



INVESTING IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH IS AN  
INVESTMENT IN HEALTHY GENERATIONS



# COST ANALYSIS FOR MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS IN ALBANIA

2025

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# Introduction



Women and girls constitute 50% or more of the users of water and sanitation services and are the de facto stewards of surface water and sanitation, the primary tool for managing personal hygiene. About 50% of the female population is of reproductive age, and most of them menstruate every month. In Albania, women and girls aged 12 – 52 years old, which is considered the active age group in terms of the menstrual cycle, make up 29.6% of the population and almost 50% of the total population of each age group. Worldwide, the majority of them, especially school-going girls and women who work (use public facilities), do not have access to clean, private, and safe sanitation facilities. This means that they have nowhere to change their pads or tampons, nor where to wash their hands.

Global trends, especially in rural areas, show that the lack of appropriate menstrual health management affects girls' school attendance. Research by Milieukontakt Albania shows that girls in our country also avoid going to school during their period, primarily due to inadequate conditions for menstrual health management, and around 25% of women claim that they do not have continuous access to menstrual hygiene products. The main reason for this is the high price of menstrual hygiene products, which are taxed at 20% in our country, although they are not luxury products. As a result of the lack of access to menstrual health management conditions, girls and women are left behind in society, which hinders their opportunities for equality and participation in public life, protected by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

**Menstrual health** is defined as the complete physical, mental, and social well-being connected to the menstrual cycle. This definition reflects the multidimensional nature of menstruation and how the lives of those having menstrual cycles can be affected by the ability to properly manage their respective menstrual health.

**Female hygiene** refers to products of personal care that are used from women and girls during menstruation, vaginal discharge and other bodily functions that are conducted by the vulva. These products include sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and other products used for the management of symptoms of the menstrual cycle.



**Menstrual poverty** happens when people with low income can't afford or access appropriate menstrual products. Menstrual poverty can also be found when there is a lack of access to sanitary products, education on menstrual hygiene, toilets, handwashing facilities, or waste management. As a result, this can bring serious consequences for women's health, which is connected to various infections of the urinary tract and of the reproductive tract.

The necessity for a dignified and affordable management of menstrual products turns into a human rights issue. Menstruations are closely connected to human rights. For example, when girls can't safely access menstrual hygiene products, they are incapable to manage the cycle and this can create barriers in education (the right to education itself is a human right sanctioned in the Convention). According to UNICEF, this problem can restrain women and girls from achieving their full potential because, under such circumstances, they lose important opportunities for their growth and development. Young girls who remain uneducated have higher chances of entering marriages at a young age and experiencing early pregnancies, malnutrition, domestic violence, and complications during pregnancy.

In Albania, data shows that women are increasingly facing problems accessing menstrual health management products, and female workers who work outdoors have no access to sanitation. On the other hand, in Albania, there are still no public toilets! Milieukontakt Albania, in their efforts to ensure that no one is left behind in access to menstrual health management resources, conducted the first cost analysis of menstrual products within the framework of the "WatSan" project, supported by the German Ministry for the Environment, to offer solutions to alleviate the situation with menstrual poverty and faster achievement of SDG 6.2.

With the desk research, we collected data regarding the following areas:

- The price of menstrual health, medicines, and treatment during the period;
- Care for one's health and care for the environment;



# How do women in Albania manage their menstrual health?

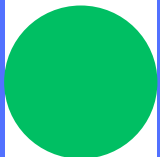
Poor menstrual hygiene caused by a lack of education on this issue, persistent taboos and stigma, limited access to menstrual hygiene products, and poor sanitation infrastructure undermines educational opportunities, resulting in a large number of girls missing 2–3 days of school per month. The threat to health is also a problem, with an increase in infections among women by 70 percent, which in turn affects the social status of women and girls around the world, including in our country, and which can be noted through reduced self-esteem of women, absence from work, and loss of pride.

In Albania, women and girls aged 12 – 52 years, which is considered the active age group in terms of the menstrual cycle, make up 29.6% of the population and almost 50% of the total population of each age group.

Data from the menstrual poverty desk research in Albania shows that 25% of women in our country cannot afford access to menstrual products for menstrual health management, so instead of standard products, they use newspapers, paper, or self-made textile pads.

The cost of menstrual hygiene and health consists of the cost of one packet of sanitary pads, which is 160 Lek, and the cost of one box of simple over-the-counter medicine, which is 110 Lek.

Therefore, the total minimal cost for every girl or woman for taking care of her menstrual hygiene in basic terms amounts to (2 packets of sanitary pads and the simple over-the-counter medicine) 480 Lek per month. Other alternative forms of hygiene menstrual care like tampons or menstrual cups, have been deducted from this cost. Also, the costs of other types of medicine to treat menstrual disorders have not been taken into consideration since they would increase the monthly cost of menstrual health care.



	Sanitary pads	Medicine for menstrual pain
1 month expenses (ALL)	320	110
1 year expenses (ALL)	3,840	1,320
Menstrual life span expenses (ALL)	153,600	52,800

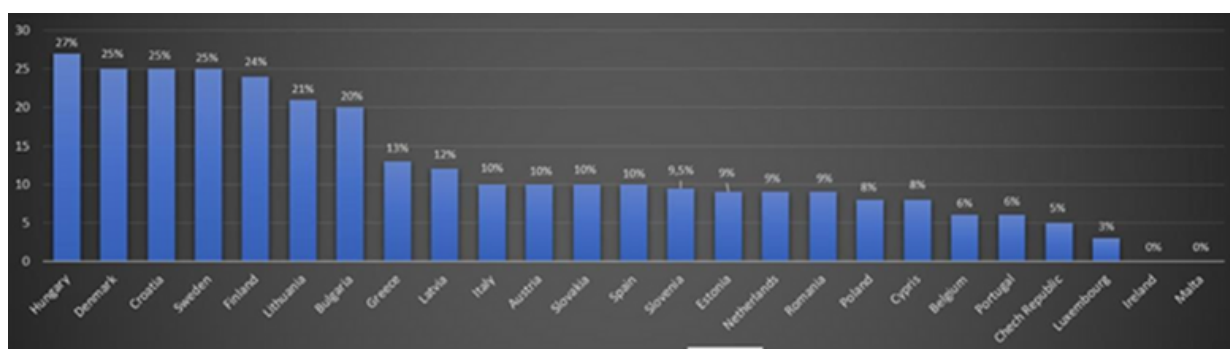
As a result, based on the data above, the yearly calculations state that every Albanian woman or girl will spend about 5,760 Lek on menstrual hygiene. In the meantime, during the whole menstrual life that spans about 40 years (12 – 52 years old), this cost amounts to 230,400 Lek per woman/girl (approx. 2,300 EUR).

If one of the women stays home, takes sick leave, then the monthly price rises to 3600 Leke, depending on the amount of the daily allowance. Namely, if the average salary is 73,641 Leke [1], then the daily fee is 3,347 Leke. If we take into account that a large percentage of women are employed in the private sector and receive a minimum monthly allowance of 40,000 Leke, we arrive at an average daily allowance of 1,800 Leke, and two days of absence from work will mean 3,600 Leke less in the account. If there are more women in the family in the sexually reproductive period, the amount that a family should allocate for it increases by that much.

Depending on the number of women in the family and the number of salaries and their amount, in socially disadvantaged families, we have a percentage between 10-15% of the income that should be allocated for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) for female family members. The calculation is made based on the minimum wage, divided by the amount that is allocated for the purchase of products for menstrual health management.

Unlike here, in Europe, women mostly use tampons, and the percentage of users of menstrual cups is over 20%. Here, in addition to the lack of awareness about menstrual cups, there is no place to buy them, not realizing that, in addition to being cheaper (you buy it once and use it for up to five years), it is also safer and more environmentally friendly. Just to illustrate, in Albania, over 13 million pieces of menstrual waste are thrown away every month, knowing that there are 650,000 women in their reproductive years, who, according to the average use of menstrual hygiene products, use 20 pieces of pads or tampons.

In Europe, 9 out of 10 women have unhindered access to menstrual products [1]. In a large number of countries, a process of reducing the tax rate has begun to reduce the price of products[2], as well as free distribution of menstrual products (Great Britain[3], France - Paris[4], Spain[5], at universities throughout the Netherlands[6], New Zealand[7]), and are in the direction of fully fulfilling SDG 6, i.e. sub-target 6.2.[8]



Unlike EU member states, in neighboring countries, the VAT rate on menstrual health management products ranges from 17% in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 21% in Montenegro.

[1] [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-006746\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-006746_EN.html)

[2] [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-006746\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-006746_EN.html)

[3] [Period poverty: Scotland first in world to make period products free](#)

[4] [France Is Rolling Out Free Period Products in High Schools](#)

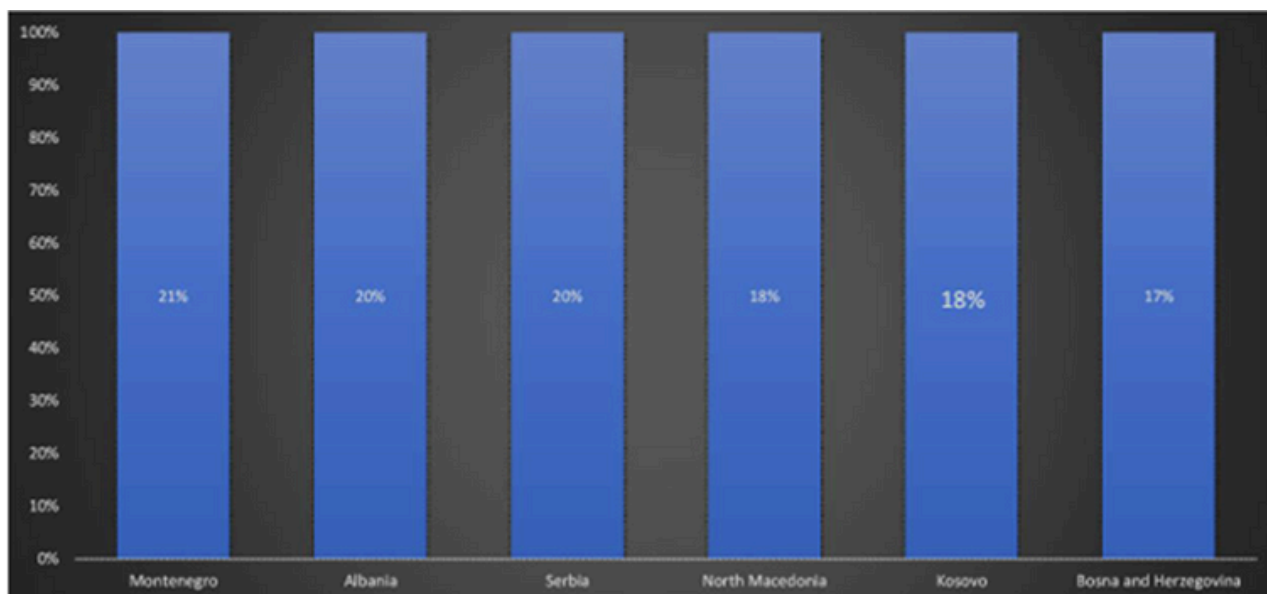
[5] [Catalan government goes one step further in fighting period poverty - Zero Waste Europe](#)

[6] ['Women should have access to menstrual products at all time' - Ad Valvas](#)

[7] [Page not found - Ministry of Education](#)

[8] [Indicator 6.2.1 "Proportion of population using \(a\) safely managed sanitation services and \(b\) a hand-washing facility with soap and water" | UN-Water](#)







# How to achieve cheaper and better-quality menstrual health management?

Based on the practices that developed countries have also followed, some mitigation measures that can be taken to reduce the cost of menstrual hygiene for women and girls in the Republic of Albania are the following:

- VAT exemption on products like sanitary pads and tampons with the final aim of decreasing the prices for the consumer.
- Free provision of sanitary pads in secondary and middle schools.
- Free provision of sanitary pads in female prisons.

About the tax Legislation in the Republic of Albania, based on Law No. 94/2014 "For the value added tax in the Republic of Albania", all goods and services inside the country's territory and imported goods and services are subject to value added tax (VAT). According to this legislation, the standard scale of VAT for all goods and services is 20%. Exemptions from this scale are defined in a depleted manner in this law, and products of menstrual hygiene are excluded.

About the annual budget law for 2024, the income from VAT is foreseen to be 211.2 billion Lek, and it takes up the main weight of income tax, consisting of 33% of the total of this budget line and 47% of the income subcategory.

Below is illustrated the distribution of the State budget's main revenue from taxes and customs, expressed in % of the total.

Sanitary pads/tampons are part of the category of imports. In terms of VAT exemption strategy, to the calculation of the number of women and girls that menstruate, the average selling price of a pack of sanitary pads/menstrual pads and the price of import of the pads, there results to be a total fund of 200 million Lek [9].

[9] Calculations are based on import's reference price for sanitary pads, just like stated on customs' official page which results to be 4 – 4.5 Euro / 1 kg of sanitary pads

Calculations are based on the import's reference price for sanitary pads, just like stated on the customs' official page, which results to be 4 – 4.5 Euro / 1 kg of sanitary pads. Referring to the weight of one pack of sanitary pads for individual use, which is about 125 g, it results that the import price is 0.56 Euro or 57 Lek/pack. While the average selling price in the market for the consumer to which this report is based is 360 Lek per pack. The average number of women from our calculations is 650,000 according to INSTAT data. According to these assumptions, the net VAT that has to be budgeted amounts to 200 million Lek.

This amount of 200 million Lek will be missing from the state budget if the decision is made to mitigate the burden of tax burden for this category. About the total revenues from VAT, this tax relief will cost the State budget only 0.09% of the total revenue from VAT, an inconsiderable amount compared to the total revenue of the state budget. This policy can be executed by making changes to the aforementioned law on Value Added Tax.

On the other hand, the free provision of sanitary pads in secondary and middle schools would be a good alternative in reducing school absence that comes from reasons related to menstrual poverty or prejudices and stigmas that surround this phenomenon.

We should keep in consideration the fact that around 46% of girls who attend secondary school and 26.5% of those who attend middle school live in rural areas. The implementation of this policy can be done with the nearest amendment of the annual budget law. The provision of free sanitary pads for women serving time in penal institutions is also classified as a gender based policy which creates an environment for a dignified treatment of women and girls in these institutions.

Based on the fact that the high cost of menstrual hygiene management products is the biggest reason why as many as 25% of women do not have access to menstrual health management products, our organisation concluded that the government of Albania should reduce the VAT from 20 to 5 percent. These are:

***1. Reducing costs: With the reduction of VAT, the prices of menstrual products***

(such as pads, tampons and menstrual cups) have decreased significantly, making them more affordable for all women, especially those with lower incomes.

## **2. Reducing menstrual poverty**

Menstrual poverty is a common problem for women and girls from vulnerable groups. This measure has eased the financial challenges they face, allowing more women to access the necessary hygiene products.

## **3. Raising awareness**

In addition to the direct economic benefit, this initiative has sparked important discussions about menstrual health and poverty, increasing public awareness and reducing the taboo surrounding the topic.

## **4. Improving healthcare and hygiene**

With accessible and cheaper menstrual products, women and girls can more easily maintain personal hygiene, which contributes to improving their health and preventing infections.

## **5. Gender equality**

This measure is a step towards eliminating unnecessary financial barriers for women and promoting equality, thus treating menstrual needs as a basic, not a luxury.

Just as a reminder, the reduction of VAT from 20 to 5% is a signal that the state cares about its citizens and respects basic human rights, including the right to menstrual health, but with its reduction, the amount that has been reduced is about 30 denars per month or 360 denars per year. On the other hand, the state remains deprived of 15% or less money from VAT on menstrual products. Mathematically, this is equal to 650,000 women in their reproductive years who spend an average of 360 ALL per month, which is 234 million ALL. Of this amount, 46,8 million ALL are now spent on VAT, and with the VAT rate reduced from 20% to 5%, the state treasury would receive 11.7 million ALL less. This suggests that the state, in addition to reducing the VAT on menstrual hygiene products, should consider subsidizing the price of menstrual products. Considering that there is no production of menstrual hygiene management products in our country, the state should subsidize the price or encourage and support domestic production of environmentally safe menstrual hygiene management products, which would also reduce the cost of the same.

At the same time, the authorities should also consider putting on a positive list the medicines that women consume to reduce menstrual pain.

Referring to our previous cost analysis, we propose possible solutions to alleviate the problem with menstrual poverty in Albania.



# 1. Subsidizing the menstrual cup

The menstrual cup is considered the cheapest and safest. The cost of it varies widely from 500 to 2500 denars<sup>23</sup> per product.

Reusable menstrual products are more economical than disposable products. Money will be saved by using a menstrual cup, compared to other options, because one cup is used for a period of 3-5 years. Just as an example, a woman in our country spends an average of 3840 ALL per year on pads and tampons. If a woman has been menstruating for 40 years, the cost of pads and tampons is 153,600 ALL. If the average silicone menstrual cup lasts between three and five years, then between eight and 10 cups will be needed in 40 years. If a menstrual cup costs 3500 ALL (average price), the amount of this expense for a period of 40 years (the age of the sexual-reproductive period in a woman) is from 28,000 -40,000 ALL, which is almost 5 times cheaper.


According to the Lancet study, 199 brands of menstrual cups are sold across Europe and are available in 99 countries, but awareness of their use is low. Entitled "Menstrual cup use, leakage, acceptability, safety and affordability: a systematic review and meta-analysis", the study summarizes preliminary evidence on the costs and waste savings associated with the use of menstrual cups, suggesting that over 10 years, a menstrual cup may cost much less than pads or tampons. A single cup can cost about five to seven percent of the cost of using 12 pads (on average \$0.31 each) or tampons (on average \$0.21) per period. Over 10 years, a single cup is estimated to create 0.4 percent of the plastic waste generated by disposable pads or 6 percent of that produced by using tampons.

Other benefits of using the cup include reducing infections in women, as well as protecting the environment. Unlike pads and tampons, a large number of studies show that menstrual cups are the safest and, at the same time, create the least waste. Just for illustration, in Albania, 13 million pieces are thrown away monthly, if it is known that 650,000 women are in the reproductive period, and if each of them uses 20 pads during the monthly cycle.

Visually,

$650,000 \times 20 = 13,000,000$  pieces of waste containing plastic that decomposes in a period of 10,000 years.

Unlike pads and tampons that are recommended to be changed every three to five hours, the cup is changed every 7-9 years, which in other words creates waste once every 84 months, and waste that decomposes much faster.



## 2. Free period – or access to free menstrual health products for all students included in the regular educational process.

In Albania, girls say they are absent from school due to the lack of conditions for managing menstrual health. Partly due to poor infrastructure, and partly due to the lack of continuous access to funds for menstrual products.

The number of female students in the sexually reproductive period, included in the educational process, is 20,326 students in grades 7-9<sup>th</sup> and 45,420 students for a total of 65766 (Source: Men and Women 2023, INSTAT). For unhindered access to menstrual products, the state needs 284,109,120 ALL or 2,869,789 euros for each female student during one year, which will ensure the implementation of the fundamental human right to hygiene, and at the same time will affect the reduction of charges for the treatment of infections caused by poor management of menstrual health, will affect the reduction of waste generation, as well as the reduction of damages caused by the pollution caused by menstrual waste. In other words, each female student during one school year would receive a package of menstrual products, which is the equivalent of 360 ALL per month. If we calculate the health risks that schoolgirls face from inadequate menstrual hygiene management, the cost to the state is much higher. In many countries, including Albania, girls lose an average of 20% of their schooling annually due to menstrual-related absences. This is calculated to be approximately two to three months during a school year or 18-20 months during the entire school year.

Absences are common among girls who do not have access to menstrual products, as well as in settings where menstrual poverty and stigmatization create additional challenges.



# Contribution to menstrual health – contribution to healthy generations

At the global level, menstrual health is part of the right to health.

Menstrual health is not simply a matter of personal hygiene but a fundamental component of the right to physical and mental health. Proper care during the menstrual cycle directly impacts the well-being and self-confidence of girls and women.

Menstrual education is considered a cornerstone for healthy generations and relies on:

- Early education about the menstrual cycle helps dispel myths, shame, and misunderstandings surrounding this natural process.
- Knowledge about the body and its changes, which empowers girls to make informed decisions about their health.


Access to hygiene products and appropriate conditions must be seen as a necessity:

- Many girls in various communities face a lack of menstrual products (tampons, pads, etc.), adequate sanitary conditions, and privacy.
- This leads to school absenteeism, withdrawal from social activities, and decreased self-esteem.
- Ensuring free and dignified access to menstrual products is an investment in both education and health.
- 

The psychological and social impact is evident in the stigma and silence that often surround menstruation, leading to feelings of shame and isolation.

Normalizing conversations around menstruation helps build a more open and inclusive society.

Investing in menstrual health contributes to healthy and equal generations and supports sustainable development and women's empowerment. Girls who grow up with knowledge, dignity, and support during their menstrual cycle are more likely to be confident, healthy, and educated, positively influencing the well-being of future generations.



From the analysis above, we can conclude that in Albania, talking about menstruation is still considered taboo. In Albanian society, women and girls continue to feel ashamed when talking about menstruation as a phenomenon, and the knowledge of the notions of menstrual rights and menstrual poverty remains vague. On the other hand, due to economic conditions, women and girls in Albania have difficulty in the management of basic personal care.

Based on the results and findings of this research report, we recommend the following:

- subsidizing the price of menstrual health products and abolishing
- VAT on menstrual products.
- Providing free packages of menstrual products for female students
- included in the educational process, since primary and secondary education in Albania is MANDATORY.
- that companies in the toilets, in addition to toilet paper, in women's cabins, also have menstrual products that will be left free of charge to women.
- that there be free access to menstrual products in malls in women's toilets.
- that there be free access to menstrual products in hotel rooms.

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# WatSanPlan

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