

The Spanish region of Catalonia offers women and girls free and reusable menstruation products

March 5 2024, by JOSEPH WILSON and RENATA BRITO



A woman receives an underwear for periods free of charge at a pharmacy in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, March 5, 2024. Spain's Catalonia region rolled out this week a pioneering women's health initiative that offers millions of women reusable menstruation products for free. Some 2.5 million women in northeast Spain can receive one menstrual cup, one pair of underwear for periods, and two packages of cloth pads at local pharmacies free of charge. Credit: AP

Photo/Emilio Morenatti

Spain's Catalonia region rolled out a pioneering women's health initiative this week that offers reusable menstruation products for free.

About 2.5 million women, girls, transgender and nonbinary people who menstruate can receive one menstrual cup, one pair of underwear for periods and two packages of cloth pads at local pharmacies in northeast Spain free of charge.

The Catalan government said that the initiative, which is called "My period, my rules," was meant to "guarantee the right to menstrual equity." The regional government cited statistics that said 23% of women polled by Catalonia's public opinion office said they had reused hygiene products designed for a single use for economic reasons.

Tània Verge, Catalonia's regional minister for equality and feminism, called the program a "global first."

Scotland's government passed a law in 2020 to ensure period products are available for free to anyone who needs them. But in comparison with the Catalan program, in Scotland the products are for single use and are distributed through schools, colleges and universities, not pharmacies.

"We are fighting menstrual poverty, which affects one in four women in Catalonia, but is also about gender justice. We are fighting the stereotypes and taboos about menstruation," Verge told The Associated Press. "And (...) it is about climate justice. We need to reduce the tons of waste generated by single-use menstrual products."

The distribution of reusable products is also aimed at reducing waste.

The regional government said that Catalonia produces about 9,000 tons of waste from single-use menstrual hygiene products.

The reusable products are acquired by the public health care system, which covers the entire population, and distributed by Catalonia's 3,000-plus private pharmacies. The program cost the regional government 8.5 million euros (\$9.2 million).

"I am completely in favor of this initiative," 29-year-old graphic designer Laura Vilarasa said. "It will give women a product that is absolutely necessary to have for zero cost."

Spain's national government passed a law last year granting women with debilitating menstrual pain the right to paid medical leave.

Spain is gearing up for International Women's Day on March 8, when the European country holds some of the biggest marches for women's rights in the world.

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Citation: The Spanish region of Catalonia offers women and girls free and reusable menstruation products (2024, March 5) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-03-spanish-region-catalonia-women-girls.html>

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