



Event "Periods@work – Making the case for Period-Friendly Workplaces!" on May 30th at the GIZ Representation Berlin

## PERIODS@WORK / MAKING THE CASE FOR PERIOD-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES!

A look into our company, with insights from 829 GIZ colleagues!

As part of their efforts, the MenstruAction initiative organized the "Periods@work" event in Berlin to shine a light on MHH issues in workplaces and learn from other organizations and companies. Additionally, they conducted a comprehensive survey across GIZ offices worldwide. The primary objectives were to understand the current situation and the grassroots needs related to MHH. Furthermore, the survey sought to estimate the economic impact of not providing menstrual products in GIZ offices worldwide.

The economic impact question arose after the article "Warum die Menstruation auf die Arbeit gehört" was published in the business magazine "Neue Narrative"<sup>1</sup>. The article cited the results of a study, which revealed that in a company with a total of 1,000 employees, of whom 400 menstruate regularly, a total of 2,752 working hours can be lost annually if the female employees are surprised by their period only once a year<sup>2</sup>.

This raised a critical question for the initiative: Are we taking sufficient measures to prevent the loss of valuable working hours at GIZ, a company comprising 51% women?

The conducted survey gathered a total of 829 responses from more than 16 countries, with significant contributions coming from Germany (33.8%), Indonesia (7.6%), India (6.5%), Malawi (6.5%), and Uganda (4.8%). Around half of those surveyed stated that they generally spend 4 to 5 days a week in the office, followed by 29% who work in the office 2 to 3 days a week.

At the same time, a staggering 62% of the respondents revealed experiencing unexpected periods at work one to three times a year, while 29% reported that this happens to them four or more times a year. Only 6% indicated that this has never occurred to them.

## MenstruAction

One goal, many initiatives

In 2015, the GIZ staff initiative MenstruAction was introduced with a clear mission in mind. Employees from diverse sectors, including education, health, gender, and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), united to promote a positive message regarding menstrual health and hygiene (MHH). The Periods@work campaign represents just one facet of this broader effort. Through the organization of special events, impactful campaigns, and collaborations both within and outside of GIZ, the overarching goal is to make MHH a widely recognized and accepted issue within the company and in the public eye.



MenstruAction – from Enthusiasm to Action  
<https://bit.ly/3Es9Y6Q>

The substantial number of individuals who find themselves unexpectedly dealing with their period not only results in the loss of valuable working hours but also hinders their ability to fully engage in the workplace compared to their non-menstruating colleagues.

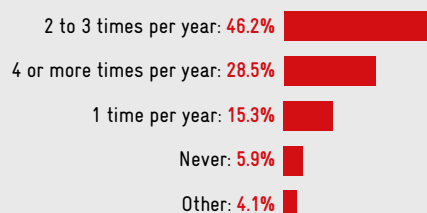
This disparity becomes particularly evident when individuals have to leave the office because of these circumstances. In fact, this is the case for about 39% of the survey respondents who have taken sick leave due to period pain at least once. It is noteworthy that among those who reported never having taken sick leave for this reason, 70% express that their work is impacted by period pain. This finding is in line with the results of a recent cohort study conducted in the Netherlands, which found that presenteeism is one of the drivers of productivity losses due to menstruation-related symptoms<sup>3</sup>.

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Survey across GIZ offices worldwide, 2023:  
829 responses from 16 countries.



How many times a year are you unexpectedly surprised by your period during work (n = 829)?



Have you ever taken personal or sick leave due to period pain (n = 820)?

No, but opted for flexible work

	Has period pain ever impacted your work?				n
	Maybe & sometimes	No	Yes	Other	
No	13%	17%	70%	<1%	479
No, but opted for flexible work	5%	—	95%	—	21
Yes	4%	1%	94%	1%	320

## / REPORT



“Menstruation should not be a taboo!”

Open House 2023 at BMZ Berlin: Svenja Schulze, German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and members of the GIZ staff initiative MenstruAction show their joint support to break the taboo around menstruation by wearing the Menstruation Bracelet.

Taking a closer look at the individual answers reveals that in certain instances, employees do not feel comfortable taking sick leave due to period pain, feel that they have to push through it or do not know whether it is even allowed to call in sick for this reason. This emphasizes the need to support the affected workforce and to find arrangements that promote effective symptom management.

A crucial component of managing menstruation in the workplace involves having well-equipped sanitation facilities. Based on the survey findings, half of the respondents would describe the facilities at their workplace as period-friendly, but the results vary across countries. Satisfaction rates seem particularly low in Kosovo (20%) and Uganda (26.8%), however given the low number of responses in these countries, it is advisable to conduct further investigation before drawing conclusions.

One highly effective solution to address these challenges is for GIZ to enhance support for MHH in the workplace by offering free menstrual products. This proactive measure would not only boost the overall performance of the company but also help mitigate the hidden costs associated with lost working hours and increased stress. The afore-

mentioned study indicates that it costs an average of just \$4.67 per year per person to provide hygiene products to employees, making it a cost-effective investment in employee well-being and productivity.

Beyond the economic reasoning, MHH are intricately connected to broader issues such as gender equality, health, well-being, education, equity, empowerment, and rights. In its strategy for a feminist development policy, BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) calls upon its implementing organizations to actively promote and implement feminist development policies. This involves fostering learning and adaptation processes, even within their own organizational structures. The concept of creating period-friendly workplaces is a central element of this strategy.

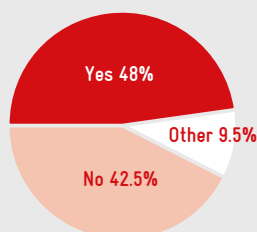
To gain further insight into effectively addressing the needs of menstruating employees, survey respondents were asked about other changes they would like to see at GIZ in this regard. The respondents were outspoken and expressive in sharing their preferences, and most frequently mentioned was the need for menstrual products to be available at work.

Participants in the survey also suggested considering the implementation of menstrual leave or flexible work arrangements to support individuals experiencing severe period-related pain, and it was proposed that support should be extended to colleagues going through menopause or facing age-related challenges in this regard.

Other key recommendations involve improving sanitation facilities by providing appropriate disposal options for menstrual products and fostering a work environment that is understanding and supportive of individuals dealing with menstruation. This includes encouraging open discussions about menstruation and providing training for supervisors to enhance their understanding of how menstrual cycles can impact work productivity and overall well-being.

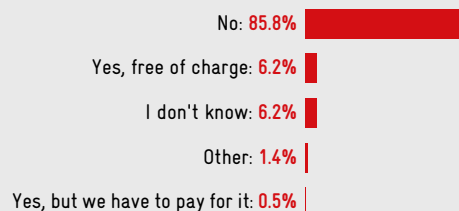
The multitude of different proposals, experiences and challenges revealed by these survey results highlights that offering period products for emergencies represents just one crucial step towards establishing a workplace that is sensitive to menstrual needs.

Does your office have well-equipped sanitation facilities?



n = 829

Does your office provide free period products?



- David, F. (n.d.). Warum die Menstruation auf die Arbeit gehört: [www.neuenarrative.de/magazin/warum-die-menstruation-auf-die-arbeit-gehoert](http://www.neuenarrative.de/magazin/warum-die-menstruation-auf-die-arbeit-gehoert)
- Harris Interactive on behalf of Free The Tampon Foundation (2013). The Murphy's Law of Menstruation: [www.freethetampons.org/uploads/4/6/0/3/46036337/fit\\_infographic.pdf](http://www.freethetampons.org/uploads/4/6/0/3/46036337/fit_infographic.pdf)
- Schoep, M. E., Adang, E. M., Maas, J. W., De Bie, B., Aarts, J. W., & Nieboer, T. E. (2019). Productivity loss due to menstruation-related symptoms: a nationwide cross-sectional survey among 32 748 women. *BMJ open*, 9(6), e026186.

## / CASE STUDIES

# SMALL EFFORT, BIG IMPACT

Best Practice Examples GIZ Malawi, GIZ Viet Nam and GIZ Germany

## Learning from partners: A Menstrual Health Pilot in Rural Malawi empowers rural women in Agribusiness

GIZ Malawi is dedicated to foster a resilient and equitable society by challenging menstrual stigma and expanding women's options for menstrual products. Incorporating menstrual cup training into their planned project sessions – whether in agribusiness, health, nutrition, or education – signifies a significant stride towards enhancing body awareness and granting women more autonomy. This is done in collaboration with UFULU, an NGO committed to alleviating menstrual poverty in Malawi, with the service contract being shared between the different GIZ projects. The initiative aims to curtail

absenteeism linked to menstruation (in GIZ trainings as well as generally), enhance healthier menstrual experiences (given limited access to sanitation facilities), and empower women with knowledge in a safe, inclusive space where all questions are valued. The workshops attracted interest from colleagues in the GIZ Malawi Country Office, so an internal workshop was also organized.

Read more on [foodfortransformation.org](https://foodfortransformation.org)  
Small cup, big impact: <https://bit.ly/458qQvy>



Menstrual Cup Session with female agripreneurs in Malawi



Sanitary pads and tampons were included in the first aid kits in GIZ country and project offices in Viet Nam.

## Creating a menstrual-friendly workplace in Viet Nam

With the support from country management team, GIZ Viet Nam is dedicated to creating a menstrual friendly workplace by including sanitary pads and tampons in the first aid kits at both country and project offices. When needed, colleagues thus have low-threshold access to free emergency rations at the workplace. Even though it is a tiny measure, it can have a major impact on the health and well-being of menstruating colleagues. Furthermore, GIZ Viet Nam applies the flexible working hour policy so menstruating people can take a break at anytime. In Viet Nam, according to the Labor Code, during the menstruation period, female employees are entitled to a daily break of 30 minutes which will be included in their working time and fully paid under their employment contracts. The number of days of menstrual leave shall be negotiated by both parties according to the working conditions and the needs of the female employees but must be at least three working days per month.

## Emergency menstrual products at GIZ Germany

An emergency kit with free menstrual products has recently been made available to employees at the Medical Services (MED) in Eschborn (building 4 on the ground floor), Bonn (BC 10501F) and Berlin (in the quiet room BK 15062, Köthener Str. 2–3). Additionally, the Medical Services also provides pain-killers for menstrual pains. The awareness and understanding of the different cycle phases, the associated effects on the physical as well as the mental health of those affected, is individually helpful and in the work context also profitable from a business perspective. This was demonstrated recently by Miriam Stark, PhD, a business psychologist, in a talk organized by the Equal Opportunities Team as part of the GIZ Health and Wellbeing Day. The fact that the lecture was the best-attended event with 1,500 participants and that there was lively discussion in the meeting chat shows that the topic of 'menstrual health in the work context' is of great concern to many colleagues. Recently, the Equal Opportunities Team also organized an event on the topic of "Menopause in the workplace" with 380 participants.

Read more on [sharepoint.com](https://sharepoint.com)  
(only accessible for GIZ colleagues)

Cycle superpowers, pads and hormones – Menstrual health in the work context:

<https://bit.ly/3PyTqR2>

The GIZ Equal Opportunities Team has prepared further information on the topic:

<https://bit.ly/463fMzy>

Information on Menopause:

<https://bit.ly/49UQwyc>



Periods@work – watch recordings on YouTube

In May 2023, MenstruAction organized the event "Periods@work – Making the case for Period-Friendly Workplaces!" at the GIZ Representation Berlin. This sparked interest in different GIZ departments how to best address this opportunity:

<https://bit.ly/45C9YNO>



The emergency kit with menstrual products is available at MED in Eschborn (left).

The Period Service Box is available in Berlin in the quiet room BK15062 – Köthener Str. (right).

# PERIOD-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

## Three steps to create period-friendly workplaces

### 1. Provide free menstrual products in sanitation facilities:

Ensure that menstrual products are available in all sanitation facilities.

Make sure the location of these products is well-known and easily accessible to everyone.

### 2. Meet WHO's global WASH facility standards:

Equip each sanitation facility with clean water, toilet paper, soap or hand sanitizer, and proper disposal bins for menstrual products.

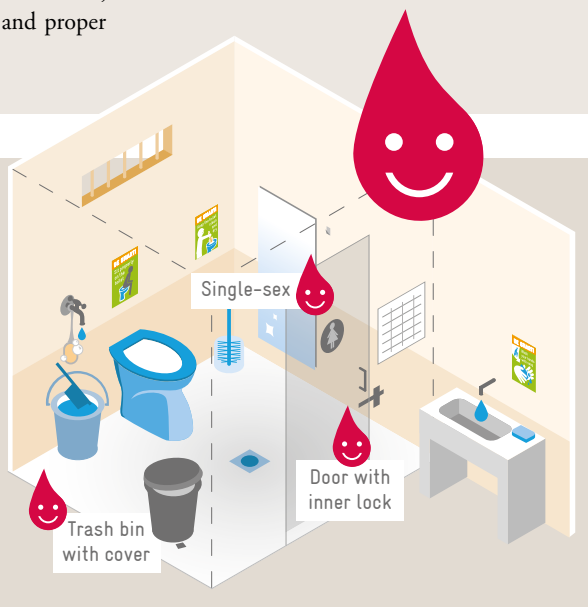
### 3. Promote awareness and training:

Foster understanding and inclusivity by educating all employees, regardless of their gender or position within the organization, about menstruation, the reproductive cycle and the impact of menstruation.

Consider offering training sessions or workshops to promote awareness and eliminate taboo associated with menstruation and reproductive health.

## What makes a toilet period-friendly?

Period-friendly toilets are essential in ensuring the safety, privacy, and hygiene of those who menstruate. These facilities must be designed with key features in mind, such as functional lighting, lockable doors, handwashing facilities with water and soap, and covered disposal bins for menstrual products.



## IMPRINT

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## Read more

This information was compiled from different initiatives/organizations dedicated to promoting period-friendly workplaces like:

Period.org | Working to end period poverty and period stigma:

<https://bit.ly/3GopHFg>

Bloody Good Employers:

<https://bit.ly/3RmxFVG>

Period Positive Workplace:

<https://bit.ly/47ByMwX>

publichealth.columbia.edu:

<https://bit.ly/3OgnTTB>

fitforschool.international:

<https://bit.ly/3WgNqhK>

menstrualhygieneday.org:

<https://bit.ly/3OjrWP9>

## Contact us

For any questions regarding the staff initiative MenstruAction, please reach out to:

[menstruaction@giz.de](mailto:menstruaction@giz.de)

## How do employees who menstruate and organizations benefit from period-friendly workplaces?

### Increased overall well-being and reduced psychological stress.

Having access to period-friendly toilets at all times makes menstruation a less stressful experience.

### Increased ability to carry on with daily educational, income-earning and social activities.

Period-friendly toilets are critical to ensure that women can go to work during their periods.

### Reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, and higher collaboration from employees who menstruate.

Organizations become stronger and more inclusive by providing for menstrual needs.

## Some facts and figures highlighting the consequences of neglecting menstrual health

- In the US, when women unexpectedly start their period at work, 96% of them leave work to find period products.
- Poor menstrual health conditions in workplaces result in wage losses, increased absenteeism, and limitations in physical mobility.
- 4 out of every 10 people who menstruate have had to call in sick due to menstrual issues.
- More than 80% of women experience presenteeism, which means a loss of productivity while at work, for multiple days during each menstrual cycle.
- Global research indicates that, on average, women lose 9 days of work per year due to menstruation.
- Workplaces neglecting menstrual health needs have reported that some women experienced reduced earnings or lower pay in the past year due to menstrual-related challenges.