SAFE ACCESS TO WASH FACILITIES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Introduction

Ensuring equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities is fundamental to promoting public health, dignity, and gender equality worldwide. Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene not only improves individual well-being but also contributes to community development and economic prosperity. However, disparities in access to WASH facilities persist, particularly affecting marginalised groups. The global community has set itself the goal to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all as the sixth sustainable development goal (SDG). Moreover, initiatives such as the Water Framework Directive (WFD) focus on ensuring water and health for all wildlife and human needs, acting against pollution. The following action recommendations build on these global Goals, specifying enhancements to accessibility, inclusivity, and safety of public WASH facilities in the Balkan region. By advocating for infrastructure enhancements, awareness programs, community engagement initiatives, maintenance and cleanliness improvements, enhanced security measures, and improved lighting and visibility, we aim to create environments that cater to the diverse needs of all individuals, ensuring that no one is left behind in accessing essential WASH services.

Recommendations for action

Infrastructure enhancements

Infrastructural barriers are a significant obstacle to the accessibility of WASH facilities for all in each community. It is often overlooked that there are specific infrastructural barriers for various, especially marginalised, groups in society. Thus, one must look into the gender-specific, generational, and disability-specific needs of each community to ensure that WASH facilities are designed to address the unique needs and safety concerns of each community.

Overall, we first recommend doing thorough assessments of existing facilities to identify barriers and then fixing or even upgrading them for better accessibility.
Moreover, it is very important to construct the infrastructure in a manner that reduces the risk of natural disasters enhanced by climate change. In the Balkan region, such hazards include fires, floods and earthquakes.

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Gender-Specific infrastructural accessibility features

Women and gender minorities must be guaranteed privacy and security in WASH facilities. Furthermore, facilities should be gender-friendly. Women and girls in all their diversity will need WASH facilities for menstrual care and other procedures that put them in more vulnerable positions than men. **Overall, the placement, privacy, and security of the WASH facility must be evaluated and fixed correctly as soon as possible.** Specific strategies and more specific recommendations will follow in the next several paragraphs.

Accessibility features for people with disabilities

Since advancing accessibility for people with disabilities is, first and foremost, an infrastructural issue, the following aspects should be considered when enhancing the infrastructure of WASH facilities: **Install ramps, handrails, and wide doorways to accommodate individuals with disabilities and ensure overall easy access.** For example, ramps should not be too steep or unreachable. The following recommendations are more ways to ensure inclusivity for disabled people in WASH facilities.

Awareness Programs

Raising awareness in society about WASH facilities is crucial to their advancement. Moreover, awareness empowers people to advocate for their rights to safe and equitable access to WASH facilities. Such measures foster a culture of awareness and accountability towards gender equality.

1. Develop educational campaigns, such as community outreach, school programs, and media campaigns, to promote understanding of WASH rights.
2. Conduct educational campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining clean WASH facilities and proper hygiene practices.
3. Maintenance training for facility managers and staff on proper maintenance techniques and hygiene standards.

Educated communities are better equipped to take care of the facilities and ensure their sustainability. The training sessions also help to build local capacity and promote healthy hygiene practices.

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Best practices for awareness programs in the Balkan region:

Community Education and Training in Kosovo*: In Kosovo*, education and training sessions are provided to community members on the importance of WASH, facility maintenance, and hygiene practices. These sessions are led by trained local facilitators and aim to increase awareness and knowledge within the community [1].

Community engagement

Implementing these recommendations will allow each community to identify issues early on and adjust in a timely manner. Moreover, user satisfaction and facility effectiveness will improve. In addition, by implementing these community engagement initiatives, organizations in the Balkan region can ensure that WASH facilities are designed and managed to truly meet the community's needs. At the same time, ensuring that facilities are inclusive, culturally appropriate, and sustainable in the long term.

1. Involve communities in decision-making processes for improved facility design.
2. Inclusive planning and designing by involving community members, especially women and marginalized groups.
3. Feedback mechanisms of users to engage actively in bettering the facilities.
4. Organize regular community clean-up days to foster community awareness and engagement for maintenance and understanding of WASH facilities.
5. Organize topic-related activities during UN days such as MHM, World Environment Day, World Clean-up Day, Global Handwashing Day, World Toilet Day, and World Water Day.

Best practices for community engagement initiatives in the Balkan region:

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project: This project involves local communities in the planning, implementation, and maintenance of rural water supply and sanitation systems. Community members participate in identifying needs, designing solutions, and overseeing construction [1].

[1[based on the project partners experience

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North Macedonian participatory design workshops: In North Macedonia, participatory design workshops were conducted in several municipalities (Veles, Kumanovo, Kisela Voda, Resen and Tetovo) to involve community members in the planning and design of new WASH facilities. These workshops included activities such as mapping, model building, and prioritisation exercises [1].

Feedback Mechanisms in Albania: In Albania, feedback mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, community meetings, and digital platforms have been implemented to gather input from users about the functionality and safety of WASH facilities. These mechanisms allow for continuous community input and timely adjustments [1].

Integrated and transboundary river basin cooperation in Ukraine and Moldova: The Water Cooperation for the Dniester River showcases the crucial role of civil society and feminist organisations in water diplomacy [1].

Maintenance and cleanliness improvements

Regular maintenance is crucial for ensuring the cleanliness and functionality of public WASH facilities, especially in the long term. Emphasising the importance of consistent upkeep not only enhances hygiene standards but also promotes a positive user experience, contributing to overall satisfaction and well-being.

1. Emphasise the importance of regular maintenance for cleanliness.
2. Invest in durable materials and long-lasting infrastructure to ensure less maintenance effort
3. Conduct regular inspections and cleaning to ensure facilities are clean, safe, and well-maintained by:
4. Establishing routine schedules (a checklist with maintenance tasks)
5. Hiring professional cleaning services
6. Ensuring the availability of hygiene supplies such as soap, toilet paper, hand sanitiser, and menstrual hygiene products, especially in schools and municipal and public buildings.
7. Ensure that facilities are stocked with essential hygiene supplies such as soap, toilet paper, and menstrual hygiene products.

8. Develop an emergency response plan to quickly address urgent issues such as plumbing failures or sanitation hazards.
9. Install user feedback mechanisms as a WASH facility monitoring system.

Best practices for maintenance and cleanliness improvements in the Balkan region:

WSSP program in the Balkans: This program, which takes place in many rural schools in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, has advocated for the improvement of WASH facilities. One aspect they emphasise is the implementation of supplies such as soap, toilet paper and menstrual hygiene products [1].

Enhanced security measures

Advocating for increased security features like surveillance cameras and emergency systems.

Best practices for enhanced security measures in the Balkan region:

Unfortunately, we were not able to find best practice examples for the security measures recommendation.

Existing initiatives and programs on a global scale

The following initiatives combat the issue of accessibility on a global scale or in regions outside the Balkans. These can be seen as further examples that can inspire solution design and implementation in the Balkan region. Although the focus might differ due to the region's specific community needs, it is necessary to examine other best practices as well to ensure the smooth implementation of one's activities. Especially when it comes to WASH facilities, it is essential to keep in mind that one place's best solution might not be that of another place; this is the case when comparing the Balkan region to others, but also when comparing different places within the Balkans. When examining best practices, rather than copying them to your region, look for how other regions implemented the solutions best suited to your situation and community.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the recommendations outlined in this letter document are essential steps towards increasing safe access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities for non-male genders all, with a focus on gender-based solutions for disabled people and minors' needs. By focusing on infrastructure enhancements, awareness programs, community engagement initiatives, maintenance and cleanliness improvements, enhanced security measures, and improved lighting and visibility, we can create inclusive and secure environments that cater to the diverse needs of women and marginalized groups. These actions not only address the physical infrastructure requirements but also promote awareness, empowerment, and community involvement in ensuring equitable access to WASH facilities. By advocating for gender-sensitive facility design, educational campaigns on WASH rights, community-led decision-making processes, regular maintenance practices, enhanced security features, and improved lighting conditions, we can foster a culture of inclusivity and safety for all individuals using public WASH facilities.

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