(English version)

Question for written answer E-001082/25
to the Commission

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(12 March 2025)

Subject: Period poverty in the EU: actions by the Commission

Period products can cost a woman up to EUR 27 000 throughout her lifetime. Defined as the lack of access to menstrual products and information about them, period poverty is largely driven by economic factors and affects millions of people across the EU. Moreover, it is an issue which disproportionately affects younger women. Parliament's resolution of 24 June 2021 on sexual and reproductive rights ([1]) encouraged Member States to reduce VAT on menstrual products to 0%. However, general inflation has undermined this effort, as rising prices have offset tax reductions, limiting their impact on accessibility. It is important to remember that period poverty can have serious consequences for physical and mental health. Addressing period poverty is also essential to narrowing the gender gap in the EU.

1. Considering that period poverty intersects with multiple policy areas, how does the Commission plan to adopt a comprehensive approach to address this issue, which disproportionately affects younger women, beyond measures such as reducing or eliminating the 'tampon tax'?

2. With some Member States already implementing policies to tackle period poverty, how can the Commission facilitate the sharing of good practices across all Member States?

3. How does the Commission plan to address the impact of period poverty on mental well-being?

Submitted: 12.3.2025

Answer given by Ms Lahbib on behalf of the European Commission

(13 June 2025)

More than one fifth of the EU population lives at risk of poverty or social exclusion with women at higher risk. EU initiatives, such as the Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion address the challenge and the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will aim at facilitating people's access to the essential protections and services, along with addressing the root causes of poverty.

In the Roadmap for Women's Rights ([1]), the Commission lists combating women's poverty and facilitating access to affordable menstrual hygiene products as key policy objectives to uphold and advance the principle of 'equal pay and economic empowerment' and 'the highest standards of health', respectively.

The inability of women and girls to access menstrual products could make them miss school or work and negatively impact their health. Member States are free to apply a reduced rate or exempt menstrual products of value added tax ([2]) although this may not necessarily result in a reduction in price.

Through the Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality, the Commission will invite Member States to organise an exchange of good practices on women's poverty, including period poverty.

The communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health ([3]) supports vulnerable groups, including children and women in vulnerable situations, through its 20 flagship initiatives and around EUR 1.2 million in funding opportunities.

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1 [1]European Parliament resolution of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health, OJ C 81, 18.2.2022, p. 43.

([1]) https://commission.europa.eu/news/eu-roadmap-womens-rights-renewed-push-gender-equality-2025-03-07_en.

([2]) According to Annex III, point (3), of Council Directive 2006/112/EC of 28 November 2006 on the common system of value added tax, OJ L 347, 11.12.2006, p. 1, as amended by Council Directive (EU) 2022/542.

([3]) https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en.

Initiatives include the identification of best and promising practices to support knowledge sharing, such as the Neunerhaus mental health practice ([4]) targeting women experiencing poverty.

([4]) https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/submission/search?call=Mental%20Health.