



# Five things you need to know about Menstrual Hygiene Day 2023

Berlin, May 25, 2023. From Berlin to Mumbai and Kampala to Mexico City, poor menstrual health and hygiene is a global problem. Around the world, millions of women and girls\* are excluded, stigmatised and shamed because of their periods. Myths and taboos about periods harm all of us, whether we menstruate or not.

This Sunday, 28 May, is Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day), the annual global day of awareness and action to create a world where no one is held back because they menstruate by 2030. Here are five things you need to know about why in 2023, this day is more important than ever.

## 1. It's a global problem.

500 million women and girls worldwide don't have what they need to manage their periods safely, hygienically and without shame<sup>1</sup>. This is due to a combination of lack of access to period products, lack of education about menstruation and inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure. The persisting taboos and stigma around menstruation are the root cause that underpins all these issues. If we can't talk openly about periods, we can't effectively address these challenges.

## 2. Period stigma has far-reaching effects, for all of us.

Menstruation-related challenges have a severe negative impact on the health, educational and income-earning opportunities, and the overall social status of women and girls. In turn, this affects families, communities and entire countries. Management consulting firm Kearney estimates the economic damage resulting from women and girls around the world missing out on education and job opportunities amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars each year<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. MH Day partners take a multifaceted approach.

The MH Day movement consists of over 970 partners, all tackling different aspects of the problem. Focus areas include:

- providing access to good quality menstrual products,
- educating school children about menstruation,
- campaigns to change negative social norms,
- policy advocacy, including the removal or reduction of taxes on period products,
- ensuring that marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and refugees, have what they need for good MHH,
- and much more.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene>

<sup>2</sup> <https://menstrualhygieneday.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/KearneyWASHUnited-Addressingmenstruation-relatedchallengesforwomenandgirls-anuntappedopportunity1.pdf>

#### 4. Change is happening.

Collectively, we're making significant progress. The collective reach of the Menstrual Hygiene Day campaign has grown from reaching just over 20 million people in 2014 to close to 700 million people in 2022. And in the same period, media coverage of MH Day has increased 165-fold.

There is ongoing change at the policy level. In April 2023, the Indian Supreme Court asked the federal government to create a national policy for managing menstrual hygiene for girls in schools<sup>3</sup>. Period products are now available for free in schools in countries such as New Zealand<sup>4</sup> and Zambia and in several US states<sup>5</sup> and provinces in Canada. Also in Canada, period products will be free for all employees in federally regulated workplaces by the end of 2023<sup>6</sup>. In February 2023, Spain approved a bill enabling workers to take sick leave if they experience severe menstrual pain<sup>7</sup>. While the Spanish example is the first in Europe, Japan, Indonesia and several other Asian countries have had similar policies in place for some time<sup>8</sup>. In Zimbabwe, menstrual hygiene management education will soon become a part of school curricula. In France, women under 25 years old will be eligible to get the cost of period products reimbursed from 2024 onwards<sup>9</sup>.

#### 5. More investment is needed. Urgently.

Due to the work of MH Day partners, societal awareness of the challenges related to menstrual health and hygiene has grown dramatically. And it has become a much higher political priority in many countries across the globe. We already have the technical solutions, and there are hundreds of committed organisations willing to step up their efforts. We are convinced that it is possible to create a world where no one is held back because they menstruate by 2030. However, without a significant increase in funding, the movement will fall short of its goal. And, as a result, millions of women and girls worldwide will be kept from achieving their full potential.

#### **Thorsten Kiefer, CEO of WASH United, said:**

“Poor menstrual health and hygiene is a critical barrier towards gender equality. We now know that societies with higher levels of gender equality are safer, more peaceful and more prosperous. In short: ending period poverty and stigma not only benefits women and girls, it's in everyone's best interest. The good news is that solving the menstruation-related challenges 500 million women and girls face every month is entirely possible. To make it happen, we urgently need governments, philanthropists and the private sector to allocate the resources needed to enable action at scale.”

#### **Ends**

Notes to editors

#### **About MH Day**

Initiated by WASH United, Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day) is a global movement to create a world where no one is held back because of their period by 2030. 28 May is our main global day of action.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.timesnownews.com/education/develop-model-for-menstrual-hygiene-for-girls-in-schools-for-all-states-sc-to-centre-article-99395938>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/18/world/asia/new-zealand-period-schools.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://allianceforperiodsupplies.org/period-products-in-schools/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/05/canada-labour-code-to-ensure-access-to-menstrual-products-at-work-starting-december-15.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/bill-europe-spain-parliament-creates-first-menstrual-leave-in-europe/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/17/spain-paid-menstrual-leave-countries/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gouvernement.fr/actualite/remboursement-des-protections-periodiques-reutilisables-pour-les-moins-de-25-ans>

MH Day has more than 970 partner organisations, including UNICEF, UNFPA, Procter & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, the World Bank and hundreds of NGOs. In 2022, MH Day reached more than 687 million people with positive, taboo-busting communication. WASH United coordinates MH Day and acts as the International Secretariat.

### **About WASH United**

Founded in 2011, WASH United is a Berlin-based non-profit working to create a world where all people benefit from safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), with a core focus on menstrual hygiene.

### **Terminology**

Women and girls: Not everyone who menstruates identifies as a woman and that not all women menstruate.

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