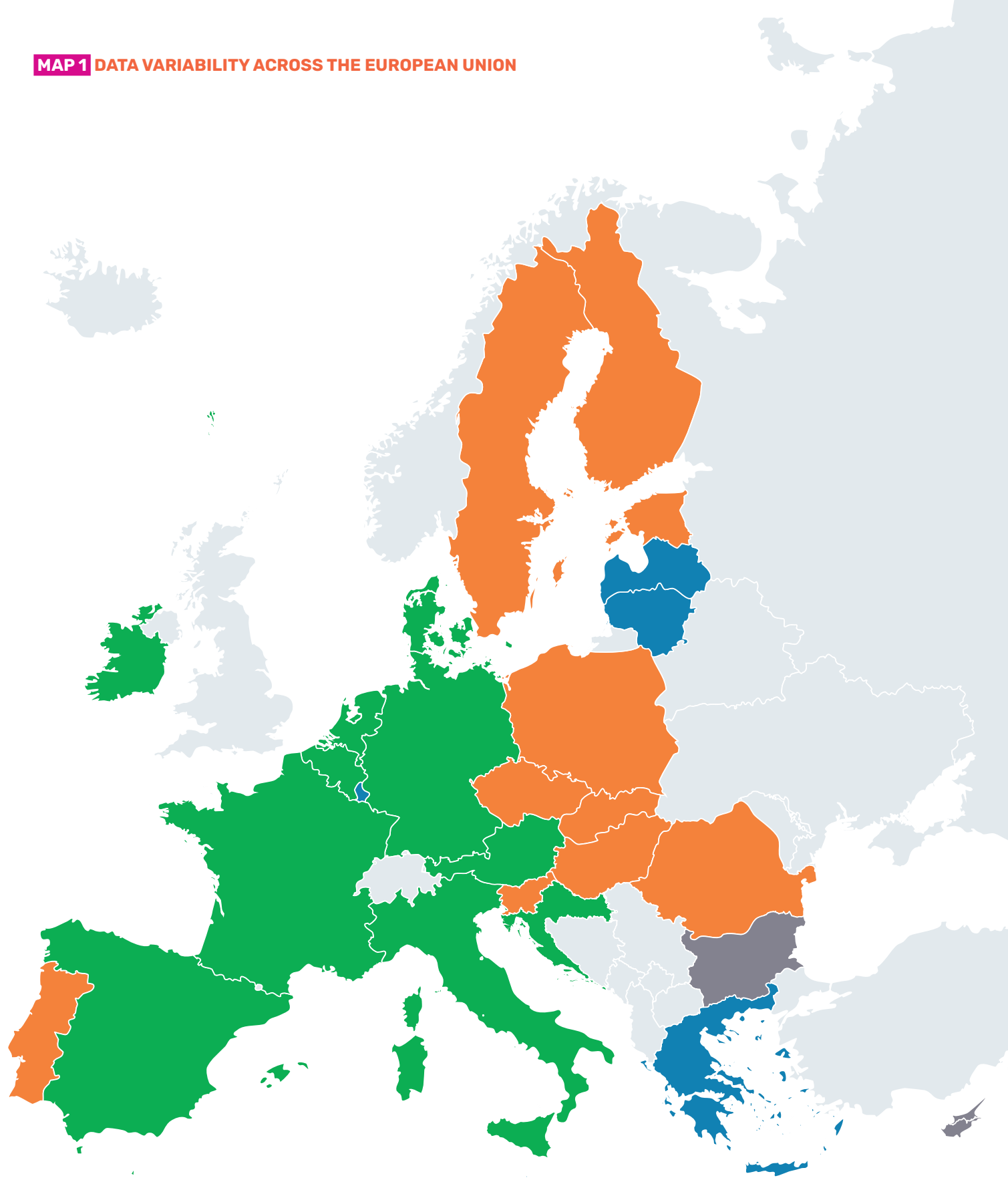
In the following map, data variability is shown by country across the European Union. A country is marked green if at least one green-rated source is available, orange if it has at least one orange-rated source, and so on. Countries shown in gray indicate the absence of available data or known initiatives addressing period poverty.

A **structured methodological approach** ensured consistency and rigor in the analysis. All collected documents were first translated into English to ensure uniform interpretation. They were then systematically reviewed and classified based on relevance, as we retained only the most pertinent materials for further examination. The selected documents were analyzed using the **software Atlas.ti**, where a predefined coding framework, based on period poverty and the study's objectives, was applied. Key themes were identified, coded, and synthesized into broader analytical categories. This process allowed for meaningful insights and facilitated cross-country comparisons across EU member states.

The findings derived from this analysis will be presented in the following sections of this report, starting with the Current State of Period Poverty in the EU (Section 3), followed by Initiatives to Tackle Period Poverty in the EU (Section 4), Recommendations to Tackle Period Poverty in the EU (Section 5), and the Closing Words (section 6).



“It was so uncomfortable for me to sit like that and live with the fear that I might see something or bleed through. It was really a traumatic experience for me.” (7)



- At least one green-rated source is available for the country
- At least one orange-rated source is available for the country
- At least one blue-rated source is available for the country
- No available data or known initiatives addressing period poverty

3. CURRENT STATE OF PERIOD POVERTY IN THE EU

In the introduction, we defined period poverty as **the inability to regularly afford and access menstrual products, adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities and stigma-free education to manage menstruation**. The reason for choosing this definition is grounded in academic literature and practitioners' experience showing that women and people who menstruate don't simply need access to affordable menstrual products to take care of their menstrual health: toilets that are well equipped with soap, lockable doors, bins and clean running water are also essential, as much as an enabling environment to ask questions, get medical and peer support and receive stigma-free, scientifically correct education about the menstrual cycle, menstrual disorders and what classifies as normal when it comes to menstrual health.

In the following section, we review data on each of the key components of our definition per European country (where available). We present data about EU citizens' struggle with affording and accessing menstrual products, their coping strategies, the prevalence of stigma across EU countries, people's knowledge of menstruation at menarche, and access to adequate facilities. Through our analysis, we came across studies that define each of these components differently. In our text, and particularly in Table 1 and Info boxes 1 to 5, we show the different definitions adopted across studies to ensure readers can put in context the statistics emerging from them.

3.1 Access to Menstrual Products

Period poverty remains a widespread issue across the European Union, with women and people who menstruate facing varying levels of financial hardship when taking care of their menstruation. The percentage of women facing **difficulties in accessing and affording** period products ranges from approximately **10% to 50%**, depending on the study's methodology, demographic group, and country. While some individuals experience occasional difficulties, others face persistent barriers that impact their daily lives, education, and well-being.

In the absence of standardized global classifications, the research team categorised European countries into two main groups based on the prevalence of period poverty: **moderate and high levels**. Further research is needed to develop universally accepted metrics for assessing and comparing

period poverty levels across countries. Strikingly, **no country in the European Union has low to zero levels** of period poverty. For some European countries, national-level data on period poverty is not available. For this group, we present estimates on period poverty levels based on available data on national poverty rates.

Countries with Moderate Levels of Period Poverty

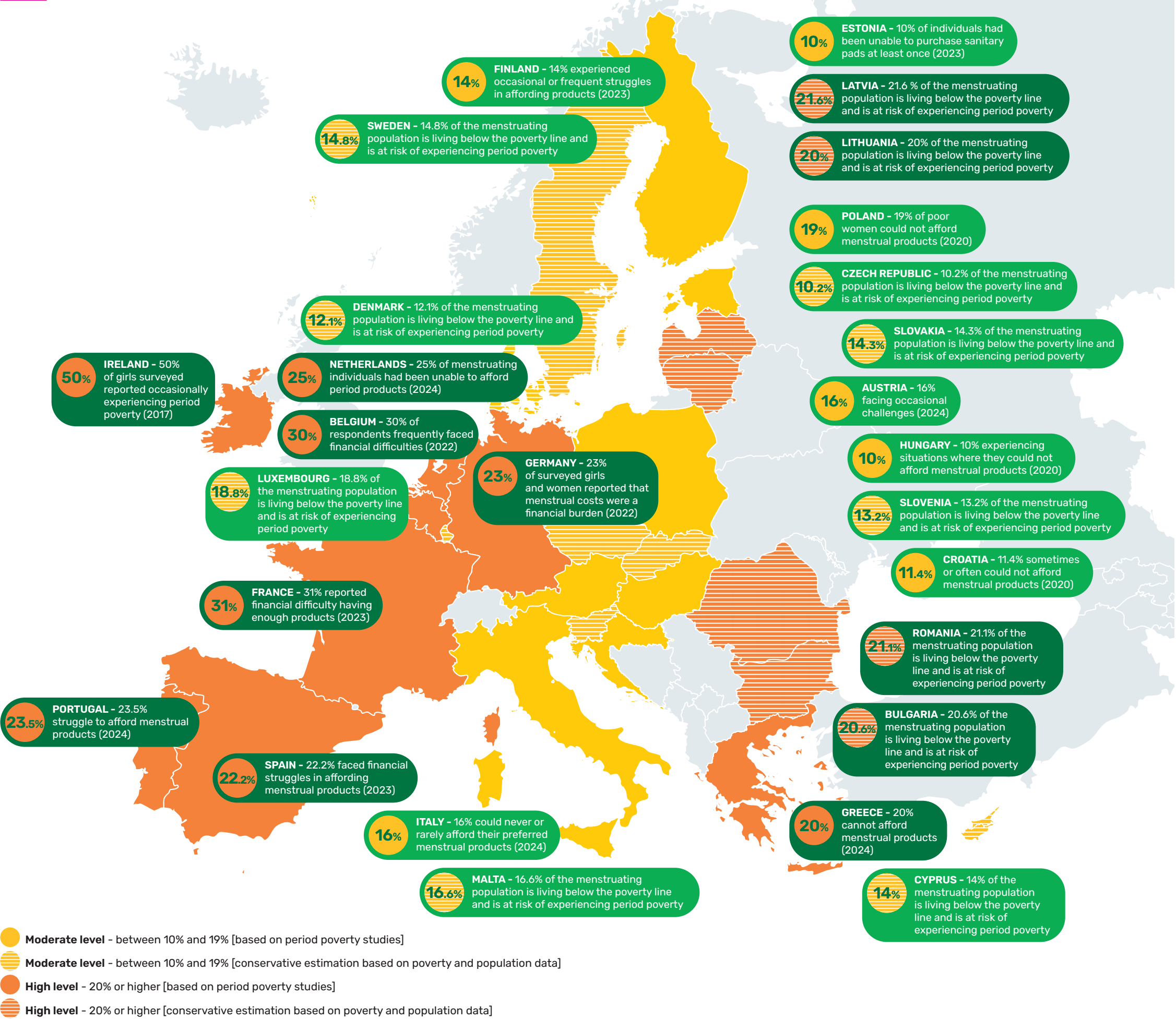
In several European countries, financial barriers to menstrual products are pronounced, affecting a significant share of the population, particularly vulnerable groups. The **moderate level** of period poverty accounts for rates between **10% and 19%** of respondents.

In **Hungary**, 10% of young girls participating in the *Program Girl to Woman* reported experiencing situations where they could not afford menstrual products (29). In **Estonia**, 10% of individuals had been unable to purchase menstrual pads at least once (10). In **Croatia**, 11.4% of respondents stated that they sometimes or often could not afford menstrual products, and over 36% had to opt for lower-quality alternatives due to their cost (11). In **Finland**, 14% of respondents experienced occasional or frequent struggles in affording menstrual products (12).

In **Austria**, the most recent data shows that 16% of respondents face occasional challenges affording menstrual products, with 4.7% experiencing monthly difficulty (13). In **Italy**, a 2024 study revealed that 16% of respondents could never or rarely afford their preferred menstrual products (14). In **Poland**, 19% of poor women could not afford menstrual products, and 39% had to forgo purchasing them in favor of other household expenses (15).

"I can't count how many times during my period I saved myself with gray paper, wrapped, folded in several layers and put in my panties. I can't count how many times I felt ashamed and stressed because of this situation. I kept thinking about whether someone would see it or whether the paper would start leaking and I would soil the chair in the classroom". (9)

MAP 2 LEVELS OF PERIOD POVERTY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



Countries with High Levels of Period Poverty

In some European countries, period poverty is a severe and widespread issue, affecting a significant percentage of women and people who menstruate. We classify a country as being affected by **high levels** of period poverty when **20% or more** respondents reported struggles to afford menstrual products.

It is important to note that some of the highest percentages of period poverty incidence emerge from the countries that conducted **methodologically thorough studies** on the issue. This suggests that in countries with moderate levels of period poverty, actual rates could result being higher than currently reported if more in-depth studies were conducted.

In **Greece**, 20% of women cannot afford menstrual products, as reported by the Greek Ministry of Health [\(16\)](#). In **Spain**, period poverty affects between 22.2% and 39.9% of menstruating individuals, with 22.2% reporting financial difficulty affording menstrual products and 39.9% struggling to afford their preferred products and being forced to rely on cheaper alternatives [\(17\)](#).

In **Germany**, 23% of surveyed girls and women reported that menstrual costs were a financial burden [\(18\)](#). In **Portugal**, 23.5% of young women aged 18 to 24 from low-income families struggle to afford menstrual products [\(19\)](#). In **the Netherlands**, period poverty affects 25% of menstruating individuals who have either been unable to afford period products, struggled but managed, or resorted to alternatives—impacting over 765,000 people overall [\(20\)](#).

A **Belgian** survey indicated that 30% of respondents, particularly unemployed individuals, students, and those working part-time, frequently faced financial difficulties in purchasing menstrual products [\(21\)](#). In **France**, period poverty has doubled in two years, affecting 31% of menstruating women aged 18 to 50 in 2023—nearly 4 million people—compared to 2 million in 2021 [\(22\)](#). In **Ireland**, a survey conducted in 2017 by Plan International [\(23\)](#) with 1,100 girls aged 12–19 found that 50% occasionally experienced period poverty.

Countries with No Available Data on Period Poverty

No study-backed statistics were available for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden. In some instances, news articles provided their own estimates based on available national data. For example, in **Lithuania**, poverty data suggest that at least 300,000 women (10.7%) likely have difficulties obtaining quality menstrual products [\(24\)](#). In **Slovenia**, an estimated 54,433 women could be at risk of period poverty, based on a 12.1% at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2022 [\(25\)](#). In **Romania**, estimates indicate that approximately 1 million girls and women struggle with menstrual poverty every day [\(26\)](#).

For the twelve European countries where period poverty data was unavailable, the research team produced conservative estimates using the number of menstruating individuals (typically aged 14–52) and the most recent national poverty rates. These figures likely underestimate the true scale of period poverty, as data from other European countries shows that the incidence of period poverty often exceeds general poverty rates.

Approximately **10.2%** of the menstruating population, or 265,200 individuals, in the **Czech Republic** are at risk of experiencing period poverty, based on national poverty risk data. In **Denmark** approximately 214,533 women—representing **12.1%** of the menstruating population—face the same risk. **Slovenia** follows with an estimated 61,729 women (**13.2%**) affected. In **Cyprus**, around 40,589 women (**14%**) are estimated to be at risk, while **Slovakia** has approximately 231,770 women (**14.3%**) impacted. In **Sweden**, around 388,000 menstruating women—or **14.8%**—are considered at risk. Numbers from **Malta** suggest that approximately 18,229 women (**16.6%**) face period poverty, and in **Luxembourg**, despite a smaller population, 24,696 women (**18.8%**) are likely to be affected. **Lithuania** is estimated to have 133,228 women (**20%**) at risk. In **Bulgaria**, that number rises to 332,744 women (**20.6%**), while Romania records one of the highest figures, with 1,179,198 women (**21.1%**) impacted. **Latvia** reports the highest estimated percentage, with 113,347 women—**21.6%** of the menstruating population—at risk of period poverty.

In sum, period poverty remains a critical issue across Europe, with notable disparities between countries. While some countries experience moderate levels of menstrual poverty, others report widespread financial hardship affecting a significant share of women and people who menstruate. The issue is particularly severe among vulnerable groups.

Consequences and Coping Strategies

The financial burden of purchasing menstrual products remains a significant challenge for many individuals across Europe, with consequences extending beyond **economic hardship to physical and mental health**. Across the studies we reviewed, it became clear that women and people who

menstruate are significantly affected by unaffordability of menstrual products and make compromises, adjustments and trade-offs throughout the month to cope with the unsupportive environment they live in.

In **France**, for example, period poverty affects approximately 4 million women, forcing some to choose between buying menstrual products and essential needs such as food. A pack of 12 pads costs around €3, and individuals affected by conditions like heavy menstrual bleeding (HMB) often require multiple packs per cycle, making the cost challenging. As a result, some are forced to forgo menstrual products entirely, while others sacrifice meals to afford it [\(22\)](#).

Similar struggles are reported across Europe. In **Hungary**, menstrual poverty is a pressing issue, particularly among disadvantaged students [\(28\)](#). Some individuals rely on materials like cotton T-shirts, outgrown tracksuits, used diapers, socks, or rags, often without access to proper washing facilities, increasing their risk of infections and other health complications [\(28\)](#). Women in Hungary must work an average of 3.3 hours to afford their monthly menstrual products and women in **Romania** must work 3.1 hours to recover the cost of one month of menstrual products, based on minimum net hourly wage, since the average monthly price of menstrual products in Romania is close to European average, at 8.4 Euros [\(29\)](#).

In **Spain**, a 2023 survey by the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió (Catalunya) revealed that 44% of women who menstruate used products that were not their first choice due to financial constraints, 23% said they reuse single-use products, and 6% have used toilet paper as an alternative [\(30\)](#). As for menstrual products' cost, 73.5% believed that all menstrual products were very expensive; 23.3% thought that the cost of some products was too high [\(17\)](#).

In **the Netherlands**, over 610,000 people (21%) have used unsafe alternatives to menstrual products, with 44% relying on toilet paper, 9% on fabric pieces, and 7% on items like tissues or newspapers. Lifetime costs for menstrual products range from €498 to €5,730 per person, prompting some to cut back on essentials like groceries, borrow money, or stay home during menstruation [\(20\)](#). In **Austria**, the menstruation portal *Erdbeerwoche* estimates an even higher lifetime cost, with menstruating women spending an average of €7,000 on menstrual products, painkillers, and contraceptives [\(31\)](#).

In **Sweden**, 71% of young people (ages 16–21) have used makeshift solutions, like toilet paper or fabric, as protection due to lacking access to menstrual products, while 11% of them have missed school, sports training, or leisure activities at some point for the same reason. Additionally, 66% of respondents have used period products for extended periods, leading to leaks because they couldn't change in time [\(32\)](#). In **Greece**, some students miss up to 30 school days per year due to a lack of access to menstrual products, with over 10,000 girls missing school at least once because they could not afford these products [\(16\)](#); [\(33\)](#).

“When we have an outing, and I only have one sanitary napkin left, [I think] ‘I’m not going to go because one sanitary napkin is not enough [to cover me]’. At home, I can then just put on a clean pair of pants”. [\(27\)](#)

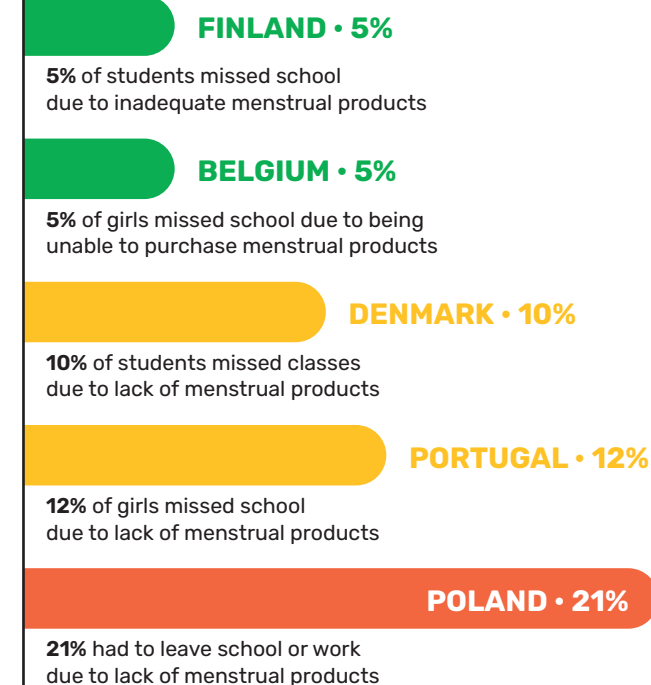
Similarly, in **Denmark**, 10% of students have missed classes due to a lack of menstrual protection [\(34\)](#). In **Finland**, 5% of young people aged 15 to 24 reported missing school or work due to inadequate menstrual products [\(12\)](#). In **Poland**, a 2020 study found that 54% of teenagers aged 15–19 did not attend school or work due to their period, and 21% had to leave school or work because of a lack of menstrual products [\(15\)](#).

In **Portugal**, 12% of girls report missing school for the same reason, with over half citing illness as an excuse. Teachers play a crucial role, with 34.5% personally providing menstrual products to students in need and 18.2% reporting that parents confided in them about their inability to afford these items [\(19\)](#). In **Austria**, 23% of respondents admitted to using fewer products than needed, while 17% deliberately delayed changing them, increasing their risk of infections [\(31\)](#). In **Ireland**, 10% of those affected by period poverty turn to unsuitable substitutes due to cost constraints [\(23\)](#).

In **Belgium**, 5% of Flemish girls miss school and 4% skip leisure activities due to lack of access to menstrual products [\(27\)](#). Beyond the physical impact, menstrual poverty causes anxiety over leaks and running out of supplies, adding to financial stress. Some turn to birth control pills—reimbursed by the state—to reduce menstruation, since menstrual products are not covered [\(27\)](#). Over half (51%) have used improvised solutions like folded handkerchiefs or layered underwear. Among 19–28-year-olds – especially unemployed, people with disabilities, and students – 30% regularly struggle to afford menstrual products [\(21\)](#).

The financial and mental burden of period poverty is further exacerbated by the lack of sufficient public support and the reliance on informal – and often underresourced – networks, such as teachers, to assist those in need. These findings underscore the urgent need for policy interventions to ensure that menstrual products are accessible, affordable, and available to all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status.

INFO BOX 1 SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM LINKED TO PERIOD POVERTY



3.2 Access to Menstrual Education

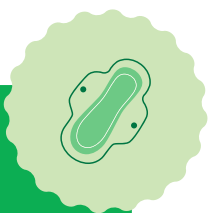
Menstruation remains a **taboo topic** across many EU countries [\(22\)](#), contributing to harmful stereotypes and derogatory attitudes towards women and people who menstruate and their needs. Without scientifically correct and supportive menstrual education, these unfounded negative perceptions persist, seeping into everyday conversations and interactions in the form of jokes and demeaning comments. In the following section, we present data about menstrual stigma and related attitudes towards menstruation across EU countries and follow that up with showcasing rates of the lack of menstrual education.

Menstrual stigma and its consequences across Europe

Menstrual stigma remains a persistent issue across the European Union, affecting individuals' comfort in discussing menstruation, purchasing products, and managing their periods in public spaces. While attitudes are slowly shifting toward normalization, many people still experience embarrassment and societal taboos.

In **Austria**, 95% of surveyed girls and women reported that visible blood stains cause significant distress, while 27% felt unclean during their period. However, 40% stated they no longer want to feel ashamed of menstruation. Additionally, 71% of respondents emphasized the need for greater education

“The worst moment is when you need to take a sanitary pad out of your backpack in a discreet way. Everyone is looking at you, watching what you are rummaging for”. (15)



and involvement of boys and men to challenge taboos and reshape societal norms (31) and 82% of female and 61% of male respondents demand that girls and women should not be discriminated against because of their periods (35).

In **Belgium**, 31% of respondents perceived menstruation as a taboo within their family. Many participants reported hiding menstrual products, experiencing ridicule due to leaks, or being discredited for expressing emotions (21). Words commonly associated with menstruation included «fear of accidents,» «embarrassment,» «stress,» «pain,» and «taboo.» Euphemisms like «the English are coming» and «being indisposed» further illustrate the societal discomfort surrounding the topic (21).

A study from **Spain** revealed that the majority of women and people who menstruate (83.3%) felt fearful of staining their clothes with menstrual blood in public, while 58.5% had hidden their menstruation, 44.5% had experienced discrimination or judgment for menstruating, and 19.2% felt embarrassed to talk about it (17). In **Italy**, more than 40% of the respondents never or rarely feel comfortable saying the words ‘menstruation’ and ‘menstrual cycle’. Almost 20% think it is unprofessional to talk about menstruation at work and 33% of people refer to menstruation as ‘things’ instead of mentioning it by its name (14).

Croatia also reports persistent stigma, with 4.1% of respondents still feeling embarrassed when buying menstrual products, particularly when served by male cashiers (7.1%). Additionally, 5.7% were uncomfortable discussing menstruation, 10.5% associated it with being «dirty,» and 15.6% resorted to excuses to justify missing school or work due to their period. Younger respondents exhibited higher levels of embarrassment, with 35.3% admitting to concealing menstrual products when heading to the bathroom. The study also revealed a wide range of euphemisms used for menstruation, including «red army,» «Niagara falls,» and «little red riding hood,» as well as personifications like «friend» or «witch,» reflecting deep-seated societal attitudes (11).

In **Denmark**, menstruation remains a sensitive topic in schools, with about 30% of students feeling uncomfortable discussing it. The stigma is particularly

pronounced among younger students aged 13 to 15, where six in ten report unease when talking about menstruation in school environments (34). Menstruation stigma affects young people in **Sweden** too: 25% of respondents (16–21 years old) stated that they felt completely uncomfortable discussing menstruation with a teacher or work manager, while only 15% said they felt fully comfortable. 72% reported hearing degrading comments or cruel jokes about periods. Additionally, 20% mentioned feeling awkward when buying period products or asking to borrow one, with 15% saying this happened «pretty often» and 5% saying «very often» (32).

Similarly, in **France**, despite national progress, menstruation continues to be a socially sensitive topic, especially among younger individuals. Thirty percent of those under 35 still consider it a taboo subject, while over 33% of young people aged 16 to 24 perceive menstruation as stigmatized within schools (36). In **Portugal**, the stigma surrounding menstruation further compounds the issue, with 10% of young women admitting they have hidden their inability to afford menstrual products (19).

Germany also reports widespread stigma, with 97% of women considering visible blood stains on clothing, bedding, or toilets unpleasant. Moreover, one in ten women reported being uncomfortable even talking about menstruation. However, two-thirds of respondents believe menstruation should be discussed more openly, reflecting a push toward breaking the stigma. Many also reject the notion of menstruation as a weakness and seek to eliminate discrimination associated with it (31).

To break the persistent stigma surrounding menstruation, comprehensive menstrual education is essential—ensuring open conversations, normalizing the topic from an early age, and fostering inclusivity for people of all genders and from all backgrounds across the EU.

INFO BOX 2 PREVALENCE OF MENSTRUAL STIGMA



CROATIA

10.5% of respondents associated menstruating with being “dirty”



SWEDEN

25% of respondents stated that they feel completely uncomfortable discussing menstruation with a teacher or work manager



DENMARK

30% of students feel uncomfortable discussing menstruation



BELGIUM

31% of respondents perceive menstruation as a taboo within their family



FRANCE

33% of young people aged 16 to 24 perceive menstruation as stigmatized within schools



ITALY

40% of the respondents never or rarely feel comfortable saying the words ‘menstruation’ and ‘menstrual cycle’



SPAIN

83.3% of women felt fearful of staining their clothes with menstrual blood in public



AUSTRIA

95% of girls and women reported that visible blood stains cause significant distress



GERMANY

97% of women consider visible blood stains on clothing, bedding, or toilets unpleasant

Menstrual Education

Menstrual education across the EU remains insufficient, with significant gaps in knowledge and preparedness when it comes to menstruation. Several of the reports we analyzed measure education and awareness about menstruation by asking whether the individuals felt prepared and were aware about menstruation at menarche (the first bleeding). Many individuals report feeling unprepared and overwhelmed at the onset of menstruation, often due to a lack of information and access to necessary products.

In **Austria**, for example, 18% of respondents were unaware of what was happening to them when they first menstruated, while 24% felt overwhelmed and helpless, and 29% had no access to menstrual products at the time (27). Similarly, in **Belgium**, 50% of respondents reported not knowing what to do when they experienced their first period, and 32% said they lacked adequate information at menarche (Verhoeven 2020). A striking 57% of respondents in Belgium reported never receiving formal menstrual education, and nearly three-quarters described their first menstruation as an unpleasant experience (21). These gaps in education lead to confusion, embarrassment, and stigma, especially as many individuals, especially younger respondents, are unsure how to handle menstruation.

In **France**, the situation is equally concerning, with 47% of respondents indicating they had not heard about menstruation before reaching puberty, and 57% stating they had not received any formal education on the topic (37). Despite the growing recognition of the need for menstrual education, only 44% reported having received formal education on menstruation, though this number increases among younger generations. Encouragingly, 80% of respondents believe that menstrual education is crucial for breaking the taboo surrounding menstruation and addressing the discomfort, shame, and anxiety often associated with it (37). Across all age groups, a vast majority—85%—support the introduction of menstrual education programs in schools, with nearly 60% of young people under 35 advocating strongly for such initiatives.

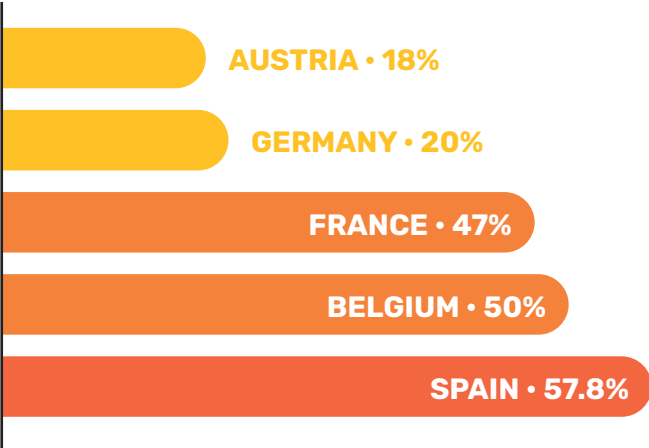
In **Spain**, a survey of almost 23,000 people revealed that 57.8% received little or no menstrual education before menarche, with those born in non-European or Latin American countries more likely to experience this; nearly half (45.3%) reported having limited information about menstruation and the menstrual cycle at menarche, while 12.5% didn’t know what menstruation was at that time. Around half (50.4%) felt unprepared for menstruation when it began (17). In **Sweden**, only 17% of young people completely agreed with the statement “I had enough knowledge about periods before menstruating for the first time” (32).

Germany has also revealed a lack of preparedness, with 20% of respondents reporting feeling unprepared for their first period, and 25% lacking access to menstrual products at that time (31). Emotional responses to first menstruation were mixed: one-third of respondents felt calm and prepared, while

half were worried or surprised, and over 20% felt helpless. Despite these challenges, there is broad public support for improved menstrual education, with 79% of women and 60% of men advocating for better information in schools [31]. The need for better education is particularly strong among younger people and those with lower education levels, who are more likely to perceive menstruation as a burden. Many respondents, especially in Germany, call for nationwide, product-neutral menstrual education materials, available for free to both teachers and students, to promote awareness and self-esteem.

This collective data points to a clear and growing demand for **more comprehensive, inclusive, and accessible menstrual education** programs across Europe starting before girls reach menarche. These programs should focus on not only providing factual information but also breaking the social taboos surrounding menstruation, promoting bodily autonomy, and ensuring that menstruation is seen as a normal part of life, rather than a source of shame or discomfort.

INFO BOX 3 LACK OF MENSTRUAL EDUCATION AT MENARCHE



“There was a situation in which I was not able to find any menstrual products in the toilets in my school. Toilet paper was too thin for me to simply use it as a replacement. This led to me having to go home early”. (7)

“In the boarding school, boys would hunt for used pads in the common toilet to then use them to make fun of their friends: [...] girls were menstruating and, for example, they would throw their used pads into the bin, and there would be some boys who would simply take them somewhere near that girl on the door to their room and then the whole boarding school would laugh at her, because it was very funny to them”. (9)



3.3 Access to Sanitation Facilities

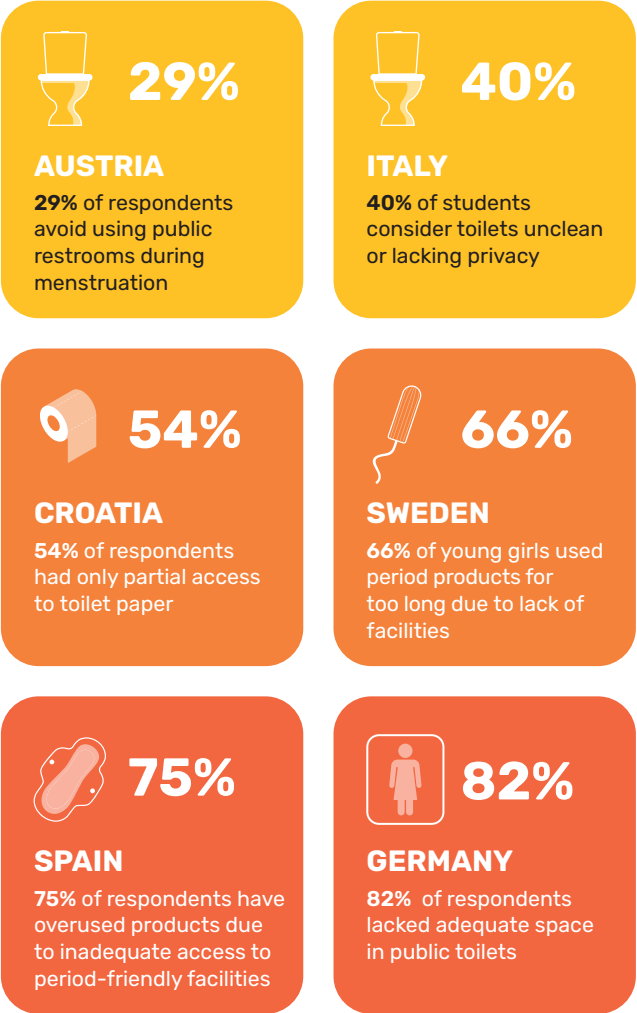
Lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities for menstrual management is the third component of period poverty and remains a critical issue across the European Union, with data often scarce and fragmented. It was noticeable from the available data that, although access to adequate facilities for menstrual management is essential, questions about it were **often not included in the surveys**.

In **Austria**, limited access to clean and well-equipped facilities poses a significant challenge. Nearly 29% of respondents avoid using public restrooms during their period, opting to stay home instead [31]. Only 51% expressed satisfaction with hygiene conditions in public buildings, while 76% emphasized the urgent need for improvements, such as hygiene bags, trash cans, soap, and sufficient space [31]. The overarching demand is for period-friendly sanitation facilities in schools, universities, and public spaces.

Belgium’s report highlights the importance of free, clean, and safe toilets in schools, workplaces, and public areas. Many public restrooms lack essential facilities such as sinks, trash bins, and lockable doors, making menstrual management difficult [21]. The absence of private sinks discourages the use of reusable menstrual products, specially menstrual cups, while inadequate privacy often forces individuals to delay changing their protection, increasing health risks such as infections, constipation, and bladder issues [21].

In **Croatia**, sanitation facilities vary in accessibility and quality. While only a small percentage of the general population lacked consistent access to warm water (0.4%), soap (0.3%), or toilet paper (0.2%), these issues were more prevalent in workplaces and schools [11]. At work, 18% reported no warm

INFO BOX 4 IMPACT OF SANITATION FACILITIES’ CONDITION ON MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT



water, 8.7% lacked soap, and 2.6% had no private bathroom for menstrual management. Among high school students, 45.3% had no access to warm water, and 54.1% had only partial access to toilet paper, while university students faced similar challenges, with 22.5% lacking warm water, 12.8% without soap, and 7.9% without toilet paper. Many also lacked proper disposal facilities for menstrual products [11].

Germany also reports significant concerns about sanitation access, with nearly one in three respondents reducing or canceling activities due to inadequate toilets and hygiene conditions [31]. Public restrooms are often criticized for poor maintenance, with 82% of respondents lacking adequate space. Less than half of menstruating individuals are satisfied with hygiene facilities in public buildings, though conditions are somewhat better in workplaces, schools, and universities [31].

In **Hungary**, some women are unable to bathe regularly during menstruation due to the lack of bathroom facilities [28]. While reusable products such as washable pads and menstrual cups could offer long-term solutions, they

are often impractical in low-income regions due to the high cost of detergent and the lack of proper washing facilities.

In **Spain**, 75.2% of survey participants reported having to overuse menstrual products due to inadequate access to proper menstrual management facilities [17]. In **Sweden**, 66% of young girls (ages 16-21) have experienced instances where they used period products for too long, resulting in leaks because they were unable to change in time [32]. A separate study on the Swedish population (ages 18-84) revealed that 59% of women have either felt uncomfortable or have avoided changing their menstrual pads due to unhygienic, unsanitary, or waterless toilets [38].

In **Italy**, 15% of respondents reported being unable to change, dispose of used products, and wash themselves when menstruating. Schools and universities, in particular, were identified as the least suitable places for menstrual management: 30% of students find the toilets unsafe; 40% consider them unclean or lacking in privacy; and nearly 1 in 4 report being unable or unwilling to lock the doors [14].

The data presented in the sections above highlights that period poverty is a pervasive issue across most, if not all, European countries. The unaffordability of menstrual products, the inadequate sanitation facilities to care for menstruation and the still-ubiquitous stigma make menstruating a disadvantage and even a burden for many European women, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups. Addressing period poverty requires a multifaceted approach, including policy interventions, educational initiatives, and improved access to essential resources. The next section provides an overview of existing initiatives to tackle period poverty across Europe.

4. INITIATIVES TO TACKLE PERIOD POVERTY IN THE EU

This section examines initiatives across EU member states focused on **providing free menstrual products and menstrual education**, and explores their **scope, target groups, and implementation strategies**. Additionally, it delves into public perceptions of these programs, analyzing societal attitudes towards menstrual equity and government intervention. Finally, it provides an overview of **tampon tax rates** across different countries, highlighting disparities in taxation policies and their impact on affordability and accessibility of menstrual products.

4.1 Programs for Free Access to Menstrual Products

Through our coding and analysis of existing data, 30 initiatives emerged, addressing period poverty across 14 of the 27 EU member states. The research team acknowledges that additional initiatives may exist in other countries but remain undocumented or lack publicly accessible information. The point of the section is not to cover every single initiative on period poverty across Europe: rather, it is to **paint a picture** of the kind of projects that have been implemented, as well as to map trends and gaps across them. The findings highlight both the growing recognition of period poverty across the EU and the need for greater transparency and data collection to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of ongoing efforts.

The majority of these programs target **school students**, with some extending support to **university students** and **vulnerable groups**. **Government bodies** at municipal, provincial, or national levels have led most of those initiatives, followed by **NGOs** and independent grassroots groups. Notably, some governments as well as a few NGOs have partnered with major menstrual product manufacturers, receiving menstrual product donations for their programs while also raising ethical concerns about potential conflict of interests and influence around product choice at a young age, particularly when programs involve students and marginalized communities.

These initiatives span a **broad timeframe**, with some launched as early as 2018 and others set to begin in 2025. **Funding levels vary** significantly, depending on the initiative sponsor, with investments reaching €2 million in the

Netherlands and €6 million in France. The **scope of impact** also varies, with projects assisting 5,500 girls in Slovakia, providing aid to 15,000 refugees in Poland, distributing 121,000 pads in Estonia, and installing 1,500 product dispensers in France. While most initiatives focused solely on the free distribution of menstrual products, some also included instructional materials and educational resources on menstruation, aiming to promote awareness and combat stigma.

While **disposable pads** were the most commonly distributed product, several programs also provided organic cotton pads, tampons, wipes, period underwear, and menstrual cups. These supplies were primarily made available in schools but were also distributed in public toilets, educational and community centers, theaters, libraries, museums, prisons, and student housing units. A detailed overview of these projects will be presented in this section.

While most of the initiatives we reviewed focus exclusively on the free menstrual products distribution, **Spain**, and particularly Catalunya, stands out as an example with the implementation of a comprehensive menstrual equity and (peri)menopause policy. In 2023, the region launched a pioneering plan to guarantee free access to reusable menstrual products to all women, nonbinary people, and trans men who menstruate. It includes around 60 actions focused on menstrual education, accessibility of products and spaces, workplace measures, professional training, research, and awareness-raising. The plan also addresses menstrual stigma and aims to combat period poverty.

The following sections provide a summary of the programs by target group: primary and secondary school students, university students, and vulnerable groups, followed by nationwide initiatives and public opinion about the free provision of menstrual products.

Primary and Secondary School Students

In the **Czech Republic**, the city of Ostrava launched a 2024 program providing free menstrual products in 55 primary schools ⁽⁸⁾. Independent initiatives include three schools in Dobříš and one in Most, which identified menstrual product needs through a student survey ⁽⁸⁾. The organization *člověk v tísni* [People in Need] launched a pilot program supplying menstrual products to 50 schools nationwide ⁽⁸⁾.

“[The provision of period products by my employer] was a relief because you don’t have to stress anymore.” ⁽⁷⁾

“I didn’t believe the cleaning lady when she told me what girls use when they are menstruating, but I found rags and pieces of clothes in the toilet” (teacher) ⁽²⁶⁾

In **Greece**, the Ministry of Health launched a 2024 initiative aimed at distributing 14 million menstrual products to 200 schools in Western Attica and Thessaloniki. The program includes educational seminars and parental engagement efforts to reduce stigma, especially among single-parent households ⁽³⁹⁾. In **Latvia**, a 2024 government mandate requires all schools to provide free menstrual products, though implementation depends on individual school budgets. Previously, only 199 schools (36%) had voluntarily offered such products ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In **Hungary**, the Hungarian Red Cross’s Girl to Woman program provides menstrual products and education in 500 schools annually. Sessions are led by health professionals and child health workers to combat stigma and promote menstrual health ⁽²⁸⁾; ⁽⁴¹⁾.

In **Estonia**, the Kooliside (School Pad) program, launched in 2021 in Tartu, supplies free menstrual products to students ⁽⁴²⁾. The Tallinn School Health Foundation distributes 35,000 pads across Tallinn schools, where school nurses also provide menstrual education ⁽⁴³⁾. Additionally, the EveryDayReads campaign, a collaboration between Always and the Estonian Red Cross, aims to distribute 121,000 menstrual pads in partnership with local governments and schools to ensure broader access to menstrual products ⁽¹⁰⁾.

In **Slovakia**, the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (BBSK) supplies free menstrual products to secondary schools (5,500 girls), with annual costs of €12,000. In July 2024, the program expanded to cultural institutions such as theaters, libraries, museums, and educational centers ⁽⁴⁴⁾. Additionally, the *Dôstojná Menštruácia & Spolka* collaboration launched menstrual lockers, providing free menstrual products in six languages (Slovak, Romani, Hungarian, Ukrainian, English, and Vietnamese) in schools and community centers ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

In **Portugal**, a national program launching in February 2025 will provide free menstrual products in schools and health centers ⁽⁴⁵⁾; ⁽⁴⁶⁾. The Almada City Council took early action in 2024, distributing menstrual kits to municipal schools ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

University Students

Across European countries, university students have mobilized to raise awareness about period poverty and provide access to free products to students and sometimes employees of the university. These initiatives are too many to report, but we present here a few. At the University of West Bohemia (**Czech Republic**), the Feminist University Circle provides free organic pads, tampons, and wipes in two faculty restrooms, with plans to expand. At the Faculty of Humanities, students in the Gender Studies department receive menstrual cups ⁽⁸⁾.

In **Malta**, the Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (KSU) launched a ‘period locker’ on campus, particularly supporting single mothers, with menstrual products donated by manufacturers and replenished weekly ⁽⁴⁷⁾. In the **Netherlands**, the Erasmus University provides free organic cotton tampons and pads for employees and students in seven locations across campus, structurally funding an initiative spearheaded by the University council in 2021. In **Italy**, several universities have over the last years invested in providing their students with free disposable menstrual products, often after grassroots student initiatives had raised the need for them, purchasing dispensers for toilets.

“I was late at university once because I was still in the library. I noticed that I was having my period and there was no other girl there that I could ask for menstrual products”. ⁽⁷⁾

Vulnerable Groups

In **Hungary**, the #NemLuxusTáska [Not a Luxury Bag] initiative has provided 17,000 hygiene kits to people experiencing homelessness and marginalized women since 2018 ⁽²⁸⁾; ⁽⁴¹⁾. Similarly in **Italy**, since 2020, the local Red Cross has been distributing hygiene kits (which include menstrual products) to women in vulnerable economic and social positions, in partnership with the brand Essity ⁽⁴⁸⁾. In **Belgium**, a government-funded program supplies 300,000 menstrual products to women in detention since 2023, building on a 2022 Walloon initiative that distributed 2.5 million products across three provinces ⁽²⁰⁾.

In **Luxembourg**, the Sang Pourcent [Blood Per Cent] project, led by the nonprofit organization Planning Familial, provides free reusable period underwear and menstrual cups to vulnerable women, particularly students. The initiative is supported by Always and Cactus Supermarkets, which donated 9,602 packs in two weeks ⁽⁴⁹⁾. Additionally, Luxembourg City installed dispensers offering free tampons, pads, and condoms in five public restrooms ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

In **Romania**, the organic cotton period product brand Meloni partnered with the Red Cross to distribute free menstrual products to victims of abuse, single mothers, orphaned teenagers, and widows. Red Cross volunteers ensure direct distribution to those most in need (51). In **Poland**, the Różowa Skrzyneczka Foundation has been supplying menstrual products since 2022 to refugees from Ukraine and Belarus, supporting 15,000 women through a partnership with CARE Polska and 32 organizations (9).

In **the Netherlands**, the NGO Neighbourhood Feminists distributes menstrual products to vulnerable groups through 65 self-serve ‘menstrual stations’ across Amsterdam, supported by donations and municipal funding. To date, the initiative has reached over 2,800 individuals and distributed more than 894,000 products (23). Since 2015, Règles Élémentaires has distributed 24 million menstrual products across **France**, in collaboration with over 1,300 partner organizations.

The EU has collaborated with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and national Red Cross branches to provide free menstrual products to underserved populations. These initiatives focus on supporting refugees and asylum seekers in EU member states, who often face limited access to menstrual products; low-income individuals who cannot easily afford such items; and women impacted by crises, including natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. For instance, in Greece, the EU utilized the Emergency Support Instrument to fund the Hellenic Red Cross, helping ensure refugee camps received essential hygiene supplies like menstrual pads. In countries like France and Spain, Red Cross organizations have distributed menstrual kits to women experiencing homelessness as part of wider humanitarian aid efforts.

Nationwide Government Actions

In the **Netherlands**, a parliamentary anti-period poverty bill (2023) allocated €2 million for menstrual product access (20). In **Portugal**, in 2022, government officials issued

“Being a woman on the street is worse than being a man. You have nowhere to hide, nowhere to feel safe. And when your period comes, it’s a nightmare. At times like these, you feel like you can’t get any worse.” –anonymous social service user (8)

recommendations advocating for free reusable menstrual products (menstrual cups, reusable pads) in public schools, as well as awareness campaigns led by health professionals to combat stigma and misinformation (45).

In **France**, the government allocated €6 million (2022-2024) to fund free menstrual product distribution in universities, prisons, and select schools (36). These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of menstrual product accessibility as a fundamental need. From local pilot programs to national policies, efforts across Europe are reducing stigma, promoting education, and ensuring that period products are available to those who need them most.

Despite not being an EU member, Scotland remains a benchmark for tackling period poverty. Since 2020, it has provided **free menstrual products to anyone who menstruates nationwide**. A 2022 evaluation survey found that 84% of respondents reported a positive impact, with fewer concerns about their ability to continue daily activities while menstruating, ultimately improving their mental health (52).

Public Opinion about the Free Provision of Period Products

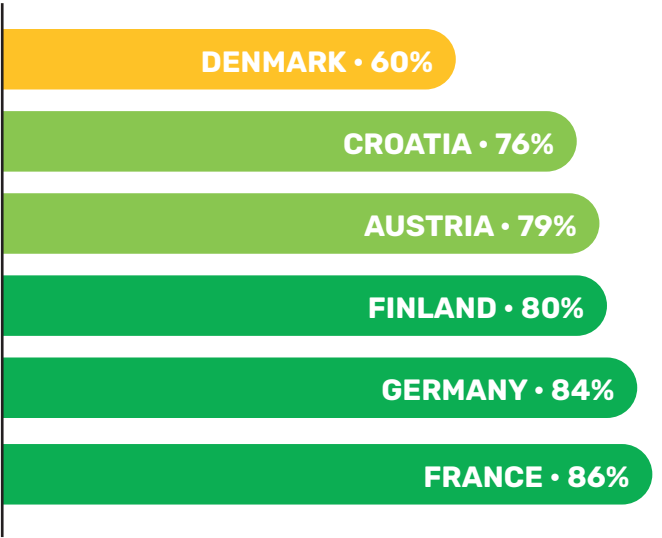
Across Europe, there is strong public support for providing free menstrual products in schools, universities, and public institutions. In **Finland**, 80% of respondents believe schools should offer free period products, with positive feedback from Helsinki’s pilot program (12). Similarly, in **Denmark**, 76% of students feel safer with free menstrual products at school, and 60% want them in shared spaces (34). In **Austria**, 79% of women support free products in public buildings (35), while in **France**, 86% back free access for those in need, and 76% advocate for availability in all public facilities (37).

In **Germany**, 84% of respondents view the provision of free menstrual products positively, and 72% believe institutions that offer them are more attractive to students and staff (7). While no national regulation mandates schools or universities to provide these products, 80% of women support their availability in public buildings. Many also advocate for more sustainable menstrual product options (31).

In **Croatia**, 76.4% of people support free menstrual

products, with higher approval for their availability in schools (89.7%) and universities (85.5%) (11). Among high school and university students, nearly all would use free products at school or on campus. These findings underscore the **widespread consensus** on the importance of free menstrual product provision, aiming to reduce financial barriers, promote menstrual equity, and create more inclusive and supportive environments in educational and public spaces.

INFO BOX 5 PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR FREE PROVISION OF PERIOD PRODUCTS



4.2 Programs for Menstrual Education

While it is likely that many menstrual health initiatives exist across the EU, especially at local or national levels, a significant number may remain underpublicized or undocumented, making them difficult to identify. Among the more visible supra-national efforts are programs funded through Erasmus+, which support cross-border collaboration in education, sustainability, and health (53). We identified six Erasmus+ projects across multiple EU countries that focus on raising awareness about menstruation through inclusive and educational approaches. While each initiative has a distinct focus, shared themes include promoting menstrual education, encouraging the use of sustainable menstrual products, and addressing the impact of menstruation on physical activity and well-being. This suggests a growing but still uneven landscape of menstrual health efforts across the EU.

For example, *Cossos Sostenibles* (Spain, Greece, Czech Republic) and *Conscient Menstruation* (Portugal, Romania, Italy, Spain) emphasize sustainability by encouraging the adoption of **reusable menstrual products**. Other programs focus on **menstruation in sports** and physical activity. *Mind the Gap* (Poland, Czech Republic) aims to increase menstrual health knowledge among sports staff to create a more supportive environment for female athletes. Similarly,

“My daughter’s first period came when she was 12. We had nothing. We had a washed, clean white sheet, which I cut up and showed her how to do it,” said a rural woman. (28)

WFC – Women Fitness Cycle (Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain) researches how the menstrual cycle affects women’s experiences in sports and seeks to remove barriers related to menstrual symptoms.

Another EU-funded effort tackling menstrual poverty within the Union is the *Empowerment through Menstrual Health Education* project. Co-financed by the Erasmus+ programme, this small-scale initiative brings together organizations from Lithuania, Poland, and Spain. Its main goal is to share best practices and approaches for **engaging young people**—especially those at risk of social exclusion and individuals with disabilities—through **non-formal education centered on menstrual health**. Activities include workshops, panel discussions, and group exercises designed to raise awareness of menstrual exclusion and its impacts, promote gynaecological health, and create impactful social campaigns. The project has a total budget of €60,000.

Additionally, broader initiatives address menstrual health from **empowerment and gender perspectives**. *Menstruation: Empowerment and Sustainability* (Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain) develops training resources on **menstruation and sustainability** for its partner organizations. *SAG – Sexmenstrual Health and Gender Literacy* (Norway, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Spain) promotes **evidence-based, inclusive, and rights-based menstrual health and gender education**. These projects highlight a shared commitment across EU countries to fostering awareness, sustainability, and inclusivity in menstrual health.

4.3 Tampon Tax Reforms

The taxation of menstrual products remains a significant issue in addressing period poverty across Europe. The controversy surrounding the so-called “tampon tax” stems from the way VAT rates are determined based on a **product’s classification as a necessity**. Standard VAT rates, which typically range from 17% to 27% across Europe, are applied to **«luxury» items**, while **essential goods** benefit from reduced rates, such as 5% VAT on food items in several EU countries. **Basic necessities** can receive super-reduced rates, often as low as 0% (54).

Although the average **female reproductive lifespan spans about 40 years** with menstruation occurring monthly, many countries still fail to classify menstrual products as essential goods—resulting in disproportionately high taxes that some view as a **penalty for menstruating**. The continued labeling of these products as **‘luxury’ items** reflects the deep-rooted gender biases in legal and economic systems (55).

While some countries have taken steps to reduce or eliminate the «tampon tax,» others continue to impose high VAT rates, making these essential products unaffordable for many (56). Following an EU law introduced in April 2022, member states are now **permitted to reduce VAT** on menstrual products to **as low as 0%**, compared to the previous minimum of 5%. However, the pace of reform varies widely. The VAT rates presented here were collected from the initiative Periodtax.com (56), which also highlights ongoing global advocacy efforts to eliminate these taxes and provides resources and lessons learned to support continued action and reform.

Countries with Limited or No VAT Reduction for Menstrual Products

At the extreme end, Hungary imposes the highest VAT rate in the EU, taxing menstrual products at **27%**, which has sparked ongoing debates about fairness and gender-based economic discrimination (28). Similarly, Sweden, Croatia, and Denmark apply a **25%** VAT, followed closely by Greece and Finland at **24%**. In Finland, public opinion strongly favors tax reductions, with 56% of respondents advocating for lowering VAT on menstrual pads to match that of health products sold in pharmacies, while 36% support abolishing it altogether (12); (57).

Several other EU member states, including **Latvia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic, maintain a 21% VAT**, while Bulgaria applies a **20%** tax. Romania, which has a **19% VAT**, still places menstrual products in the same tax bracket as many non-essential goods.

Some EU countries have introduced moderate tax reductions, though rates remain relatively high. **Slovakia, Austria, and Italy apply a 10% VAT**, with Italy controversially having reversed back the rate from **5% to 10%** in January 2024, a move criticized as a step backward in the fight against period poverty (58). **Slovenia** follows with **9.5%**, while **the Netherlands and Estonia** both impose a **9%** VAT. **Germany** made significant progress by reducing its rate from 19% to **7%** in January 2020 (7).

Portugal and Belgium both tax menstrual products at **6%**, while France applies a **5.5%** rate. In **Poland and Cyprus**, the VAT is even lower at **5%**, reflecting a growing awareness of the need for affordability and accessibility.

Countries Leading in VAT Reductions and Tax Exemptions

Some EU countries have taken more decisive steps to eliminate the tampon tax. In 2018, **Spain** lowered VAT on menstrual products from 10% to **4%**, formally recognizing them as essential rather than luxury goods (59). **Luxembourg** now applies a reduced VAT of **3%**—one of the lowest rates in the EU.

Ireland has been a leader in tax reform, being the **first EU country to remove VAT on menstrual products entirely in 2022**. Furthermore, in 2023, Ireland extended tax exemption to reusable products, such as menstrual cups and period underwear, something that should also be considered across EU member states, to ensure fairness and freedom of menstrual product choice. More recently, **Malta** eliminated VAT on menstrual products entirely in 2025, following an earlier reduction from 18% (60).

4.4 Challenges in Current Initiatives to Tackle Period Poverty

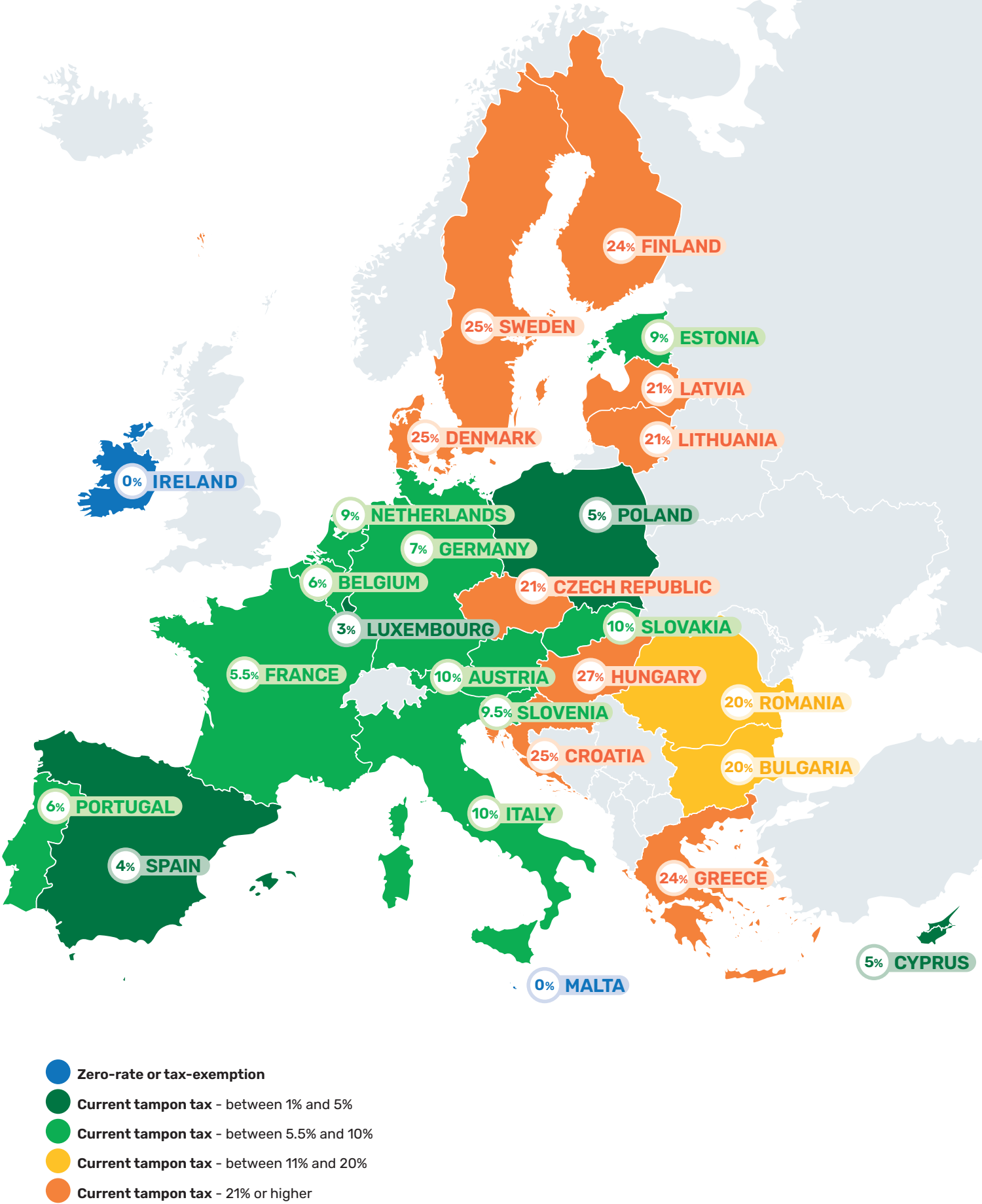
This section provides a critical analysis of key initiatives implemented across the EU to address period poverty, including the provision of free menstrual products, menstrual education programs, and tampon tax reforms. While these efforts represent important progress, several concerns remain, including the lack of long-term evaluation, the role of large corporate partnerships, and the effectiveness of tax reductions in meaningfully alleviating period poverty.

Lack of Central Ownership and Continuous Funding

One of the most significant limitations observed across existing period poverty initiatives in the European Union is the **absence of a central coordinating body and the lack of sustained funding**. While several Member States have piloted or implemented programs—such as distributing free menstrual products in schools or public facilities—these efforts often rely on short-term budgets, project-based funding, or local government initiative **rather than being embedded in national policy frameworks**. As a result, the continuity and scalability of these interventions are compromised.

Moreover, the lack of centralized ownership means there is **limited oversight, standardization, or evaluation** of the impact of these initiatives. Without a national or EU-level strategy that prioritizes menstrual equity, initiatives remain disjointed and vulnerable to political shifts and budget cuts. This gap in long-term commitment also undermines the potential for cross-border collaboration, shared learning, and consistent data collection—elements that are essential for addressing period poverty as a systemic issue across the EU.

MAP 3 RATE OF “TAMPON TAX” ACROSS THE EUROPEAN UNION



Narrow and Fragmented Approach to Period Poverty Research and Interventions

Current approaches to period poverty in the EU tend to be **narrow in scope and fragmented in application**. Interventions often target a limited demographic—primarily school-aged girls—and focus almost exclusively on the provision of free menstrual products. While such initiatives are critical in addressing immediate needs, they fail to account for the **broader structural dimensions of period poverty**.

Period poverty affects a much wider population, including low-income women, refugees, people experiencing homelessness, those with disabilities, incarcerated people, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Yet, there is **limited research and few targeted interventions** for these groups. In addition, focusing solely on product access overlooks the complex socio-economic, cultural, and educational factors that perpetuate menstrual inequity. Issues such as stigma, lack of menstrual education, inadequate sanitation facilities, and limited access to healthcare remain largely unaddressed in existing policy responses.

Lack of Evaluation Mechanisms

Despite the increasing number of initiatives aimed at tackling period poverty, there is a significant **lack of systematic evaluation** to assess their effectiveness over time. Our research found little evidence of ongoing monitoring, making it difficult to determine whether these programs are successfully reaching their intended beneficiaries and whether they are reducing financial barriers for those most affected. Without robust evaluation frameworks, critical questions remain unanswered: Are the distributed menstrual products meeting the needs of users? Are awareness programs leading to **lasting improvements** in menstrual education? Are these initiatives financially sustainable in the long run?

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure that **interventions remain relevant** and effective. Regular impact assessments, including user feedback, cost-effectiveness analyses, and accessibility studies, could help refine strategies and improve resource allocation. Transparent reporting would also enable policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to adapt and expand successful models. Without such measures, even well-intentioned initiatives risk becoming short-term solutions rather than sustainable mechanisms for combating period poverty.

Effectiveness of VAT Reduction

Tampon tax reforms have been a major focus in the fight against period poverty. High taxation rates in countries like Hungary (27%) and Sweden (25%) demonstrate that menstrual products are still not universally recognized as essential goods, while progressive policies in Ireland (0%) and Malta (0%) highlight a growing commitment to accessibility. While reducing or eliminating VAT on menstrual products is often celebrated as a step forward, these tax reductions **do not always translate into lower consumer prices**. Without strong **regulatory mechanisms** to ensure VAT reductions directly benefit consumers rather than corporations, there is

a risk that retailers will keep prices unchanged or market the VAT cut as a temporary promotion rather than a permanent reduction.

Eliminating the tampon tax is an important step toward menstrual equity, but it must be part of a larger strategy that includes regulatory oversight, free product distribution, and menstrual education. Without a holistic approach, VAT reductions **risk benefiting corporations more than consumers**, failing to address the deeper structural inequalities that perpetuate period poverty. As the EU moves forward, a more integrated, sustainable, and rights-based approach is necessary to ensure menstrual equity for all.

Ethical Concerns in Corporate Partnerships

Some menstrual health initiatives depend on partnerships with large manufacturers, improving access but raising ethical concerns. A key issue is the **lack of transparency in product ingredients**, exposing users—especially those receiving donations—to potential health risks, making it crucial to demand regulations that require full ingredient disclosure. Additionally, it's important that **menstrual education initiatives remain independent**, promoting a comprehensive understanding of all available options, including sustainable alternatives like menstrual cups and cloth pads. Increased government funding for menstrual health programs can further support unbiased and inclusive education, reducing financial reliance on corporate partnerships.

The following section presents actionable recommendations to address period poverty in the European Union, grounded in the data and insights presented throughout this study.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS TO TACKLE PERIOD POVERTY IN THE EU

Tackling period poverty requires a **systemic, inclusive, and evidence-based approach** that acknowledges the complex realities faced by diverse menstruating populations. To build effective and sustainable solutions, policy interventions must address the **multiple dimensions of the problem**—including access to safe and affordable products, comprehensive education, inclusive and hygienic sanitation infrastructure, as well as robust legal and regulatory frameworks.

Drawing on the data collected for this study, this section identifies five interconnected priority areas: (1) data and research; (2) menstrual products; (3) menstrual education and awareness—including public campaigns; (4) sanitation facilities; and (5) regulation. Particular attention is given to ensuring policies are **inclusive of all people who menstruate**, especially vulnerable groups. By centering dignity, health, and gender equity, these recommendations aim to guide EU-wide action toward the eradication of period poverty across all Member States.

5.1 Data and Research

Address the Data Gap: There is a significant data gap across EU member states concerning period poverty. The priority should be to fund and encourage rigorous, reliable, and periodic research to create a robust evidence base, using both quantitative and qualitative indicators. This will inform policy and practice, ensuring that future actions are data-driven and targeted. Regular surveys should gather comprehensive data on period poverty, including access to sanitation facilities. We suggest integrating period poverty questions in existing EU-wide surveys (e.g. EU statistics on income and living conditions (SILC) and Eurobarometer) to ensure comparability across countries.

Evaluate Existing Measures: There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of current initiatives aimed at combating period poverty. Research should assess whether these measures are reaching the intended target groups, reducing stigma, and providing adequate menstrual education. Understanding the effectiveness of existing programs will help improve future interventions.

Focus on and Include All Individuals Who Menstruate, Especially Vulnerable Groups: Research should prioritize

the most vulnerable groups affected by period poverty. Targeted studies are essential to understand the unique needs of vulnerable groups such as low-income individuals, students, refugees, incarcerated people, women experiencing homelessness, victims of abuse, single mothers, orphaned teenagers, widows, Roma communities, single-parent families, migrant women, and those living in rural areas.

Launch Funding Opportunities: Funding mechanisms should be established to support both research and projects addressing period poverty. These funding opportunities should be pluriannual to ensure consistency and long-term impact. Research should also focus on the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and interventions related to period poverty, providing valuable insights into effective strategies at both the national and EU levels.

Apply a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Period Poverty: Future research and projects on period poverty should adopt a gender-sensitive approach, incorporating participatory processes that actively engage affected groups. This ensures that the diverse experiences of those impacted by period poverty are captured and addressed in policy decisions.

Use Inclusive and Stigma-Free Language: To challenge stigma, it is essential to use inclusive and accurate language when discussing menstrual products. Terms like «female hygiene products» or «sanitary products» should be replaced with «menstrual» or «period» products to avoid the exclusion of non-binary and transgender individuals and to eliminate the harmful association of menstruation with uncleanness (see the *Glossary* for more insights about language).

5.2 Menstrual Products

Promote Regular Access in Key Community Spaces: Menstrual products should be regularly and reliably available in locations frequented by individuals most affected by period poverty. This includes schools, universities, libraries, public restrooms, public buildings, leisure centres, community and primary healthcare settings (e.g., GP offices, family resource centres), post offices, food banks, day services for people with disabilities, and shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

Install Accessible and Visible Distribution Points: Ensure ease of access by placing menstrual products in unlocked cabinets near and/or within restrooms, installing vending machines, or placing products directly inside cubicles to preserve user privacy and dignity.

Provide Safe Disposable Options: Offer disposable menstrual products—such as pads and tampons—that are safe and clearly labeled. Prioritize brands that disclose ingredients and are free from potentially harmful substances like chlorine, pesticides, fragrances, and dyes.

Support the Introduction of Reusable Products: Where feasible, introduce reusable options such as menstrual

cups and discs, period underwear, and washable pads. Prioritize products made from non-toxic materials and accompany distribution with clear, accessible information on proper use, cleaning, and sterilization.

Implement Reimbursement or Subsidy Schemes: When full free provision is not possible, establish systems for full or partial reimbursement of menstrual products. For example, provide a dedicated monthly or annual stipend—such as an additional €10 per young person aged 12 to 18—to offset the financial burden of menstrual health supplies or an annual number of reimbursed menstrual products for certain categories. Special attention should be paid to the variety of size, usability and absorption of such products for people with disability or menstrual disorders that experience irregular or heavy bleeding.

5.3 Menstrual Education and Awareness

Educational Programs in Schools

Develop and Disseminate Stigma-free Educational Materials: Create up-to-date educational resources—including online content, printable materials, and educational videos—that are freely accessible to educators and learners across all EU member states. These materials should be designed to help menstruating individuals manage their cycles confidently and with dignity, reducing embarrassment, shame, or stress, while promoting self-esteem, empowerment, and overall well-being. We propose that the European Commission develops a common framework or guidance for menstrual education across Member States and fund opportunities for exchange of best practices (through long-term and large-scale research initiatives like Flagships).

Introduce Menstrual Education Early and for All Genders: Implement education programs for all children around age 8—before the average age of menarche—to ensure early preparedness and to foster empathy, understanding, and support among all genders.

Provide Free, In-Person Menstrual Education Sessions: Offer accessible, regularly scheduled menstrual education sessions in schools, universities, care facilities, and youth centres. These sessions should be fully integrated into institutional programming and focus on fostering a positive and empowering experience for all learners, helping menstruating individuals feel prepared and confident in managing their menstruation.

Educate on the Full Range of Menstrual Products: Include information on various menstrual product types—both disposable and reusable—along with clear, practical guidance on usage, hygiene, and disposal. This will allow individuals to make informed choices that suit their needs and preferences.

Prioritize Inclusion and Accessibility: Develop multilingual, culturally sensitive, and accessible materials that reach diverse populations, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.

Deliver Education Through Qualified Professionals: Ensure that menstrual education is delivered by trained and knowledgeable professionals, capable of facilitating respectful, and evidence-based learning.

Public Awareness Campaigns and Advertising Standards

Launch a Pan-European Public Awareness Campaign: Initiate a coordinated EU-wide campaign to openly challenge menstrual stigma and taboos in both public and private spaces. Campaign messaging should reflect the diversity of people who menstruate—including non-binary, trans, and intersex individuals, as well as migrants and those living in vulnerable socioeconomic conditions—and promote menstruation as a stigma-free, natural and healthy part of life.

Ensure Representation Across Languages and Cultural Contexts: Campaign materials should be multilingual and culturally relevant to ensure resonance with diverse populations across all 27 EU member states, particularly in communities where stigma may be more entrenched.

Promote Accurate and Inclusive Media Representation: Develop EU-level guidelines for the portrayal of menstruation in advertising, television, social media, and other media platforms. These guidelines should actively counter harmful stereotypes, encourage positive and realistic depictions of menstruation, and promote menstrual education.

Leverage Existing Regulatory Frameworks: Utilize the European Advertising Standards Alliance and other existing regulatory bodies to promote compliance with new standards and ensure that portrayals of menstruation are inclusive, stigma-free, and rooted in public health principles.

5.4 Sanitation Facilities

Ensure Period-Friendly Toilets in All Public and Institutional Buildings: Sanitation facilities in schools, universities, workplaces, and public buildings must be adapted to meet the needs of menstruating individuals. This includes a clean environment, regular maintenance, and sufficient space to manage menstruation with dignity.

Standardize Minimum Requirements for Period-Friendly Toilets: All toilet facilities should meet essential hygiene standards: lockable doors for privacy; access to running water, soap, and toilet paper lidded, regularly emptied bins for menstrual product disposal and a sink within the cubicle where possible, to enable changing of reusable menstrual products like cups and discs.

Develop, Adopt and Disseminate Period-Friendly Toilet Guidelines: A Europe-wide guideline or toolkit should be created for schools, public institutions, and city planners. This guide would outline how to assess, upgrade, and renovate toilet facilities to be period-friendly, covering essentials like placement of bins, availability of water and soap, and suggestions for inclusive design (e.g., sinks inside stalls, cubicle hooks, privacy locks).

Ensure Inclusive Design for All People Who

Menstruate: Public toilets must be inclusive and considerate of all gender identities. Facilities should be welcoming and safe for trans, non-binary, and intersex individuals who menstruate, with clear signage and non-gendered access where possible.

Increase Visibility and Access to Facilities: Cities should provide public maps or digital tools showing the locations of free and accessible toilets and water points. This supports both menstrual health and broader public health goals.

Monitor and Maintain Facilities Regularly: Infrastructure upgrades must be paired with regular monitoring and maintenance schedules to ensure continued cleanliness, functionality, and supply of hygiene materials.

5.5 Tampon Tax

Abolish VAT on All Menstrual Products: All EU countries should move towards abolishing VAT on all menstrual products (not only pads and tampons, but menstrual cups, discs, reusable pads and period underwear too) to reduce the financial burden on menstruators and increase access to essential products. The EU VAT directive should be amended to allow greater flexibility for Member States, ensuring that all menstrual products are subject to a zero VAT rate.

Prevent Price Increases by Manufacturers and Retailers: Any reductions in and removal of VAT on menstrual products should be accompanied by strict monitoring to ensure that manufacturers and retailers pass on the cost savings to consumers, rather than increasing prices.

Direct Tax Revenues Toward Period Poverty Organizations: Tax revenues from VAT on menstrual products, when still in place, should be allocated to associations that fight menstrual poverty. This ensures that the financial benefits of tax reductions are reinvested into supporting those most in need.

In sum, tackling period poverty requires a comprehensive, intersectional, and rights-based approach that addresses both immediate needs and systemic inequalities. The recommendations outlined in this section offer a roadmap for EU policymakers, national governments, and civil society to work collaboratively towards menstrual equity. By ensuring access to safe products, inclusive education, period-friendly infrastructure, and robust regulation—underpinned by reliable data and research—we can dismantle the stigma surrounding menstruation and create a society where all individuals who menstruate can manage their cycles with dignity, safety, and confidence.



6. CLOSING WORDS

This study set out to map the landscape of period poverty across the European Union, consolidate and critically assess available data, identify good practices and initiatives within member states, and offer actionable recommendations to address this multifaceted issue. Despite the fragmented and often limited data available, the findings offer a compelling and comprehensive picture of period poverty in the EU today.

Period poverty is a significant and widespread problem for millions of women and people who menstruate across the European Union. The economic and social burden of menstruating, fueled by persistent stigma and gaps in menstrual education, affects their ability to learn in school, thrive at work and fully participate in social life.

The evidence highlights an urgent need for coordinated policy responses, sustained investment in menstrual education, and improved access to both menstrual products and adequate sanitation facilities. Addressing period poverty is not only a matter of health: it is a prerequisite for gender equality, social inclusion, and the full participation of all individuals in public life.

GLOSSARY (taken from Glossary for the Global Menstrual Movement, 2022) (61)

Disposable products (also referred to as single-use products). Products that can be used one time to manage the menstrual flow and are then disposed of. Most common examples are disposable menstrual pads or tampons.

Heavy Menstrual Bleeding (HMB). Excessive menstrual bleeding, also known as menorrhagia. Heavy menstrual bleeding is defined as losing 80 ml or more in each period, having periods that last longer than 7 days, or both. Symptoms can include: heavy and prolonged menstrual periods, anemia, tiredness, fatigue, shortness of breath and lower abdominal and pelvic pain

Informed choice. A decision where all the available information about the health alternatives is considered and used to inform a final decision; the resulting choice should be consistent with the individual's values.

Menarche. The first menstruation, or the onset of the menstrual cycle. The age at which menarche occurs is affected by genetic and environmental factors, and usually occurs between 10-16 years of age.

Menstrual Cycle. A complex reproductive process in the female body that begins at puberty with menarche or the first period. It usually begins around the ages of 10 to 16, and ends at menopause (average age is 51), when menstrual periods stop permanently. The menstrual cycle has four phases: menstruation, the follicular phase, ovulation and the luteal phase. Menstruation marks the beginning of the menstrual cycle.

Menstrual Discomforts, Conditions and Disorders (MDCDs). An umbrella term for all menstrual related discomforts, pain or conditions related to a person's menstrual cycle. There are many different types of MDCDs that vary with signs and symptoms, including pain during menstruation, heavy menstrual bleeding, blood clots or emotional upheaval.

Menstrual Equity (Period equity). The affordability, accessibility and safety of menstrual products for all people - including laws and policies - that acknowledge and consider menstruation.

Menstrual Health. A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.

Menstrual Product (or period product). A physical internal or external product used to absorb or collect menstrual blood and effluent.

Menstruation. The regular discharge of menstrual blood and mucosal tissue from the inner lining of the uterus through the vagina. It signals the beginning of a person's menstrual cycle. Normal menstrual bleeding lasts from 2-7 days per menstrual cycle. Menstruation stops during pregnancy, early breastfeeding and other times due to hormonal changes, extreme stress, or underlying medical issues.

Menstruators. An inclusive term to describe all people who experience menstruation. This is a gender neutral term used to refer to all people who may experience menstruation

as a biological function. This inclusive term is used to denote that not all people who experience menstruation identify as women (ie. trans men, nonbinary or intersex individuals), and that not all women menstruate (ie. post menopausal women, or women who have undergone hysterectomy).

Period Stigma (Menstrual Stigma). A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person related to their menstruation or menstrual experience. This includes the social stain and loss of status, due to menstruation. Through the process of being stigmatized, menstruators often become socially stained or discredited because they hold a characteristic that is classified as unacceptable or undesirable.

Period Taboo (Menstrual Taboo). Closely related to "period stigma," a taboo can be expressed as a social custom that prohibits discussion of a particular practice or condition, thus potentially isolating members of a community who might be associated with the given practice or condition. The types of menstrual taboos vary from culture to culture, and what may be considered a period taboo in one culture (or region), may not be considered in another.

Reusable Products. Products which can be used multiple times to catch or absorb cervical fluid and menstrual flow, such as cloth menstrual pads, menstrual cups and period underwear. A reusable product is intended to be used more than once and can last anywhere between one menstrual cycle and 10 years, depending on the type of reusable product used.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity.

Tampon Tax. A term used for the tax imposed on menstrual products by a government. These products are not subject to a unique or special tax but are often classified as luxury items along with other goods that are not exempted.



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