



Right to Sanitation

Working Paper WECF
*Women in Europe
for a Common Future*
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*EcoSan toilets in Garla Mare,
Romania*

WECF vision on the right to sanitation

WECF promotes safe water and sanitation for all: It is our vision that by 2020 everyone has access to safe and affordable drinking water and sustainable sanitation. Adequate sanitation is considered indispensable for leading a life in human dignity, for ensuring cost-effective health systems, for promoting economic growth in developing countries and ensuring education for all – for both girls and boys. Therefore, sanitation should be treated as a human right. However, experience shows that pollution from sanitation can jeopardize the right to water.

Present situation

Nowadays, more than 100 million people in the EU, EECCA and SEE region experience a lack of access to safe sanitation. This fact makes people vulnerable to water-related diseases and can cause mortality. People living in rural areas, marginalized groups and poor people, women and children are particularly affected by the consequences of missing adequate sanitation. The lack of adequate sanitation particularly effects women's health and safety. Pit latrines and open defecation cause water contamination which can infringe on the right to clean water.

There is a growing recognition internationally of the human rights dimensions of access to safe sanitation. Some international treaties refer implicitly to the right to sanitation,

e.g. the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on Children's Rights. Other treaties, such as the 1999 UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, explicitly address sanitation. The protocol requires that States, in pursuing the aim of access to drinking water and sanitation, should be guided by principles, which are also fundamental from a human rights perspective, such as: access to information, public participation, and special consideration to vulnerable groups. One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to halve the proportion of people living without access to sanitation by 2015. Moreover, the right to sanitation is recognized by many UN member states in several political declarations.

However, sanitation has received low political priority by Governments and in national legal systems. The realization of adequate sanitation is perceived as expensive as conventional sanitation is often more expensive than establishing drinking water supply. Secondly, sanitation projects do not appeal as attractive as drinking water projects.

WECF vision on the realization of the right to sanitation

WECF demands the securing of the right to safe, sustainable, physically accessible and affordable sanitation for all, which is acceptable from a cultural and gender perspective. To achieve this goal WECF calls governments to integrate the right to sanitation in na-

tional legislation and constitutions. To bring the right to sanitation into practice, Governments should guarantee:

- Affordable and hygienic toilets for everybody in cities as well as in rural and remote areas.
- That every child has access to safe sustainable sanitation at school, whenever possible with separate toilets for boys and girls.
- Sustainable technologies that protect public health and the environment for present and future generations, thus in most cases requiring a basic treatment of wastewater, urine and faeces.
- Limiting the use of unsustainable sanitation technologies, which threaten drinking water protection.
- Assure affordability of sustainable sanitation systems via
 - Investment support (low interest rates, low tax rates, tax deduction, partial or full subsidies) for the sustainable sanitation installation for urban settlements, individual households, schools and other public buildings
 - Support for low income families unable to cover operation fees/ costs (cross-subsidising waste water charges, income support, sanitation solidarity fund)
 - Financial support for women-owned sanitation programmes.
- Access to information and possibility to participate in decision-making at all levels for communities and citizens – women and men - concerning the realization of sanitation facilities.
- Adequate monitoring of the provision of sanitation with community participation.
- Access to effective judicial and administrative remedies.
- Educational programs and capacity building to ensure sustainable and safe water, sanitation and hygiene as a regular subject.

In short, WECF states that every person has the right to a minimum access to sustainable sanitation serv-

ices. Governments have the obligation to ensure the realization of this right in such a way that no population group is excluded and that services are delivered in a sustainable manner consistent with human rights standards.

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WECF's mission

WECF strives for a Healthy Environment for All. We enhance women's potential to balance decision making processes, environment, health and economy. WECF works in the Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia region and our activities are based on the countries and our partners' visions and needs. Therefore WECF in cooperation with its members and other stakeholders, implements solutions locally and influences policy internationally.

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