



KONUŞMAMIZ  
GEREK DERNEĞİ  
*We Need to Talk Association*

**Stakeholder Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review for the  
Fourth Cycle of Türkiye**

11 October 2024

**Submitted by:** We Need to Talk Association (Konuşmamız Gerek Derneği)  
**Prepared by:** Dr. İlayda Eskitaşçıoğlu Karavelioğlu, Aylin Topal, Ayda Bengi Yılmaz,  
Bengisu Göğebakan, Elif Rençber, Derya Özkul

## Introduction

1. We Need to Talk Association (Konuşmamız Gerek Derneği) is a youth-led civil society organization based in Türkiye. Our organization is committed to promoting safer, healthier, and more comfortable menstruation experiences for young girls and women in Türkiye. Our mission is to increase the accessibility of menstrual products, to incorporate menstrual awareness education into the national educational curriculum, and to collect evidence-based, actionable data on period poverty. Our key demographic groups are children attending rural schools, survivors of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, migrants and refugees, and seasonal agricultural workers. In this written submission, we present evidence gathered through our Period Poverty Research, our observations, and experiences from our fieldwork, particularly at the earthquake zone following the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in 2023. Our submission highlights how period poverty and menstruation stigma contribute to broader human rights violations and includes our recommendations.

## Period Poverty and Menstrual Stigma in Türkiye

2. We Need to Talk Association's ["Period Poverty in Türkiye" Report](#) revealed that 21.1% of menstruators did not always have access to soap, 16.3% did not always have access to clean water, and 31.8% did not always have access to a waste bin. This means that approximately 1 in 5 menstruators do not always have access to soap and clean water - two critical items for menstrual care. The proportion of participants who always had access to a toilet where they felt safe is 32.6%, the proportion who always had access to clean toilet paper is 41.9%, and the proportion who always had access to any healthcare facility is 52.9%.
3. The ["Deep Poverty and Access to Rights During the Pandemic" Report](#) published by the Deep Poverty Network in 2021 revealed that 82% of the 103 households experiencing deep poverty during the pandemic could not access sanitary pads without external aid.
4. In Türkiye, menstrual leave was first granted in 2004 as a legal right for women working in "heavy and dangerous jobs," providing five days of leave. However, in 2013, the Regulation on Heavy and Dangerous Jobs was entirely abolished. In recent years, menstrual leave has reappeared in collective labor agreements, with the efforts of trade unions.
5. So far, five members of parliament have submitted bills to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) focusing on period poverty and stigma, since 2019. All proposals are still awaiting further progress and evaluation in the relevant commissions.
6. In Türkiye, single-use menstrual products like sanitary pads and tampons were taxed at 18%, the highest VAT rate for consumer products, until 2022. On March 28, 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced a reduction of VAT from 18% to 5% for products such as detergents, soaps, toilet paper, napkins, and diapers. With Presidential Decision No. 5359, published in the Official Gazette on March 29, 2022, the VAT rate on sanitary pads and tampons was reduced to 8%. This tax reduction was a significant achievement, indicating that the state now recognizes menstrual products as basic necessities rather than cosmetic items. However, the tax reduction has not noticeably reflected in the prices of menstrual products. Moreover, the inclusion of menstrual products in the tax reduction category was only announced through the codes in customs tariff schedules. In other words, the recognition of menstrual products as basic needs and the issues of period poverty and stigma remain insufficiently visible in public policies. In 2023, the 8% VAT was increased to 10% due to inflation. For low-income individuals, these expenses constitute a significant economic burden. It should be emphasized that period poverty and stigma are not problems that can be solved solely through tax reductions; they are systemic and multi-layered issues of gender inequality and deep poverty.

## **Lack of Comprehensive Data and Access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education including Menstrual Health**

7. Currently, there is no government-led or national-scale research or statistics providing information about access to menstrual care in Türkiye. The lack of such data prevents the development of targeted and effective policies to address period poverty and menstrual stigma. Additionally, menstruation is included in the national educational curriculum only as part of the female reproductive system, focusing purely on biological aspects. There is no provision for age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education in the curriculum.
8. Türkiye has previously received two recommendations during the third UPR cycle (45.208 and 45.210) one from Fiji and another from France—both recommending evidence-based, age-appropriate, and comprehensive sexuality education. These recommendations were noted but not implemented. On the contrary, the Ministry of Education has reduced its collaborations with civil society organizations that specialize in this area, hindering efforts to build protocols and conduct training in schools.

## **Inadequate Policy and Data Collection on Access to Menstrual Care in Türkiye**

9. The absence of government-led data collection and research on menstrual health prevents evidence-based policymaking. Without accurate data, it is challenging to understand the full extent of period poverty and design interventions to combat it. The lack of comprehensive sexuality education in the national curriculum further perpetuates the stigma around menstruation and limits young people's understanding and ability to manage their menstrual health effectively.

## **Disaster Relief Agencies Failing to Address Menstrual Care Needs**

10. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, two consecutive earthquakes struck the southern part of Türkiye in which more than 50,000 people lost their lives and 9.1 million were directly affected. The disaster relief agencies responded to this humanitarian emergency by providing shelter, clothing, food, and water to thousands of those affected by the earthquake, including diapers for children and adults. However, many of these agencies failed to address the menstrual health needs of women and girls.
11. Women staying in the temporary accommodation center, including those run by the government reported lack of access to private, safe toilet facilities with water, intermittent supply of sanitary napkins, and lack of disposal bins for soiled pads. Women reported using the pads for more extended periods and since diapers were more readily available than sanitary pads, some said they resorted to wearing diapers. Mothers fearing for the safety of their children, prohibited them from using unsafe toilets at night. In many humanitarian emergencies the menstrual health and hygiene needs of women and girls are often overlooked. According to UN guidelines, humanitarian emergencies “should support women and girls to manage their menstrual hygiene confidently, in privacy and with dignity.” Türkiye’s Constitution also protects the right to health for all its citizens (Art. 56)
12. Türkiye is in one of the most earthquake-prone zones. When the next earthquake happens, humanitarian aid agencies should be prepared to provide the necessary care so women and girls can manage their menstruation with safety, comfort, and dignity. Humanitarian relief organizations in Türkiye have considerable experience in responding to earthquakes, floods, and other emergencies, and agencies like AFAD & Turkish Red Crescent have provided aid to many countries. Designing and implementing gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and preparedness strategies, action plans, and policies is an opportunity to show the world how the needs of women and girls can be addressed with sensitivity and care during emergencies.

## Right to Health and Right to Education

13. Period poverty in Türkiye significantly impacts the right to health, and menstruation-related challenges lead to disruptions in education, especially for school-aged girls. A lack of safe and clean toilet facilities directly impacts school attendance. In many cases, menarche is a breaking point for forced marriages or girls being removed from schools.

## Recommendations

14. In order to ensure all menstruators' access to menstrual care products and knowledge; Türkiye should implement public health policies and relevant measures which address menstrual care needs. Türkiye should:
  - 14.1. Incorporate evidence-based, age-appropriate, and comprehensive sexuality education in the national curriculum, including information on menstrual health, and initiate national-scale statistical research on menstrual care access.
  - 14.2. Ensure curriculum changes are reflected in all schools and publish a comprehensive report on menstrual care access within five years, by starting curriculum revisions and initiating collaborations in 2025, with the goal of full implementation and data publication by 2030.
  - 14.3. Menstrual needs of girls and women should be visible in emergency policy, planning and response.
  - 14.4. Menstrual products should be included in emergency hygiene kits. The kits should include sanitary napkins, tampons, cotton underwear, bath soap, and disposal bags. DRR Agencies should stockpile menstrual products in advance.
  - 14.5. Toilet facilities should be built with lights and doors that lock to ensure privacy and safety and should have bins with lids to dispose of soiled pads and tampons and running water to wash reusable hygiene products and underwear in temporary accommodation centers.
  - 14.6. In order to provide menstrual care with sensitivity, relief agencies should consult with civil society organizations with experience in delivering such services.
  - 14.7. Develop and launch a Menstrual-Care Focused Public Health Strategy by 2025, integrating menstrual health into public health and education, with benchmarks to reduce period poverty and ensure access to products in schools, monitored every two years.
  - 14.8. Eliminate taxes on menstrual products by removing the value-added tax within one year and reallocate funds to support menstrual health education.
  - 14.9. Implement nationwide data collection and longitudinal statistical research on access to menstrual products within two years and publish annual reports on menstrual health issues, product accessibility, and stigma.
15. We Need to Talk Association (Konuşmamız Gerek Derneği) calls upon Türkiye to acknowledge the gravity of period poverty and menstrual stigma as human rights issues. Implementing the outlined recommendations will demonstrate Türkiye's commitment to promoting gender equality, upholding the rights of women and girls, and meeting its international human rights obligations.