

MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

REGIONAL PROGRESS REVIEW

VIET NAM

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Viet Nam is a Southeast Asian country with a population of 98 million, including 29 million adolescent girls and women of reproductive age.¹ In 2021, 35 per cent of girls and women aged 15–49 years had an unmet need for contraception.² Around 89 per cent of Vietnamese households have access to at least basic sanitation services and 86 per cent have access to basic hygiene services.³ An estimated 97 per cent of schools have a basic sanitation service.⁴

OBJECTIVES

1. Document the state of policy and programming to support menstrual health. Collate lessons learned and stakeholders' insights on barriers and enablers to effective action.
2. Review the evidence for menstrual health interventions across the region. Document lessons learned and the barriers as well as the enablers of high-quality monitoring and evaluation.

This review report assesses the progress and opportunities using five dimensions of the definition of menstrual health.⁵ Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in relation to the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle throughout their life course can engage in the following five dimensions.



Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation and changes experienced throughout the life course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.



Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.



Access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomfort and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief and strategies for self-care.



Experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.



Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstruation-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion and/or violence.






PROGRESS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Policies and plans

The Government of Viet Nam has included policy commitments to menstrual health in the following labour laws:

- **Labour Code (2019)**, Article 139, Degree 45/2019/QH14, states that, 'During her menstruation period, a female employee shall be entitled to a 30-minute break in every working day...with full wage as stipulated in the employment contract'.
- **Labour Hygiene Standards (2002)**, Decision 3733/2022/QD-BYT, on promulgating 21 labour hygiene standards, stipulates that factories must provide menstrual rooms for employees.

Review informants confirmed that menstrual health has not been integrated across other policies or plans including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, gender equality and adolescent sexual reproductive health.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✓ Labour Hygiene Standards (2002) outlines menstrual health spaces in factory workplaces.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✓ The Labour Code (2019) stipulates that paid rest breaks must be provided when employees are menstruating. The Labour Hygiene Standards (2002) stipulate that menstrual rooms must be provided in factory workplaces for employees.</p>



Lessons and insights: Opportunities to link existing policies to menstrual health

The review identified four opportunities to strengthen the linkage between national policies and guidelines and menstrual health:

- **Reproductive and sexual health care for adolescents and young adults in Vinh Phuc province 2022-2025**, which aims to improve the reproductive and sexual status through promoting communication, counselling and provision of friendly reproductive and sexual health services, in which menstrual health could be a focus.
- **School Health Policy (2021)**, which provides a framework for health care service at school, which could include menstrual health provisions.
- **National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030**, which aims to narrow the gender gap, creating opportunities for women and men to participate and enjoy equal benefits in all fields of social life, which could incorporate menstrual health.
- **National Strategy for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation by 2030 with a vision toward 2045**, which provides a plan that strives for 100 per cent of rural households, schools and health stations to have hygienic latrines by 2030.



Lessons and Insights: Menstrual Hygiene Day has influenced awareness of menstrual health issues

Review informants reported that the celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day in Viet Nam has contributed to increasing menstrual health awareness and attention of policymakers and development partners. They also highlighted that continued awareness raising was needed with government and the general public beyond Menstrual Hygiene Day and to include media coverage, online campaigns and engagement with social influencers.

“

The conference that we organized to celebrate Menstrual Hygiene Day contributed to raising awareness and gained attention from one of the high-ranking government officials and other participants. However, we need to do more. – Review informant Thrive Networks/East Meets West Foundation Viet Nam

”

Implementation arrangements

Under the labour codes, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for ensuring workplaces comply with menstrual health legal provisions. Labour inspectors carry out compliance checks across workplaces, with employers required to meet the legal requirements. The Viet Nam Women's Union has played a prominent role in partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implementing menstrual health-related activities as part of efforts to support women's reproductive health through communication and education, however to what extent menstrual health is addressed is unclear. Menstrual health is relevant to the portfolios of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Training, and Ministry of Construction, which are responsible for WASH, however stakeholders reported no clear responsibility or cross-sectoral coordination for menstrual health.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
 No evidence was found.	 No evidence was found.	 No evidence was found.	 No evidence was found.	 The Ministry of Labour is responsible for requirements to meet the labour code and the labour hygiene standards across workplaces.

Financing

The Government of Viet Nam has invested in improved access to WASH, including sex-segregated toilets. However, the review did not find evidence of menstrual health funding allocation in the national budget or policy documents. Private actors such as Kimberly-Clark and Proctor & Gamble are supporting menstrual health programmes delivered with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Plan International and World Vision. Development partners and NGOs reported limited funding and no specific budget allocation for menstrual health activities. Most were delivering menstrual health as one component of a larger WASH programme.



Lessons and insights: Companies are investing in menstrual health programmes

Plan International and World Vision Viet Nam are leading two flagship menstrual health programmes supported by donations from private companies. Review informants also reported that the government had leveraged the private sector funding for WASH in schools. These initiatives have the potential to incorporate a greater focus on menstrual health.

“

Explore the possibility of working with the private sector through social corporate responsibility to fund menstrual health projects. – Review informant, UNICEF Viet Nam

”

PROGRESS: SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

Programmes delivering menstrual health services in Viet Nam were of limited quantity and scope, through government and non-governmental actors. NGOs implemented menstrual health as small components of other programmes, with a focus on improving access to information and pad distribution. Service delivery programmes the review found include:



Information and education: Review informants reported that UNFPA, UNICEF and UNESCO collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Training to develop a comprehensive sexuality education extra-curricular module in 2019. The module was implemented in 2022 through a national training of trainer's programme. The module includes puberty education topics for lower secondary school students, and menstrual health information focuses on bodily changes. The Viet Nam Women's Union, UNICEF, and the NGOs Plan International Viet Nam and Thrive Network/East Meets West Foundation have delivered menstrual health education and information programming through teachers, peer educators and caregiver trainings on the use of learning materials on menstrual health for students.



Services and materials: The government aims to provide sex-segregated toilets in schools; however, further commitment is required to ensure that the facilities are fully equipped to manage menstrual health needs. The NGOs Plan International Viet Nam, World Vision and Thrive Networks/East Meets West Viet Nam are addressing access to menstrual pads for girls in schools and improving menstrual health through WASH.



Care for discomfort and disorders: Stakeholders reported that Ministry of Education and Training had implemented a school health programme, which sets up a health room with part-time health workers to provide basic health-related services. Specific menstrual health care services at schools were not reported by stakeholders. The review did not find NGOs supporting care for menstrual discomfort or disorders.



Supportive social environment: The NGO Thrive Networks/East Meets West Foundation Viet Nam is improving menstrual health awareness of parents and teachers to support adolescent girls. The Viet Nam Women's Union and Plan International established community mother-and-daughter clubs to deliver advocacy and promote the role of school, family and community to improve girls' menstrual health.



Lessons and insights: Negative norms and stigma surrounding menstruation remain barriers

Informants highlighted that negative norms, taboo and secrecy surrounding menstruation remain prevalent in Viet Nam. This makes open and public discussion on menstruation challenging. Puberty education has been included in emerging comprehensive sexuality education materials, and informants highlighted that teachers' confidence to teach the subject also remains challenging.








Students are normally told by their parents and communities that menstruation is something not clean. The topic is not openly discussed or shared with others, and some teachers tend to skip or avoid using direct words when teaching their students about menstruation. Some participants in our training feel shameful to mention menstruation – the social norm affects the behaviour of students seeking information and support. – Review Informant, Plan International Viet Nam, baseline survey of the project Vietnamese girl leadership on menstrual hygiene management



PROGRESS: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE

The Survey Measuring the Sustainable Development Goals Survey on Children and Women 2020-2021, a national household survey conducted jointly by the General Statistics Office and UNICEF, included questions on menstrual health. This included questions on women’s access to menstrual pads, access to a private space to manage menstruation at home, information on menstrual cycle experiences over the past 12 months, and whether women did or did not participate in a social event due to menstruation.

Government monitoring systems in health, education and WASH do not incorporate menstrual health indicators. There is limited monitoring and evaluation of menstrual health in NGO development programmes, given that there are few projects and menstrual health activities that are part of broader programmes. Plan International Viet Nam conducted a baseline survey for its menstrual health project capturing the knowledge and confidence to make decisions on menstrual health and plans to do an endline survey in 2023.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.	❌ No monitoring data were found.



Lessons and insights: Systematic monitoring and evaluation is required to inform menstrual health service delivery

Despite the success of capturing national menstrual health data through the Survey Measuring Sustainable Development Goals Survey on Children and Women 2020-2021, the absence of menstrual health in Viet Nam’s national policies and plans limits opportunities to continually monitor menstrual health nationally. The few menstrual health projects led by NGOs had limited scope and therefore did not prioritise development of systematic monitoring, evaluation and learning. Informants expressed the need to have national monitoring data to influence policy change and service delivery investments.

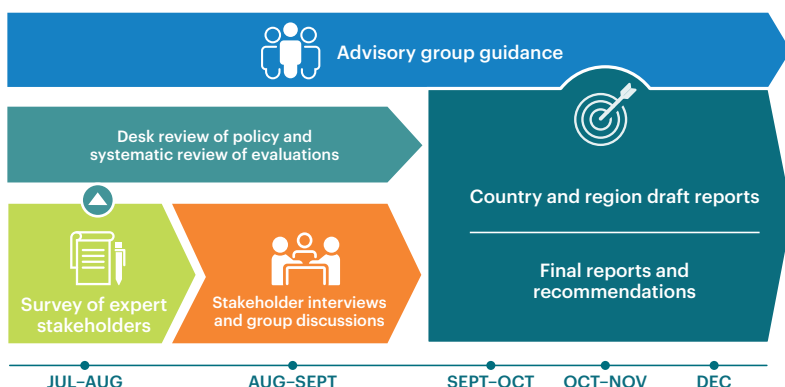


There is no systematic way to monitor the progress of menstrual health. We only have simple indicators at the output level to track our intervention. We did not include menstrual health indicators at the outcome level, as it is extra activities to our project. There is no funding for the evaluation of menstrual health without the real program implementation. – Key informant interview, Thrive Networks/East Meets West Foundation Viet Nam



Review methods

Regional progress review methods



8 policies reviewed in the education, WASH, sexual reproductive health and labour sectors

5 informants participated in interviews and surveys capturing programme and policy action

Acknowledgements

The research team gratefully thanks the valuable contributions made by the review informants who generously shared their insights and evidence through the survey and interviews.

Suggested citation: Huggett, C., Chea, P., Head, A., Suttor, H., Yamakoshi, B., and Hennegan, J., *Menstrual Health in East Asia and the Pacific Regional Progress Review: Vietnam*, UNICEF, Burnet Institute and WaterAid, 2023.

The *Menstrual Health in East Asia and the Pacific Regional Progress Review* report is available at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/menstrual-health-in-east-asia-and-the-pacific>

Bibliography

East Meets West Foundation, Building healthy schools for ethnic minority girls in Hoa Binh province report, 2021, *unpublished*.

General Statistics Office Viet Nam and UNICEF, *Survey Measuring Sustainable Development Goals indicators on children and women 2020-2021, survey findings report*, 2021.

Plan International, Baseline Survey of the Project Vietnamese Girl Leadership on Menstrual Hygiene management, 2021, *unpublished*.

UNFPA, [Training of trainers on comprehensive sexuality education and life skills education](#), 2022, accessed 10 November 2022.

UNICEF, [Viet Nam Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) and or+ \(thematic\) report](#), 2018.

Urbano, M., Aeberhard-Hodges, J., Huong, T., [Labouring under false assumptions? Exploring the rifts between international standards and cultural values in Viet Nam's Labour Code Reform](#), 2018, accessed 10 November 2022.

Endnotes

¹ Defined as 10–49 years in 2021. See United Nations Population Division Projections, 2022, <<https://population.un.org/wpp/>>, accessed 1 December 2022.

² General Statistics Office and UNICEF (2020) Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2020-2021. Available at: https://mics.unicef.org/news_entries/208/FINDINGS-OF-THE-VIET-NAM-SURVEY-MEASURING-SUSTAINABLE-DEVELOPMENT-GOAL-INDICATORS-ON-CHILDREN-AND-WOMEN-2020-2021

³ UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2020: five years into the SDGs*. New York: UNICEF and WHO, 2022. <<https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2021-wash-households>>

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO), *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: 2000-2021 data update*. New York: UNICEF and WHO, 2022. <<https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2022-wins>>

⁵ Hennegan, J., et al., 'Menstrual Health: A definition for policy, practice and research', *Sexual Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2021: 1911618. doi: 10.1080/26410397.2021.1911618. PMID: 33910492; PMCID: PMC8098749.