



# **The State of Menstrual Health & Hygiene (MHH) in JRS 2024 Report**

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Global Education Team.

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For more information about this report or MHH at JRS, please contact [GRE@jrs.net](mailto:GRE@jrs.net).

For more information about the Jesuit Refugee Service, please visit [jrs.net](https://jrs.net).

Cover photo: Secondary students in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Photo Credit: Paula Casado, JRS Eastern Africa Regional Office

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We would also like to express our gratitude to JRS colleagues in Chad, Colombia, Iraq, Lebanon, Kenya, South Sudan, Syria, Uganda, and Venezuela who collected data and participated in the letter-writing campaign for the 2024 report. We also thank Irish Jesuit International (IJI) for generously sharing their experience in MHH programming. Our gratitude extends to the many institutional and private donors who accompany JRS to end the stigma surrounding menstruation.



MHH letter writing activity in Bar Elias, Lebanon  
Photo Credit: JRS Lebanon

Finally, we thank those who live and manage menstruation in fragile, conflict-affected, and violent settings. We acknowledge your struggle and honour those who silently endure period-related challenges and those who courageously speak out. We dedicate this report to all forcibly displaced people who menstruate or support those who do. We thank those who openly share their experiences of menstruation with us and advocate for safe and dignified menstruation for all. We also extend our gratitude to those who remain silent due to fear of retribution or stigmatization. Thank you, all, for your strength and resilience.

JRS celebrates the progress in MHH programming throughout the organization and thanks staff for their tactical and tireless efforts. These enabled forcibly displaced girls and women to live fuller lives by being able to manage their periods safely, securely, and with dignity.

Only by working together will JRS be able to *End the Stigma, Period.*

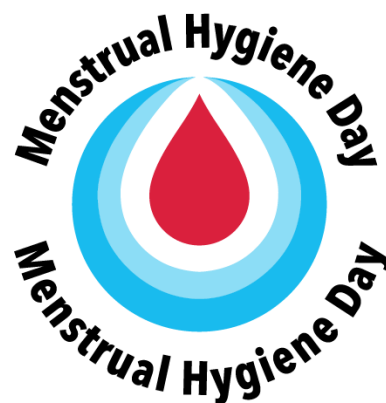
## Acronyms

<b>APR</b>	Asia Pacific Region
<b>EAR</b>	Eastern Africa Region
<b>FCV</b>	Fragile, Conflict-Affected, and Violent
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GRE</b>	Gender-Responsive Education
<b>IJI</b>	Irish Jesuits International
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and Caribbean
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MH</b>	Menstrual Hygiene
<b>MHD</b>	Menstrual Health Day
<b>MHH</b>	Menstrual Health and Hygiene
<b>MHM</b>	Menstrual Hygiene Management
<b>NFIs</b>	Non-Food Items
<b>REC</b>	Regional Education Coordinator
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>WAF</b>	West Africa and Great Lakes

## Menstrual Hygiene Day

Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day or MHD), launched by WASH United and first observed in 2014, advocates for a world where no one is held back because they menstruate. Celebrated annually on May 28, this worldwide day of observance is marking its 10th anniversary in 2024, bringing together millions of individuals to advocate and push for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld.

MH Day envisions a world where menstrual hygiene is managed safely and confidently, without shame, allowing every individual to reach their full potential. For more information on MH Day, visit [menstrualhygieneday.org](https://menstrualhygieneday.org).



## The State of MHH in JRS Report

Published annually on MH Day, *The State of MHH in JRS* **report is a celebration and a call to action.** This year marks the second year of this report and further amplifies the activities, advocacy and programming across JRS, which:

- Break the taboos and end the stigma surrounding menstruation;
- Raise awareness about the challenges regarding access to menstrual products, education about menstruation, and period-friendly sanitation facilities; and
- Mobilise funding required for greater global action and advocacy.

The report applauds the significant strides made in MHH programming that have empowered forcibly displaced girls and women to manage their menstruation safely and with dignity. This year's theme, "**End the stigma, Period.**" underscores the critical need to dismantle menstrual taboos as a prerequisite for achieving broader goals of the campaign. By promoting a holistic and sustainable approach, including the involvement of men and boys in MHH efforts, JRS not only increases the participation of girls and women in its projects but also advances gender equality and challenges harmful norms.



## Executive Summary

**End the stigma, period.** If you are a typical JRS staff member, you resonate with the spirit of this year's Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Day campaign slogan. However, having to read this report probably feels like another task added to an already long list of urgent priorities. Therefore, this executive summary summarises the *State of Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) in JRS in 2024*. Additionally, a dedicated, global webinar on 28 May 2024 aimed to provide an engaging platform for sharing the report with you. Beyond MH Day, we encourage leadership at all levels of the organisation to create space and time for JRS teams to read and reflect on the contents of this report – and to take action within contexts where they work.

In summary, there are promising MHH practices happening throughout JRS – and partners – and significant progress has been made since last year's report. Here are the key highlights:

**Global Expansion:** More countries reported conducting MHH activities in 2024 compared to 2023. This year, 15 out of the 58 countries (or 26%) where JRS operates reported MHH interventions.

**Increase in People Served:** Since last year's report, at least **74,322** individuals benefitted from JRS's MHH programming. In



In March 2024, JRS staff laid the cornerstone for one of the incinerators being constructed at Kakuma Refugee Secondary School in Kakuma Refugee Camp.

Photo Credit: Paula Casado, JRS Eastern Africa Regional Office

comparing the countries that reported both last and this year, there was a 40% increase in total MHH activity. Looking instead at global data for 2023 and 2024, the number of people served through MHH programming in JRS has grown significantly, with a remarkable 105% increase, particularly in Pillar III: Information and Education.<sup>1</sup> This shift is noteworthy, given JRS's past emphasis mostly only on Pillar I and specifically distributing disposable menstrual pads. This increase in

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<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive MHH programming comprises three areas/pillars of intervention: 1) Menstrual Materials and Supplies, 2) MHH-Supportive Facilities, and 3) MHH Education and Information. Go to Section II of this report for a full overview.

MHH education and information is why this year's report features this area, or pillar, of comprehensive MHH programming.

**Increase in Spending:** While spending varied across pillars in JRS – ranging from \$27,949 USD to \$322,131 USD – the expenditure on MHH programming has increased on average by 200% across the three pillars compared to the 2023 report.

**Investments in Resources & Staff Development:** In March 2024, staff from across the Eastern Africa Region (EAR) participated in a weeklong Gender-Responsive Education (GRE) gathering in Nairobi. This event extensively discussed MHH programming, fostered a shared language and understanding of why it's crucial for breaking down barriers to education, and shared new JRS resources and tools featured in this report. The exchanges were emotional and powerful.



GRE regional gathering in Nairobi, Kenya in March 2024.  
Photo Credit: JRS International Office



# Purpose and Introduction to the 2024 Report

## ABOUT THIS YEAR'S REPORT

*The State of MHH in JRS - 2023* Report largely focused on addressing menstruation-related barriers to education, especially at the secondary level. This year's report focuses on period as a protection issue for women and girls with whom JRS accompanies, services, and advocates and for all staff, especially those working in fragile, conflict-affected, and violent (FCV) contexts. Wherever JRS teams encounter those we serve, affected populations have and manage periods. Therefore, wherever JRS works, periods are a protection issue.

This second *State of MHH in JRS* report expands upon the inaugural report from 2023, specifically aiming to:

1. Continue promoting a shared language and understanding of comprehensive MHH programming across education, livelihoods, and other JRS programme areas and activities.
2. Share data and learning about MHH activities and advocacy across JRS and highlight promising practices across contexts; and,
3. Feature Pillar III – MHH Information and Education – including resources and tools to **End the Stigma, Period.**

Each section in this report provides an overview of JRS's progress for each of these objectives, with a special focus this year on Pillar III. Section 1 defines key terms, outlines main concepts, and shares promising practices related to comprehensive MHH programming.

Section 2 shares information on MHH activities and programming in JRS that took place in 2023 with data reported from four regions and 15 countries.

Finally, Section 3 showcases this report's focus – Pillar III – MHH Information and Education – highlighting the critical importance of comprehensive MHH programming to end stigma surrounding menstruation.

**Examples of menstrual myths, stigmas, stereotypes, and taboos are featured in boxes like this one throughout the report.**



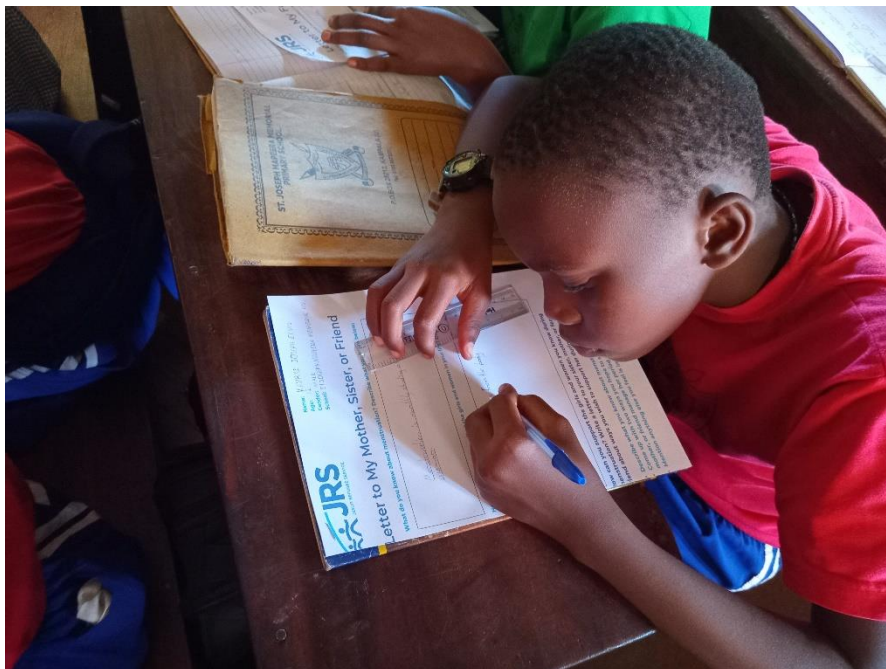
## ABOUT THIS YEAR'S LOGO AND SLOGAN



For this year's MHH report and related activities, JRS created a sticker for JRS staff to use and share with people served, partners, and stakeholders.

The slogan reflects this year's focus on Pillar III – MHH Education and Information to address myths, stigmas, stereotypes, and taboos around menstruation.

JRS staff can access the sticker template [here](#).



A boy in Kampala, Uganda joining the MHH Letter Writing Campaign organised by local JRS staff.

Photo Credit: JRS Uganda

## What is MHH?<sup>2</sup>

### DEFINING TERMS:

MHH is the evolution of another concept, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), that was previously used to refer to this area of programming.

**MHM** is defined as the following:

**Women and adolescent girls are using clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. They understand the basic facts linked to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity and without discomfort or fear.**

Source: (The World Bank, 2022)

**MHH** encompasses:

**MHM and the broader systemic factors that link menstruation with education, empowerment, equity, gender equality, health, rights, and well-being.**

**These systematic factors include: accurate and timely knowledge, availability of safe and affordable materials, well-informed and comfortable professionals, referral and access to health services, sanitation and washing facilities, safe and hygienic disposal methods, positive social norms, and strong advocacy and policy.**

Source: (UNICEF, 2019)

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<sup>2</sup> The information in this section has been adapted from the Columbia University's online course, [Menstruation in a Global Context: Addressing Policy and Practice](#).

## ABOUT PERIODS & PROTECTION

Globally, an estimated 500 million girls and women do not have access to the items they need to manage their periods safely and hygienically, free from embarrassment or, worse, harassment or violence (Plan International, n.d.). **Having a period within FCV contexts is a protection issue.** With each cycle, those who menstruate – and their families – are faced with difficult decisions and realities about managing periods. MHH does not fit neatly into a single sector. Therefore, these decisions and realities present protection issues often overlooked in humanitarian contexts. As a result, JRS teams must be mindful of the protection-related challenges surrounding MHH, regardless of our focus areas of work or the region we serve.

### Periods in Emergencies

Periods do not stop for war. Yet, providing MHH support is often not a priority in humanitarian contexts. In emergencies, such as the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Ukraine, people continue to be on the move. Oftentimes, people in transit, staying outside on the streets, or in temporary shelters do not have regular access to soap or water – much less period products or privacy to manage their periods. In places where menstrual products are available, prices are often inflated and make them unaffordable for those who menstruate, especially for forcibly displaced persons and families who are already struggling daily to secure clean water and enough food. As part of the response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, JRS provides food packages and non-food items (NFIs) in the form of vouchers. However, if a displaced family must choose between more food for their children and MHH – they may forgo the latter. A scarcity of MHH materials and supplies increases the risk of infections for those who menstruate, and this can become life-threatening due to limited access to clean water and medical services in emergencies. Furthermore, a lack of period products prevents girls and women from participating in daily activities, and the emotional and physical stress further impacts on their overall mental and physical health and well-being while in an already precarious life situation.

**Girls and women are dirty during their monthly periods. During menstruation, no one should touch them or anything they touch, including kitchen utensils or scholastic materials.**





## Periods in Protracted Refugee Contexts

In protracted refugee situations, ongoing funding shortfalls restrict the services provided by humanitarian and development actors. JRS staff worldwide are intimately acquainted with this harsh reality and understand its profound impact on our capacity to “accompany, serve, and advocate for forcibly displaced people.”

Over this past year, Kakuma refugee camp has been a focal point of GRE because of JRS Kenya’s role as the implementing partner for secondary education in the camp. Kakuma epitomizes a typical protracted refugee situation. It is a place where funding dwindles as needs escalate. New arrivals arrive at the camp weekly and the services cannot match the urgent needs. Most households face food insecurity, and many secondary students attending JRS-operated secondary schools report only eating one meal a day. Girls often lack resources to manage their menstrual cycles and report engaging in survival sex or seeking assistance from “sugar daddies” who expect sexual favours in exchange for learning materials, period products, or school fees that allow them to keep attending secondary school.

In the same month as this report’s publication, the World Food Programme (WFP) further reduced food rations, from 50% to 40% of previous amounts for refugees in Kakuma and the neighbouring Kalobeyei settlement. In response, hundreds of refugees protested, disrupting traffic on local roads, and demanding that UNHCR reverse the World Food Programme’s (WFP) decision to reduce food rations. According to one refugee, “Our families are starving. Even our children sleep hungry for days without food. It has become hard for us to fend for our families due to lack of food (Ngasike, 2024).” Within this context, one wonders how girls and women are managing their monthly periods. Sadly, “stressful life circumstances exacerbated by gender-based violence (GBV)” are a causative factor for contemplating suicide in Kakuma. According to a 2021 report, across Kakuma and Kalobeyei, 25.9% of the population had thought of ending their lives, 23.4% had thought of inflicting harm on themselves, and 20.9% had already attempted to do so. Women accounted for the majority of those who exhibited suicidal behaviours (Kakuma Suicide Prevention and Response Taskforce., 2021).

This single case study illustrates the compounding vulnerabilities that refugees face in a protracted camp setting, especially those who menstruate. It helps us understand that MHH is a high priority because it directly impacts access to education, health, livelihood, and other opportunities. Ensuring comprehensive MHH can mitigate GBV, alleviate some of the daily pressures and stressors, and improve the overall well-being of the refugee population.

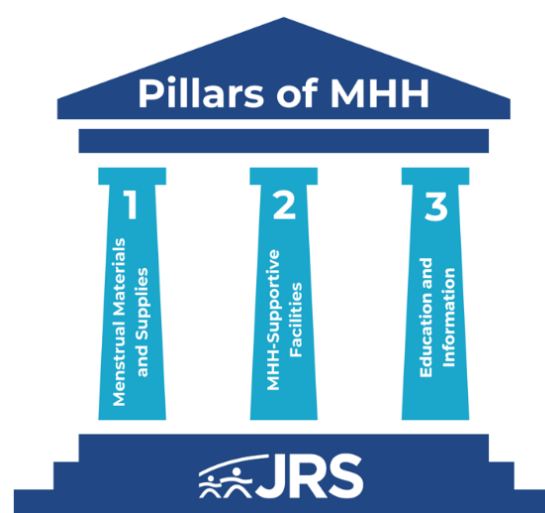
## ABOUT PERIODS & STIGMA

Around the world, JRS works with diverse people, composed of many cultural groups in the nearly 60 countries where it operates. Within some of these groups, traditional beliefs, including menstrual-related myths, stigma, stereotypes and taboos persist. **Traditional beliefs are those held by members of a community for long periods of time, often spanning generations. Some traditional beliefs and related practices are beneficial, some have no benefit or harm, and others are harmful.** Harmful traditional beliefs and practices are long-standing and will not change or be reversed by briefly implemented, one-off interventions. Instead, addressing deeply embedded beliefs, behaviours, and mindsets surrounding menstrual stigma presents a more difficult challenge.

Destigmatizing menstruation involves more than providing education and information to girls and women and necessitates the involvement of everyone, including boys and men. This report aims to elevate and embed community-wide MHH programming through gender-responsive and gender-transformative interventions. To this end, several promising practices and global resources are highlighted in this year's *State of MHH in JRS* report, including an MHH-letter writing activity and a Girls' Club curriculum and resources that include lessons on menstruation.

Comprehensive MHH programming comprises three areas or **pillars of intervention**:

- I. Menstrual Materials and Supplies
- II. MHH-Supportive Facilities
- III. MHH Education and Information



## PILLAR I: MENSTRUAL MATERIALS & SUPPLIES



### WHAT IS IT?

The first pillar of comprehensive MHH programming refers to the access of menstrual materials and supplies that are necessary for managing periods with comfort, confidence, and dignity so those who menstruate can go about their daily lives as normally as possible.

### DEFINING TERMS:

**Menstrual materials** refer to products or items used externally or internally to absorb or collect blood and tissue that comes out of the vagina during menstruation. These include cloths, disposable or reusable pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or period underwear.

**Menstrual supplies**, instead, are supportive tools needed for the effective and hygienic management of one's period. These tools include soap and a bucket for washing reusable pads, underwear, reusable or disposable pads, and a bag to store reusable pads or menstrual cups between use.

**A girl or woman will be rendered barren if anyone comes into contact with her menstrual blood.**



## Pillar I Promising Practice: Irish Jesuit International – Girls Learn their Own Worth Programme

In 2024, Irish Jesuit International (IJI), a partner of JRS South Sudan, launched the **Girls Learn their Own Worth (GLOW)** Programme, a comprehensive business model that covers procurement, production, costing, marketing, sales, and logistics for the local production of reusable sanitary pads. By offering livelihoods activities for local community members, this innovative approach provides girls with the necessary menstrual supplies to manage their periods and helps them support their families while simultaneously ending period stigma!



“  
***Mother Cecilia has taught us how to measure, how to cut and how to machine. And it is also a source of employment to people. And in South Sudan it is very important to learn how to make the pads. That we can employ many people and make a difference.***  
”

increasing girls’ and women’s agency as individuals, as changing gender norms around their roles in society.”

Visit [www.iji.ie/news](http://www.iji.ie/news) to learn more about the GLOW Programme.

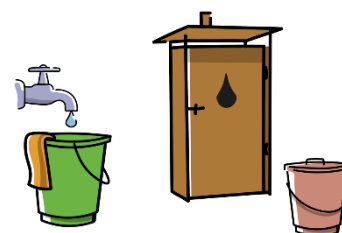
The GLOW Programme is also complemented by MHH awareness sessions for both girls and boys, addressing important topics that educate about puberty, personal hygiene, female and male reproductive systems, among other topics to promote greater gender equality.

According to Emer Kerrigan, IJI Deputy Director, the GLOW programme, “is part of IJI’s commitment to increasing access, availability, accessibility, and affordability of dignity kits and MHH tools as a key, gender-transformative intervention, with the ultimate goal of





## PILLAR II: MHH-SUPPORTIVE FACILITIES



### WHAT IS IT?

The second pillar of MHH programming refers to a range of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services and spaces that can support managing menstruation in a healthy and safe manner. Within the school setting, the primary focus for MHH supportive facilities is on toilets, including issues of disposal and waste management.

To be period-friendly, toilets should have certain characteristics, including inside door latches, proper lighting, clear signs pointing to menstrual waste disposal, accommodations for people with disabilities, and more. Please see the checklist on the right side.



Be conveniently and safely located.



Be culturally appropriate.



Be separated by gender.



Be accessible to those with physical disabilities.



Be protected by fencing.



Be checked, cleaned, and maintained regularly.



Have working doors & locks and to ensure privacy and security.



Have internal lighting.



Have menstrual waste disposal options provided, such as bins, chutes, and/or incinerators.



Have a bell inside that allows individuals to summon help discretely or case of an emergency.



Have soap and water available, through a bucket or tap, and ideally inside the cubicle to allow for discrete washing of period blood off bodies and hands.



Have hooks for keeping bags and clothing off the floor. This makes changing menstrual products smoother and less stressful. For people with disabilities, having hooks at an accessible height can make it easier to manage their belongings and period independently.

## Pillar II Promising Practice: Investing in Period-Friendly WASH Infrastructure in Secondary Schools

Contributed by Jeremiah Otieno

*Secondary Education Coordinator in Kakuma Refugee Camp, JRS Kenya*

Comprehensive MHH programming in secondary schools is crucial for ensuring the safety, well-being, and dignity of female students. In Kakuma refugee camp, JRS Kenya's MHH activities are built on three essential pillars. The first pillar focuses on providing girls with necessary menstrual materials and supplies. The second pillar ensures the availability of period-friendly WASH facilities. The third pillar delivers comprehensive MHH education and information to the community. Together, these pillars create a supportive and empowering environment for female learners in Kakuma.



Secondary school schoolgirls draw water from the new taps installed at LifeWorks Secondary Boarding School.

Photo Credit: JRS Kenya

The GRE assessment conducted in Kakuma in 2023 identified barriers to accessing and completing secondary school, with a particular emphasis on girls. The findings, outlined in the report *Breaking down barriers: increasing girls' access to and completion of secondary education in Kakuma*, identified key MHH-related barriers, including a shortage of materials and supplies.

Additionally, through focus group discussions (FGDs) with girls and key informant interviews with teachers and school stakeholders, as well as observations by our team, a critical shortage of period-friendly facilities was identified. Additionally, through FGDs with girls and key informant interviews with teachers and school stakeholders, as well as observations by our team, a critical lack of period-friendly facilities was identified. These deficiencies include insufficient toilets, running water, and proper waste disposal and management for period products, such as incinerators. Due to these shortages, girls report missing school during their menstrual periods, significantly limiting their participation in classes and contributing to poorer learning outcomes.

### Promising Practice, continued.

Comprehensive MHH programming in secondary schools is crucial for ensuring the safety, well-being, and dignity of female students. In Kakuma refugee camp, JRS Kenya's MHH activities are built on three essential pillars. The first pillar focuses on providing girls with necessary menstrual materials and supplies. The second pillar ensures the availability of period-friendly WASH facilities. The third pillar delivers comprehensive MHH education and information to the community. Together, these pillars create a supportive and empowering environment for female learners in Kakuma.

#### Before & After



One block of two-door latrines  
**before renovation.**

Photo Credit: JRS Kenya



One block of two-door latrines  
**before renovation.**

Photo Credit: JRS Kenya

To ensure sustainability over time, JRS Kakuma will budget for regular maintenance of existing WASH facilities in the future and strengthen ongoing fundraising activities. JRS Kenya is proud of its investments in period-friendly WASH facilities. These improvements and investments will go a long way in improving access to, retention in, and completion of secondary school for girls in Kakuma refugee camp – as well as the health, well-being, and equal learning opportunities for all learners.

### PILLAR III: EDUCATION & INFORMATION



#### WHAT IS IT?

Provision of MHH materials and supplies and supportive facilities alone fall short of ensuring hygienic menstrual management. Many girls report being confused or scared by their first periods or simply because they don't know what's happening to their bodies. In many cultures, menstruation is shrouded in silence and stigma, leaving girls without the crucial information they need to understand and manage their periods. This lack of knowledge, coupled with cultural taboos, leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment, leaving girls unprepared.

MHH education helps to bridge gaps in awareness and knowledge. By equipping girls and women with the information they need, we can help them feel more confident and prepared to manage their periods.

However, education should not stop with girls and women. It is equally important to involve boys and men in MHH education programs. When boys and men are aware of menstruation-related challenges, they help foster communities of knowledgeable and supportive individuals. Involving boys and men also combats the stigma surrounding menstruation by transforming them into allies who normalize and support MHH.

**Experiencing any pain during a period, such as menstrual cramping, is the sign of an ancestral curse.**





### Pillar III Promising Practice: Celebrating Girlhood: JRS Syria & MHH Awareness

Contributed by Batoul Moussa  
Regional Education Officer, MENA Region

JRS Syria has been actively integrating MHH initiatives into their programming in multiple locations. From March to April 2024, these initiatives involved 434 girls and aimed to break the stigma surrounding menstruation, provide essential health education, and empower young girls to understand and manage their MHH confidently.



A group of girls who joined the MHH awareness activities in Kafroun, Homs, Syria  
Photo Credit: JRS Syria

During and after these sessions, girls raised several important questions, reflecting the widespread misinformation and cultural taboos surrounding menstruation. Some of the questions included:

- Will menstruation affect my growth?
- Will I suffer from pimples because of menstruation?
- Is it shameful for a girl to laugh and enjoy life after reaching puberty?
- Is it harmful to move and exercise during my period?
- Should I wear wide and long clothes while on my period?

### Promising Practice, continued.

Social workers and educators addressed these concerns, providing scientific explanations and encouraging a positive and informed approach to MHH.

A unique and impactful component of these MHH programmes was the MHH letter-writing activity. After the awareness sessions, each participant wrote a letter to a younger sister or friend who might experience menstruation soon. The letters were gathered into a single, heart-shaped envelope. They contained advice, words of encouragement, and expressions of solidarity. The activity fostered a sense of community and mutual support among the girls.

Below is a list of the Top Ten messages that emerged from the letter-writing activity:

1. Never be ashamed of puberty, it is a wonderful indication of growth.
2. Be proud of yourself and never be shy to ask, remember to ask the right people.
3. Be aware of who you ask when it comes to this subject, seek support from trusted references.
4. Always ask when you are not sure, having answers will help you feel safe.
5. Never feel shy, you are valuable, always take care of your personal hygiene.
6. You have a valuable role in this community, always be positive.
7. Please take care of your personal hygiene
8. You are a blessing to everyone around, always remember that.
9. You are a girl, and this is a very important role.
10. Being a mother is a blessing from God.

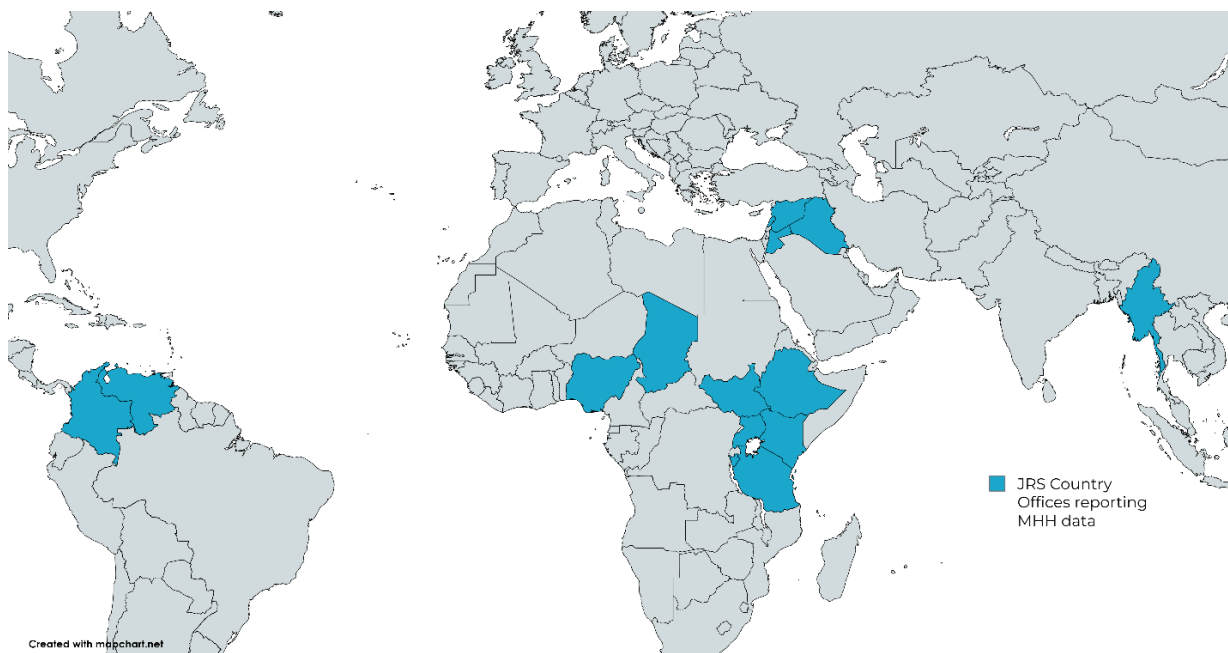


*Messages written by the girls joining the MHH awareness activities in Kafroun, Homs, Syria  
Photo Credit: JRS Syria*

Thank you, JRS Syria for breaking down harmful period stigma and creating a healthier and more informed generation of young women in Syria.

## Section 2 – People Served by JRS MHH Activities

According to the survey, **at least 74,322 individuals** benefitted from JRS's MHH programming in 2023. Most of those served were through activities related to Pillar III – MHH Education and Information”, followed by Pillar II – MHH Supportive Facilities, and then Pillar I – Menstrual Materials and Supplies.



This map highlights the JRS Country Offices that reported ongoing MHH activities. **The appendix** provides details of MHH activity, and the number of individuals served by region and country.

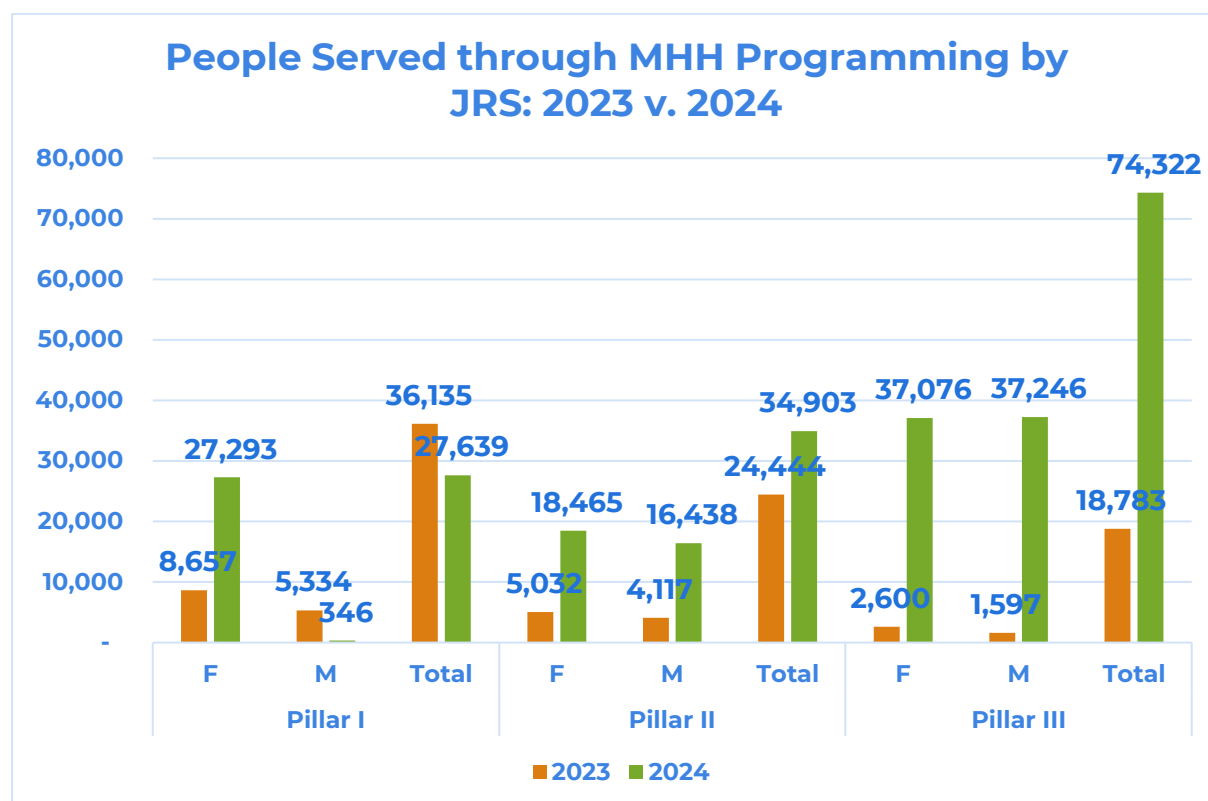
## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The information in this section was gathered through a global, online survey about MHH programming in JRS. The survey was organized around the three pillars of MHH outlined in this report. It aimed to capture information about the activities implemented, budget allocated, and people served (disaggregated by gender) through each MHH pillar.

The survey was structured around the three pillars of MHH outlined below. It aimed to gather information about the activities carried out and the individuals served, with a breakdown by gender, for each MHH pillar. To avoid double counting, this report does not include data on the total number of people served across all MHH

pillars, as some individuals served under one pillar may also have been served under other pillars. The authors acknowledge this limitation of the *State of MHH in JRS* report.

With just over a quarter of country teams reporting MHH activities in 2024, there is a significant opportunity to elevate the importance of MHH within JRS.



In comparing the countries that reported both last and this year, there was a 40% increase in total MHH activity. Looking at global data for 2023 and 2024, the number of people served through MHH programming in JRS has grown significantly, with a remarkable 105% increase in the number of people served by JRS across the three pillars since 2023.

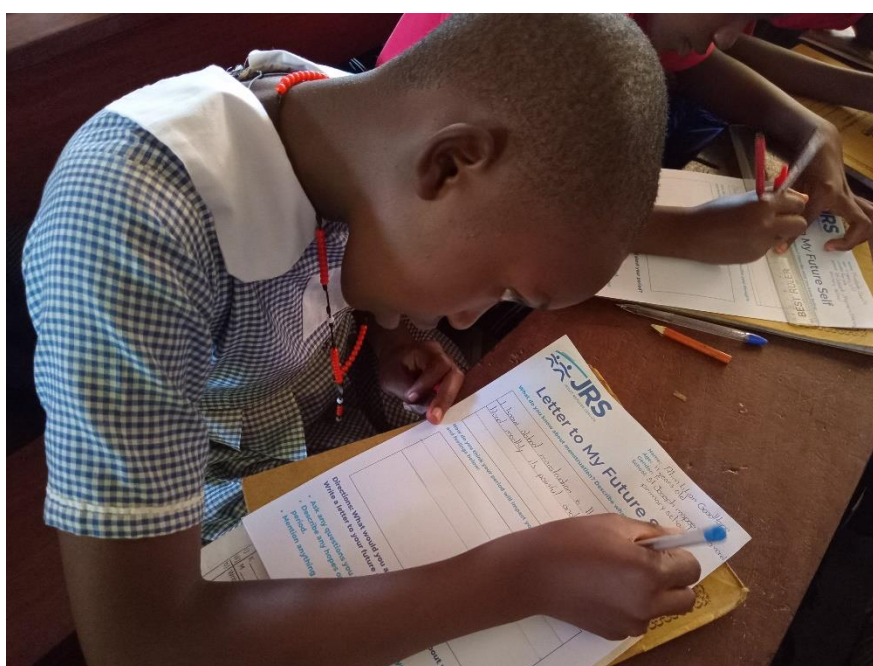
The most notable rise is in Pillar III – Education and Information, with a 296% increase in beneficiaries compared to last year. In part, this increase is likely due to improved data collection and reporting across JRS Country Offices, with more teams reporting MHH data this year (15) compared to last year (8).<sup>3</sup> Pillar II – MHH-

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the numbers and information presented do not necessarily reflect all JRS's MHH programming, but instead are reflective of the information we were able to gather.

supportive Facilities saw a 43% increase in beneficiaries, while Pillar I – Menstrual Materials and Supplies experienced a 24% decrease in the number of people served.

Overall, these numbers suggest significant progress in MHH programming and data reporting. However, our efforts should continue. MHH is a critical issue that requires a long-term, gender-transformative approach in programming to dispel menstruation-related myths, stigmas, stereotypes, and taboos. Thank you for joining JRS in this journey to **End the Stigma, Period.**

**Girls and women are isolated during menstruation and expected to sit over a small hole or pit for the length of their periods. Only after their periods finish are they allowed to bathe and rejoin the larger family and community.**



A girl in Kampala, Uganda participates in the MHH Letter Writing Campaign organised by local JRS staff.  
Photo Credit: JRS Uganda



## Pillar III Resource: Girls' and Boys' Club Programming

The JRS Girls' Club curriculum is developed according to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP). Grounded in this transformative Jesuit approach to education, the curriculum covers a wide range of essential topics, including puberty, menstruation, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early pregnancy, and GBV. These lessons are crucial for fostering responsible attitudes and behaviours, especially in high-risk settings like refugee camps and humanitarian emergencies, where access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information is often limited.

The curriculum includes two lessons on puberty and three lessons on menstruation. The menstruation lessons encompass an introduction to the menstrual cycle, a lesson on period products, and a final lesson on managing menstruation-related emotions, fatigue, and pain. The series concludes with learners developing a public service announcement about menstruation to raise awareness and change behaviour in local communities. Students also create a dissemination plan for refugee girls to approach local radio stations or NGOs to help amplify their message and information about menstruation, aiming to end the stigma surrounding the topic.


25


Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Session 16: Menstruation III: Managing Menstrual Emotions, Fatigue, and Pain**

**By the end of this session, you will be able to...**

- Recall key learnings from the previous lessons and continue to dispel any myths and misinformation.
- Provide accurate information and support students in learning to more effectively emotions, fatigue, pain, and other symptoms during their menstrual cycle (to ensure school attendance during periods).

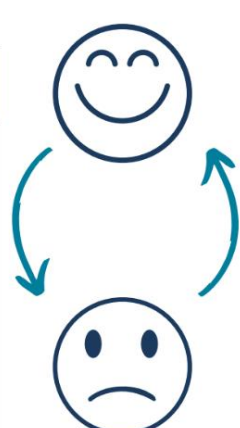




**Mood Swings**

The hormones that control the menstrual cycle also affect one's emotions. It is normal to feel a range of emotions and feelings, especially before and during periods. It is normal to feel angry, grumpy, fragile, irritable, lonely, tearful, and sad. It's essential to acknowledge and validate these feelings and remember that they are a normal part of the menstrual cycle.

We encourage those who are feeling "out of sorts" to let those around them know how they are feeling. Confide in family, friends, teachers, etc. If you know that a family member or friend is experiencing mood swings due to their period, be gentle and patient with them. Ask how you can support them. Better yet, look for ways to reassure and support the person.



**Period Fatigue**

It is common for girls and women to feel tired during their menstrual cycle due to hormonal fluctuations. Energy levels typically return to normal within a few days when hormone levels increase again. Period or menstrual fatigue is normal.

Fortunately, there are some strategies that can help alleviate period fatigue and improve energy levels. We will talk about these as a strategy to ensure girls' continued attendance and performance at school.


Some girls and women may experience more prolonged and severe fatigue. Anemia, for example, can result from heavy bleeding and causes tiredness. This, for example, is a condition that should be discussed with a doctor.

**Pain**

Physical pain, such as menstrual cramps, is another common aspect of menstruation. Some girls and women may experience mild discomfort, while others may have more severe pain. In addition to abdominal cramping and pain, it is normal to experience bloating, backaches, breast tenderness, headaches, tiredness, feeling emotional, having certain food cravings, and an increased/decreased sexual desire or libido.

All the symptoms are a normal part of menstruation. They are not the cause of illness or infection and should not be treated with antibiotics. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed is dangerous. It can make them less effective.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know is experiencing menstrual symptoms that are not normal, then it is important to see a doctor.



*Sample pages from the  
JRS Girls' Club Participant Workbook*

All JRS staff can access the Girls' Club programming materials, including the full curriculum and facilitator guide, participant workbook, and monitoring and evaluation material [here](#). Consistent with comprehensive MHH programming, a corresponding Boy's Club curriculum is currently being developed. Learn more about the forthcoming curriculum and programming [here](#).

## Pillar III Resource: MHH-Letter Writing Materials

This year, JRS launched a new MHH-letter writing activity to promote community-wide awareness and education to **End the Stigma, Period**. The letter-writing activity is designed to engage participants of all ages and genders. Depending on the context, JRS staff have implemented this activity in various ways. Below are reflections from two of JRS's Regional Education Coordinators (REC), one from Latin America and another from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions. There are four different templates and the excerpts below are from letter-writing activities carried out in countries including Chad, Colombia, Kenya, Syria, Uganda, and Venezuela.

1. **Letter to My Past Self:** This template invites older girls and women to write about their experience getting their first period, addressed to their past selves. Before writing the letter, participants are encouraged to reflect on the question: "What advice would you give your younger self experiencing her first period?" These letters serve as personal narratives that younger individuals can learn from.

“

***I was like [the] world  
has just turned against me.***

”

2. **Letter to a Younger Girl:** This template encourages girls who have already experienced menstruation to write a letter to a younger friend or sister, advising them on what to expect upon reaching menarche. Older girls provide advice on what menstruation is, how to manage periods and any other helpful information.

“

***The topic of menstruation, is important to make it known to our society, it is as normal as drinking water every day.***

”

3. **Letter to My Future Self:** This template targets girls who have not yet started menstruating and invites them to share any fears or questions about getting their first period in the form of a letter to their future selves. This format provides a space for them to express concerns, ask questions, and learn more about menstruation.



Girls and women in Zulia, Venezuela participant in the JRS-led MHH Letter Writing Campaign.  
Photo Credit: JRS Venezuela

4. Finally, the **Letter to My Mother, Sister, or Female Friend** targets boys and men. Through this activity, they write to girls or women in their lives to offer their support to manage their periods with dignity.

“


***My support to each one of you will be in the following ways: you will have enough sanitary pads to use whenever there is need. You can share the pads with your friends, relatives, and any other person...I will be part of the discussion on challenges you may be facing in relation to menstruation, and together we can find appropriate solutions that benefit both of us.***

”

Girls during their periods are not allowed to interact with their fathers and must be isolated from the male members in the family. They are considered bad omen.



**The MHH Letter-Writing Activity templates are accessible to all JRS staff:**



Name:  
 Age:  
 Gender:  
 School:



## Letter to A Younger Girl

Recall your first time getting your period. Describe some details below, including your age at the time, where it happened, and how you felt:

Describe how your period impacts your life:

**Directions:** What advice would you give to a younger girl about menstruation? Write a letter to your younger sister or friend who has not yet gotten her period.

- Tell her about your first time getting your period.
- Describe what you did not know about menstruation that you wish you had known.
- Offer advice about how you manage your period with dignity.
- Mention anything else you feel is important!

in English here.

الاسم:  
العنوان:  
المدرسة:



**JRS**  
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

Nom:  
Âge:  
École:



**JRS**  
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

Nombre:  
Edad:  
Género:  
Escuela:



**JRS**  
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

### رسالة الى نفسي في الماضي

تذكرني صورة الأقران التي اختبرت فيها انكسارك العنصرية الذي يوصف بعض الناس بـ "بدا في ذلك صبرك" وكيف شعرت حينها

صلي كيف توافر الدورية الشهرية على حياتك:

الدورهات: بما في السجدة التي تقسمها انكسارك في الماضي بشأن الدورية الشهرية التي رسالة في لكسات في الماضي التي لم تغير الدورية الشهرية بعد

الحديث لكسات في الماضي من العرا افراق التي اختبرت فيها الدورية الشهرية: صلي اذا ما شأنت ان كنت تجربته ساديا من الدورية الشهرية.

الذي اصاح بملونه حول كيفية إدراك الدورية الشهرية والتي اربطت بملونها مع لكسات في الماضي.

انكري اي شيء آخر تريته مهنا

الترتيب:

### Lettre à ma mère, à ma sœur ou à une amie

Que sais-tu des menstruations? Décris ce que tu sais ici-bas:

Comment les menstruations affectent-elles les filles et les femmes de ton entourage? Mentionne ta réponse ici-bas:

Instructions: Comment peux-tu soutenir les filles et les femmes que tu connais pendant leurs règles? Écris une lettre à ta sœur, à ta mère ou à une amie pour lui expliquer comment tu souhaites la soutenir pendant ses règles.

- Décris ce que tu sais sur les menstruations.
- Trouve deux façons d'aider ta sœur, ta mère ou une amie à gérer ses règles avec dignité.
- Mentionne toute autre chose que tu juges importante!

### Carta a Mi Futura "Yo"

¿Qué sabes sobre la menstruación? A continuación, explica lo que sabes:

¿Cómo crees que afectará la menstruación a tu vida? Explica tus opiniones y sentimientos a continuación:

Instrucciones: ¿Qué le preguntarías a la futura tú sobre la menstruación? Escribe una carta a tu futura "yo."

- Hazle todas las preguntas que tengas sobre la menstruación.
- Explicale lo que esperas o lo que temes de tener la menstruación.
- Menciona también cualquier otra cosa que consideres importante.

in Arabic here.

in French here.

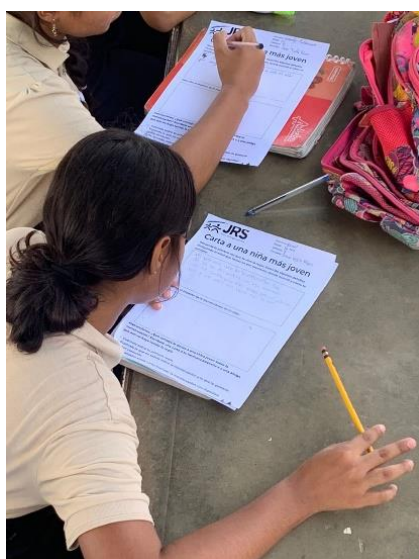
in Spanish [here](#).



## Reflection on JRS's 2024 MHH Letter-Writing Campaign

Contributed by Juanita Bedoya Palacio  
Regional Education Specialist, Latin America

Menstruation is something all women experience and have in common, regardless of migratory, economic, or cultural situation. As humanitarian workers, it is also important for us to reflect on our own life experiences, the paths we have walked, who we have walked them with, and the forms of violence we have experienced in our lives.



A girl in Zulia, Venezuela writes a letter to a Younger Girl.  
Photo Credit: JRS Venezuela

When I listened to my colleagues in Nairobi reading the letters they wrote to their daughters, my heart filled with hope. It made me think of all the girls and women in Latin America and around the world who are vulnerable both inside and outside of school because of their menstruation. It was hopeful to hear my colleagues acknowledge with open hearts that violence surrounds this issue, that it is something seldom discussed, and that it seriously affects the educational paths of girls in humanitarian contexts.

In Arauca (Colombia) and Caracas, Táchira, and Zulia (Venezuela), eighty-seven women joined the JRS MHH letter-writing campaign. This has been a great motivation to strengthen our GRE approach and create spaces where girls and women feel safe and cared for when talking about their menstruation. It is also a commitment to accompany, listen to, and not judge each other.

In these meetings, we heard from some women who feel alone, judged, and lack the necessary resources to manage their menstruation with dignity. These women have culturally faced a series of acts of violence and have been discriminated against not only for being migrants but also for being women who menstruate. We also heard from empowered women who are healing and redefining their relationship with menstruation and womanhood. These have been moments to connect, walk together, and convince us of the power of humanity. As women and humanitarian workers, we have a responsibility to ensure that people and their dignity are always at the heart of our actions.

## Ten Takeaways for Improving MHH Programming within JRS (to End the Stigma, Period.)

1

### Acknowledge MHH as a protection issue.

- Consider the MHH-related risks and needs of forcibly displaced people in emergency and protracted contexts.
- Engage girls and women for local insights and involve staff in coordination and cluster meetings to address MHH issues.

2

### Prioritize and address MHH in JRS Programming.

- Recognize menstruation-related protection issues and integrate MHH in all phases of Project Cycle Management.

3

### Include MHH in all project plans, including budgets.

- Ensure MHH is part of project planning and budgets to remove barriers for girls and women in JRS programming.
- Provide emergency period products within JRS projects and maintain WASH facilities.

4

### Coordinate MHH across JRS priority areas.

- Within JRS: Discuss and clarify MHH responsibilities between and within programme priority areas, including Advocacy, Education and Livelihoods, MHPSS, and Reconciliation.
- Beyond JRS: Clarify MHH responsibilities across sectors like Education, NFIs, Protection, Shelter, and WASH.

5

### Ensure comprehensive and ongoing MHH programming.

- Provide regular distribution of MHH supplies and upkeep of facilities within JRS projects.
- Ensure continuous, rather than one-off MHH activities.

6

### Collect MHH data & use MHH indicators.

- Include relevant indicators to measure the impact of MHH-related activities in your programming.
- Report MHH data annually to JRS IO.

### **Nurture an organizational culture that supports strong MHH programming and practice.**

**7**

- Regularly train JRS staff to comfortably discuss and integrate MHH activities in all JRS programme areas.
- Ensure finance and procurement staff understand the quality of and users' preferences around the different menstrual products that exist, while considering the environmental impacts of MHH products.

### **Engage boys and men.**

**8**

- Include boys and men in MHH activities to change harmful practices, tackle myths, and support gender equality.

### **Support female humanitarian workers, including Education personnel and teachers.**

**9**

- Address the shortage of female leadership and teachers by improving work conditions, including MHH-compliant facilities, to retain and support female staff.

### **Invest in MHH for broader impact.**

**10**

- Recognize that investing in MHH promotes better outcomes for girls and women, through GBV prevention, protection, SRHR, and WASH outcomes.
- Contribute to gender equality.



Primary school girls in South Sudan celebrate the distribution of menstrual pads provided by JRS.  
Photo Credit: JRS South Sudan

## Glossary

**Gender Equality:** Equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources, and rewards. ([UNFPA](#))

**Gender Equity:** The process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. ([UNFPA](#))

**Gender Responsive:** An approach that addresses the different situations, roles, needs, and interests of women, men, girls, and boys in the design and implementation of activities, policies, and programs. ([INEE](#))

**Gender Transformative:** An approach that addresses root causes of gender inequalities. It aims to challenge and change harmful gender norms, roles and power inequalities.

**Gender-Responsive Budget(ing):** A budget, or budgeting practices, that work for everyone (women and men, girls and boys) by ensuring gender-equitable distribution of resources and by contributing to equal opportunities for all. ([Oxfam](#))

**Menarche:** The first occurrence of menstruation. The age of menarche varies considerably between populations.

**Menstrual Equity:** Equal access to safe, affordable, and available menstrual products for everyone who needs them. ([Jennifer Weiss-Wolf](#))

**Menstrual Health (MH):** 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. ([UN Water](#))

**Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH):** MHM and the broader systemic factors that link menstruation with education, empowerment, equity, gender equality, health, rights, and well-being. These systematic factors include accurate and timely knowledge, availability of safe and affordable materials, well-informed and comfortable professionals, referral and access to health services, sanitation and washing facilities, safe and hygienic disposal methods, positive social norms, and strong advocacy and policy. ([UNICEF](#))

**Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM):** Refers to a situation in which menstruating individuals are using menstrual materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. (Adapted from [Columbia University's online course on Menstruation in a Global Context: Addressing Policy and Practice](#))

**Menstrual Materials:** Products or items worn inside or outside the body to absorb or collect blood and tissue that comes out of the vagina during menstruation. These include cloths, disposable or reusable pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or period underwear. (Adapted from [Columbia University's online course on Menstruation in a Global Context: Addressing Policy and Practice](#))

**Menstrual Stigma:** Negative perception of menstruation and those who menstruate. It characterizes the menstruating body as abnormal. Socio-cultural norms enforced stigma by spreading the idea that menstruation is shameful and has to be hidden. Efforts focused on menstrual hygiene, do nothing to address menstrual stigma. (Adapted from [Olson MM, Alhelou N, Kavattur PS, Rountree L, Winkler IT](#))

**Menstrual Supplies:** Supportive tools needed for the effective and hygienic management of one's period. These items include buckets and soap. (Adapted from [Columbia University's online course on Menstruation in a Global Context: Addressing Policy and Practice](#))

**Menstruation:** The monthly vaginal discharge of blood and other materials from the lining of the uterus from about puberty to menopause (the point at which a woman stops ovulating and menstruating), except during pregnancy. ([Office on Women's Health](#))

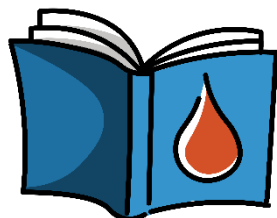
**Period Poverty:** Inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and educations, including but not limited to menstrual products, washing facilities, and waste management. ([Alexandra Alvarez](#))

**Period Tax:** Also referred to as the 'tampon tax,' is the taxation on menstrual products as "non-essential" items. ([Leah Rodriguez](#))

**Period-Friendly Toilet:** Toilets that meet a number of requirements, including access to Menstrual Hygiene Materials, accessibility to all, safety and privacy, and proper waste disposal management system. ([Menstrual Hygiene Day](#))



## Resources



The following resources provide guidance, practical tools, and support for JRS teams to strengthen comprehensive MHH programming. Keep in mind that due to the evolving field, resources use different terminology. Older resources tend to use the term MHM. More recent resources and many organizations have shifted to using the term MHH.

### MHM and Humanitarian Response Resources:

- [A Toolkit for Integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management \(MHM\) into Humanitarian Response](#)
- [Compendium of Menstrual Disposal, Waste Management and Laundering](#) published by the GATE team at Columbia University in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee (2020).

### More Gender & MHH Resources:

- [Menstrual Hygiene Matters](#), 2017.
- [Menstrual Hygiene Matters, training guide for practitioners](#), 2017.
- [Addressing menstrual hygiene management needs: guide and tools for Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#) by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), 2019.
- [Menstrual Hygiene Management: Operational Guidelines](#) by Save the Children, 2015.
- [Menstrual health and hygiene management: a module for gender empowerment - UNESCO Digital Library](#)
- [Female-Friendly, Public, and Community Toilets: A Guide for Planners & Decisionmakers](#), by WaterAid, UNICEF, & Sanitation for the Urban Poor, (2018)
- [Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene](#) by UNICEF, 2019.

- [Guidebook on Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management](#) by UNESCO, 2014. [Priority List of Indicators for Girls' Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Technical Guidance for National Monitoring](#), by Global MHH Monitoring Group, 2022.

### Other Resources:

- [Menstruation in a Global Context: Addressing Policy and Practice](#), an online course developed by the Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning, along with instructors from the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. It consists of seven modules that can be accessed at your own pace, featuring case studies and lectures presented by global experts.
- [Menstrual Memos](#), a biweekly newsletter that inspires and shares worldwide MHH updates from the private and public sectors.
- [The Period Posse](#) is a monthly webinar series that features MHH experts from policy, practice, and the research fields who discuss key emerging issues.

### JRS Articles and Resources:

- MHH Letter-Writing Activity in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#)
- [Girls' Club Curriculum and Facilitator Manual](#) (Coming Soon in French!)
- [Girls' Club Workbook](#) (Coming Soon in French!)
- State of MHH in JRS 2023 in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#)
- [3 ways to improve girls' access to secondary education - JRS](#)
- [Chad: Menstrual hygiene management \(MHM\) and inclusive education take center stage - JRS](#)
- [JRS Chad: Building for Girls' Safety and Inclusion - JRS USA](#)

## Appendix: Data on People Served by Region and Country

By region/country	Pillar I			Pillar II			Pillar III		
	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M
<b>Asia Pacific (APR)</b>									
Myanmar							168	102	66
<b>Total APR</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	168	102	66
<b>Eastern Africa (EAR)</b>									
Burundi	5,000	5,000					5,000	5,000	
Ethiopia	400	400							
Kenya	926	850	76	3,820	1,378	2,442	16,675	6,208	10,467
Tanzania	515	515							
Uganda	318	172	146				425	240	185
South Sudan	3,439	3,439							
<b>Total EAR</b>	10,598	10,376	222	3,820	1,378	2,442	22,100	11,448	10,652
<b>West Africa &amp; Great Lakes (WAF)</b>									
CAR	-			-			-		
Chad	16,157	16,157	-	25,595	11,599	13,996	50,078	23,970	26,108
Nigeria	316	192	124	-	-	-	1,479	1,059	420
<b>Total WAF</b>	16,473	16,349	124	25,595	11,599	13,996	51,557	25,029	26,528

### Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Iraq	400	400		276	276		400	400	
Jordan				448	448				
Lebanon				3,080	3,080		16	16	
Syria				1,684	1,684				
<b>Total MENA</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5,488</b>	<b>5,488</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>-</b>

### Latin American & Caribbean (LAC)

Colombia	168	168					18	18	
Venezuela							63	63	
<b>Total LAC</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>-</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>27,639</b>	<b>27,293</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>34,903</b>	<b>18,465</b>	<b>16,438</b>	<b>74,322</b>	<b>37,076</b>	<b>37,246</b>
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