

Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers

Briefing note

Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers aims to help local authorities, planners and others responsible for sanitation provision to better understand the requirements of women and girls using public and community toilets. The guide will support them to meet these requirements, with practical suggestions for planning, implementation and operational processes. This briefing note presents the highlights of the guide and an overview of the subject of female-friendly toilets.



Figure 1: An example of the exterior of a female-friendly toilet block.

Credit: WaterAid/ Verónica Grech

Why focus on female-friendly public and community toilets?

Sanitation is a basic human right. Sustainable Development Goal 6 calls for universal access to sanitation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. However, many people, in particular women and girls, often still cannot go to the toilet when and where they need or want.

In addition to a lack of household toilets, in many low- and middle-income countries there are often also too few public and community toilets. Those that do exist are usually not planned, designed or managed to be female-friendly or accessible to all.

Women and girls have different requirements from men and boys, due to both biological factors (including menstruation and pregnancy) and social norms and realities (including greater risks of harassment and sexual violence, and increased likelihood of being caregivers). Without well designed public toilets, women and girls face restrictions to their movement, which reduces their ability to participate in economic, community and public life.

Essential features of female-friendly public and community toilets

The guide provides detailed information on the essential and desirable features that make toilets female-friendly. The essential features are summarised here:

1. Safe and private

- Separate male and female sections, with entrances facing different directions or far enough apart to maintain privacy.
- Easy and safe to access in an unhidden location, avoiding rundown, dark or remote areas, ideally identified through consultations with women and girls.
- Well lit external and internal areas, especially when facilities are open at night.
- Trained male and female caretakers or toilet attendants present throughout open hours.
- Robust doors and structure that users can lock from the inside.
- Clear signs and directions in the local language pointing to the different toilet sections (male, female and accessible).



Figure 2: An example of the interior of a female-friendly toilet block.

Credit: WaterAid/ Verónica Grech



Figure 3: An example of the interior of a female-friendly toilet cubicle.

Credit: WaterAid/ Verónica Grech

2. Cater for menstrual and other hygiene management requirements

- Water and soap in each block for handwashing and cleaning reusable menstrual products, and bathing units where appropriate. Water access (tap or bucket) inside cubicles for safely managing menstruation, incontinence or diarrhoea or other illnesses.
- Access to affordable menstrual products in a visible place.
- Safe and culturally appropriate options for disposal of menstrual products inside the female toilet block, such as washable bins with lids.
- Hooks and ledges for keeping clothes and belongings off the floor.
- A mirror, ideally above handwashing stations, to enable self-care and encourage handwashing.

3. Accessible to all

- Close enough to homes or areas of activity.
- At least one toilet cubicle per section accessible for people with disabilities, which meets national or international guidelines for aspects including space in cubicles, support frames, door width and heights of features.
- An unobstructed, accessible path to the block that is well lit, and wide and flat enough for all users.

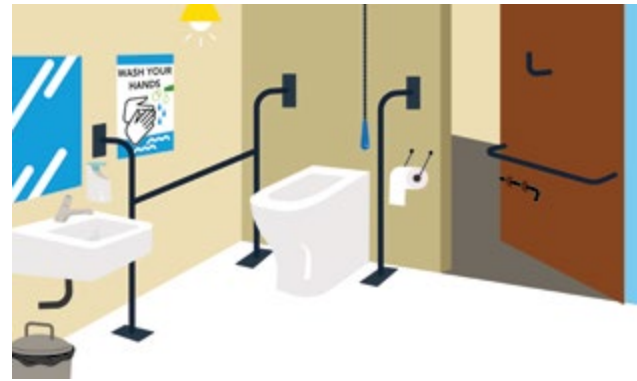


Figure 4: An example of the interior of a female-friendly and accessible cubicle.

Credit: WaterAid/ Verónica Grech

4. Affordable and available when needed

- If user fees are required they are affordable and appropriate, assessed in consultation with users. Fees should not disadvantage women because of their bodies or social roles, e.g. if men's urinals are free, women are not charged for urinating; and carers are not charged when accompanying others.
- Toilets are open when needed and meet the requirements of the community and/or surrounding area. Opening times are clearly displayed.
- There are more female cubicles to account for women needing more time and space in the toilet than men, and there are enough for the context.

5. Well maintained and managed

- A clean toilet is especially important for women and girls, who have to touch more parts of a toilet than men do. A frequent and reliable cleaning schedule should be in place, with means and resources allocated to ensure it is adhered to.
- Toilets are well maintained to keep them working, with a guaranteed and consistent water supply.
- Waste is safely and regularly removed and disposed of, including used menstrual products and soiled nappies, by the relevant bodies responsible for solid waste.
- Toilets are close to water supply networks, drainage, and, if present, sewer systems, to help faecal and liquid waste management. Where septic tanks are used they should be easy to access for sludge-emptying trucks and periodic desludging agreed with operators.
- Clear management arrangements are in place to ensure sustainability.

6. Meet the requirements of caregivers and parents

- A clean and safe baby-changing station.
- At least one family-friendly cubicle, spacious enough for the caregiver and the person they are caring for to be in the cubicle together without touching doors or walls.

Assessing and addressing gaps in city-wide and local implementation

The final section of the guide focuses on the processes connected to the planning and constructing or upgrading of public and community toilets so that they meet the requirements of women and girls.

To analyse the gaps in provision of community and public toilets, and the extent to which existing toilets meet female-friendly requirements, a participatory city-wide assessment is required. Mapping the information gathered from the assessment can provide a visual of the current provision and the potential solutions, including which areas need brand new, female-friendly toilets, and where upgrading and expanding substandard toilets to make them female-friendly is an option.

Use of participatory processes to understand the experiences and perspectives of existing and potential toilet users will then help determine the exact locations of new toilets, opening times, tariffs, aspects of operation and management, and which female-friendly features to prioritise. Leveraging other participatory processes that might already involve community members and the public is useful. However, prioritising the perspectives and perceptions of women and girls is crucial.

This assessment process, and wider efforts to improve provision, should not happen in isolation. It should be integrated with initiatives to improve household toilet provision and sanitation in institutions, and with existing or planned work on urban planning, slum upgrading or faecal waste management.

The guide provides a checklist of elements to consider in construction or upgrading, operation and maintenance, and monitoring phases.



Results of a mapping exercise of community toilets in Mathare, Kenya.

For more information

Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers provides detailed guidance, case studies and many links to practical resources.

Download the full guide at washmatters.wateraid.org/female-friendly-toilets

Acknowledgements

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