Menstrual hygiene remains a taboo in many settings, with poor knowledge and misconceptions as great a challenge as access to adequate facilities at both home and in school. In recent years, a solid body of evidence has revealed the discriminatory nature of many school environments, with menstruating girls unable to adequately manage their monthly menses with privacy, safety and dignity. This, in turn, may have negative impacts on girls’ ability to succeed and thrive within the school environment.

In recognition of the positive impact on girls’ education, initiatives around the world are addressing adolescent girls’ menstrual hygiene management (MHM) needs in coordination with ongoing efforts to improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and services in schools. By offering an alternative to the stigma and marginalization often associated with menstruation, integrating MHM into WASH in Schools (WinS) empowers all students, especially girls.

**WinS in the Sustainable Development Goals**

One of the reasons that WinS monitoring has been relatively weak is that there were no WinS-related targets included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), around which international development efforts were focused from 2000 to 2015. Encouragingly, a number of WinS-related goals have been included in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This represents a significant opportunity to improve the monitoring of WinS by encouraging all countries to develop and promote national targets.

**WinS-related target**

- **Target 4.a:** Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.
- **Target 5.6:** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- **Target 6.1:** By 2020, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.
- **Target 6.2:** By 2020, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.
- **Target 6.3:** By 2030, ensure availability and sustainable use of water and sanitation for all.

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**WinS Monitoring through EMIS**

UNICEF’s WASH in Schools Monitoring Package provides guidance on how to improve WinS monitoring through national Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), recommending 13 parameters to include in EMIS questionnaires. A review of questionnaires from 54 countries, shows that:

- **WASH** is frequently included in EMIS: 48 of 54 countries include water and sanitation questions.
- Of the three components of WinS (water, sanitation and hygiene), sanitation is the most comprehensively captured in EMIS questionnaires.
- Most countries monitor water in schools, though the majority include less than half the recommended parameters.
- **Hygiene** is the least monitored; only 6% of countries solicit information about soap availability in their EMIS.
- **WinS in peri-urban areas:**
  - Estimated regional proportion of schools with an adequate water supply:
    - Global: 65% in 2008, 71% in 2013
    - Least developed countries: 45% in 2008, 52% in 2013
    - Developing countries: 64% in 2008, 70% in 2013
  - Estimated regional proportion of schools with an adequate sanitation:
    - Global: 62% in 2008, 68% in 2013
    - Least developed countries: 40% in 2008, 51% in 2013
    - Developing countries: 61% in 2008, 67% in 2013

**Equity**

- National averages often mask gender disparities and significant differences between urban and rural coverage.
- Based on the most recent data available, including only those countries that report dissimilar gender-disaggregated data (29 countries), the estimated average school sanitation coverage is 5% higher for boys than girls. However, this average may mask much larger disparities in some countries.
- Based on the 16 countries with both urban and rural data available for water in schools, on average, the proportion of schools with adequate water in urban areas is 17 percentage points higher than in rural areas.
- The average urban-rural difference is slightly less (15 percent) for sanitation, potentially due to the challenges associated with providing sanitation services in crowded peri-urban areas.

**Recommendations**

To support every child’s right to a quality education, all schools need to have adequate WASH facilities and services. Donors, governments and development partners should strengthen WinS monitoring systems, which provide the information necessary to gauge progress, engage in evidence-based advocacy, and ensure accountability.

**National level**

- Agree on clear definitions and standards for WinS.
- Develop and promote national targets for WinS. Targets should be guided by the SDGs and include aspects beyond the existence of WASH facilities, including functionality.
- Build capacity to improve WinS data collection and analysis.

**International level**

- Monitor and report on global and regional WinS coverage trends on a regular basis, including through SDG mechanisms.
- Ensure that WinS monitoring data are used effectively.