

## Journalists for Human Rights

### GRB tools used: costing analysis and advocacy;

**Overview** - Data from the survey on menstrual poverty in Macedonia show that 29.5% of women cannot afford any access to menstrual health management products, so instead of standard products, vulnerable ones use newspapers, paper or homemade textile pads to manage periods. Consequently, this lead to reproductive health problems, such as increase numbers of infections by 70 percent, especially in a situation where 74 schools toilets have not been renovated for 15 years. Regulating the menstrual health also presents financial burden for women and families' budgets, especially now in times of staggering inflation. Journalist for Human Rights calculated that women spend an average of 250 MKD per month on menstrual products (with an average price of 125 MKD per pack of pads), not including stomach pain relievers and eventual absence from work. Namely, 464 women out of 1,290 respondents (36%) answered that they ask for one to two days leave due to dysmenorrhea, whereas more than 70% of the respondents use drugs to reduce stomach pain, which increases the monthly expenditure of managing menstrual health for an additional 150 MKD. Moreover, the costs for menstrual cup is quite high (500-2,500 MKD) and another challenge is that only limited number of stores have this product in stock. All these elements are more than sufficient to be declared a state of menstrual poverty.

**GRB Initiative** - Journalist for Human Rights applied a three layered policy solution, applying costing analysis as well as intensive advocacy campaign, especially targeting members of Sobranie and Ministry of Finance. When it comes to the policy proposals, Journalist for Human Rights presented the following:

#### Policy proposal / solution: Reducing VAT rate from 18% at 5%

**Rationale:** According to the calculation, in Macedonia ca. 400.000 women are menstruating. With the proposed measure, in the national treasury on a monthly basis 13,000,000 MKD less will be accumulated, or nearly minus 211,000 €. However, on the other hand, 107 MKD will be one package of pads, or monthly cost for menstrual products of ca. 214 MKD (2 pads per period) compared to the current costs (125 MKD per package or 250 MKD for entire monthly cycle).

#### Policy proposal / solution: Subsidizing the menstrual cup

**Rationale:** No precise subsidy amount was proposed. Instead of it, Journalist for Human Rights rationalized this initiative by providing comparative data presenting the average sum of 120,000 MKD per women/girl who menstruates for 40 years (3,000 MKD per year on pads and tampons) with the cost on using menstrual cup in an amount of 9,000-15,000 MKD (10 cups for entire menstrual cycle with average cost per cup of 1,500 MKD).

#### Policy proposal / solution: Access to free menstrual products for all female students

**Rationale:** The number of schoolgirls in the sexually reproductive period, included in the educational process is 35,200 in secondary schools and 38,541 female students in primary schools or 73,741 female students in total. In other words, every student during one school year would receive a package with menstrual products, which are the equivalent of 2,160 MKD annually or 180 MKD per month. This will provoke fiscal implications of nearly 159,280,560 MKD or 2,654,676 € per year in total. This will provide effective and timely practice of basic human rights as well as significant decrease of vaginal infections and absence from school due to period.

**Success of the GRB initiative** - On the basis of the proficient costing analysis, a comprehensive advocacy campaign was designed and implemented that encapsulated meetings with MPs, decision makers in the Ministry of Finance as well as reach out to general public via social media. Significant help and support was received from the traditional media broadcasting several reports on the menstrual poverty. Official request was sent to the Ministry of Finance for lowering VAT rate, whereas on the local level similar steps were taken with City of Skopje, especially with the Committee on equal opportunities. The success was imminent - after intensive debate in the Committee on financing and budget, the prime minister and minister of finance announced lowering of the VAT rate on menstrual products at 5% beginning from 1st of January 2023. Later this year, the City of Skopje council voted free mensural products for all female students in the primary and high schools located in the capital.

**Success factors** - To vocalize the issue, Journalist for Human Rights were quite loud during significant international days such as the International Day on Menstrual Hygiene - 28th of May, International Women's Day, International Day of the Girl Child and etc. Additionally, they used the Women's MP Club in the Macedonian Sobranie as a platform for lobbying and building mutual inter-party consensus on lowering VAT rate which was demonstrated with single standing positions from all female MPs during the Budget 2022 and VAT Law discussions in the respective Sobranie committees.

**Main obstacles** - in times of energy and economic crisis, cutting the income part of the budget always seems challenging;