

Menstrual Product Standards Advocacy Toolkit

Enabling the development and adoption of menstrual product standards in LMICs & advancing participation in ISO TC 338*

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* LMIC, low- and middle-income country; ISO TC 338, International Organization for Standardization Technical Committee 338 on Menstrual Products.

Key Takeaways



1.89 billion people living in LMICs will need menstrual products by 2035. Harmonized product standards are critical to meeting this essential need.



The opportunity is time-sensitive. Global menstrual product standards are being developed now and will shape markets and product access for generations.



To be effective, harmonized global standards must be LMIC-grounded, co-created with local technical expertise, reflecting sociocultural realities while leveraging shared learning across countries.



LMIC participation in ISO TC 338 is essential to ensure standards reflect diverse contexts and can be readily adopted.



Multi-stakeholder coordination at a country level is the foundation for effective advocacy and technical contribution to ISO TC 338.



Early planning for adoption prevents implementation bottlenecks and ensures standards translate to real-world impact.



Every country stakeholder has a role, from mapping landscapes to contributing technical expertise to building consumer awareness.



Benefits of harmonized global menstrual product standards are clear—they improve safety and quality, expand consumer choice and agency, reduce stigma, and support efficient markets and effective regulation.

Why global harmonized standards for menstrual products matter

Menstrual health is a critical public health, gender equality, and economic issue. 1.72 billion people who menstruate live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs); a number projected to rise to 1.89 billion by 2035. Yet more than one-third of menstruators in LMICs are unable to fully meet their needs using purpose-made menstrual products, relying instead on materials like cotton wool, tissue, and old rags that compromise their health, dignity, and participation in daily life.

Meeting this scale of need requires more than public distribution programs alone. Well-functioning markets are essential to ensure sustained access, affordability, product choice, and innovation. In this context, product standards are a critical market enabler.

Most countries have either no quality standards for menstrual products or highly varying quality standards for only one or two product categories. The absence of harmonized global standards exposes consumers to unsafe products, raises costs for manufacturers, and limits trade and innovation—disproportionately affecting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). This limits affordability and choice for consumers. Limited access to affordable and quality menstrual products also limits governments' ability to achieve key development targets relevant for girls and women, such as health, education, and workforce participation.

1.72 BN

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How stakeholders can participate in global standards development

Recognizing this gap, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) established Technical Committee 338 (ISO TC 338) in 2022 to develop global, harmonized standards for all menstrual products, across product types. The TC was set up by ISO based on an initial proposal by the Swedish stakeholders through the Swedish Institute for Standards (SIS) to the Committee on Consumer Policy within ISO and a subsequent ballot where national standards bodies across the globe voted “Yes” to kick off this work.

This process represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the technical benchmarks for menstrual product quality, safety, performance, and market access.

National standards bodies (NSB) are the official country representatives to ISO TC 338 and are responsible for nominating experts from their countries to the committee. At the country level, these experts are members of the national mirror committee (NMC) or other related technical committees, and include industry experts and manufacturers, testing and laboratory experts, development partners/civil society representatives, academics and researchers, consumer groups, government stakeholders, and other interested parties.

Organizations can also participate in ISO TC 338 as external liaisons, e.g., the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the European Nonwovens Association, and the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry nominate experts directly to the TC as external liaisons and do not work with individual NSBs.



ISO TC 338 was set up with SIS as its secretariat, and its scope was defined by members as follows:

Standardization in the field of menstrual products, covering all products intended for both single and multiple use, regardless of material.



For individuals or organizations to participate in ISO TC 338, a direct request first has to be made to the NSB for nomination as an expert to the NSB/NMC, and then by the NSB to ISO TC 338.

Why LMIC participation in ISO TC 338 is essential

ISO TC 338 currently has 55 members, of which 31 represent LMICs (access the full list of members [here](#)). While LMIC participation in ISO TC 338 has increased over the years, especially since 2024 due to supportive provisions available from ISO and SIS, many regions across the world remain poorly represented (e.g., East Asia and Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). Securing wider representation is necessary to ensure that global standards for menstrual products are relevant to LMIC contexts, aligned with existing regulations, sensitive to sociocultural contexts, representative of LMIC-specific expertise, and informed by the shared challenges and lessons from these countries.

- 1 : LMICs represent the majority of current and future users:** LMICs are home to the largest and fastest-growing population of menstruators and the fastest-growing menstrual product markets. Standards developed without robust LMIC input risk reflecting assumptions, technologies, cost structures, and regulatory capacities that are misaligned with where most users live and where future demand will concentrate.
- 2 : Standards must reflect diverse contexts and constraints:** Menstrual products in LMICs are produced, imported, distributed, and used within highly diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and infrastructural contexts. LMIC manufacturers face different realities related to raw materials, production technologies, testing access and capacity, and financing. Without LMIC technical voices at the table, standards may unintentionally privilege large manufacturers or high-income-country contexts, making adoption and compliance difficult and/or costly in LMICs.
- 3 : Participation increases adoption and real-world impact:** Countries that actively contribute to global standards development are more likely to adopt and enforce those standards nationally. Early LMIC engagement through NSBs and NMCs builds technical familiarity, political buy-in, and institutional readiness, reducing delays and bottlenecks once ISO standards are published.
- 4 : LMIC participation strengthens equity and legitimacy:** ISO standards are consensus-based. For menstrual product standards to be truly global and equitable, they must be co-created with the countries and communities most affected. Meaningful LMIC participation ensures that global benchmarks safeguard consumer health and dignity without reinforcing inequities or excluding under-resourced markets.
- 5 : The window to influence standards is time-bound:** ISO TC 338 is actively developing standards now. The TC is developing two standards, one on general and safety requirements for menstrual products and one on menstrual products-related vocabulary, which are expected to be published by December 2027.

Countries that do not engage during this phase may later face the choice of adopting standards they did not help shape or remaining outside harmonized frameworks, with consequences for consumer safety, trade, and market development. The opportunity to influence content, scope, and feasibility is now.

Call to Action

We call on technical and advocacy experts working in LMICs to engage with industry, technical experts, and government stakeholders, including the national standards body in their countries, to ensure LMIC participation and active contribution to ISO TC 338.

This Advocacy Toolkit was developed to demystify ISO TC 338, make the case for engagement, and equip LMIC stakeholders with practical tools to drive participation, adoption, and impact. It is grounded in insights from LMIC experts across regions and sectors, including NSBs, manufacturers, civil society organizations, researchers, and ISO TC 338 members. This Advocacy Toolkit provides country stakeholders with the following:

1. Clear rationale for menstrual product standards

The toolkit explains how the absence of harmonized standards:

- Exposes consumers to unsafe or poor-quality products.
- Raises costs and limits choice and affordability.
- Creates unnecessary trade barriers and compliance burdens.
- Undermines government efforts to advance health, education, gender equality, and economic growth.

It also articulates the multi-stakeholder benefits of harmonized standards for consumers, industry, and governments, linking standards to development outcomes and Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Practical guidance on engaging with ISO TC 338

The toolkit clearly outlines:

- How ISO and ISO TC 338 are structured.
- The roles of NSBs, NMCs, and participating and observing members.
- Pathways for individual experts, civil society organizations, industry actors, and researchers to contribute through national processes or as external liaisons.

This guidance addresses a major barrier to LMIC participation: lack of awareness of how to engage and why it matters.

3. Step-by-step advocacy strategies

Stakeholders are guided through actionable steps to:

- Map national menstrual product markets and standards landscape.
- Convene inclusive, multi-stakeholder platforms.
- Engage governments, NSBs, and media to build demand for standards.
- Support NSBs to initiate or strengthen participation in ISO TC 338.

Tools such as market-mapping templates, NSB engagement checklists, country status frameworks, and “making the case” presentation outlines translate advocacy into practice.

4. Emphasis on inclusive, multi-stakeholder coordination

The toolkit highlights the importance of bringing together government, industry (including MSMEs), civil society, technical experts, and consumer groups. It showcases how coordinated platforms amplify influence, strengthen technical inputs, and ensure under-represented voices, particularly from LMIC manufacturers and users, are reflected in standards development.

5. Forward-looking focus on adoption and implementation

The toolkit is forward-looking, recommending early planning for:

- Regulatory alignment.
- Laboratory and testing capacity.
- MSME compliance support.
- Consumer awareness and market readiness.
- Regional collaboration and technology transfer.

By encouraging countries to think beyond participation toward rollout, the toolkit helps ensure standards translate into real improvements in menstrual product access, quality, and affordability.

Conclusion

ISO TC 338 represents a pivotal moment to reshape menstrual product markets globally. LMIC participation is essential to ensure that standards are relevant, equitable, adoptable, and impactful where the majority of menstruators live.

This Advocacy Toolkit provides a clear roadmap for action. By equipping LMIC stakeholders to engage strategically with NSBs, governments, industry, and ISO TC 338, it enables countries to move from the margins of global standard-setting to its center. The choices made, and voices included, during this process will shape menstrual health, dignity, and opportunity for millions of people for generations to come.