

WASH<sup>e</sup>paper

#4

October 2015 / Special issue

## **Building and operating sanitary facilities in refugee accommodation in Germany**

The WASH e-paper is an online magazine published at regular intervals in German and English. Each issue takes a closer look at a current key issue in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector and related areas. It also provides updates on forthcoming national and international events, highlights current publications and projects, and reports on news from the sector. The WASH e-paper is published by the [German Toilet Organization](#) in close cooperation with the [WASH Network](#) and the [Sustainable Sanitation Alliance](#).

### Issue no. 4

This **fourth issue of the WASH e-paper** is devoted to sanitary facilities in refugee accommodation in Germany against the background of the current situation in Germany. It is in large part based on an internal guidance document from the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) drawn up in a close partnership between THW and the German Toilet Organization. The aim of this issue is to provide guidance for everyone currently involved in WASH aspects of setting up, managing and/or maintaining refugee accommodation and to enable them adequately to address cultural specificities and requirements for toilet facilities. We hope you enjoying reading this issue.

---

## In this issue...

- 01 [Background / current concerns](#)
- 02 [Cultural diversity and specificities](#)
- 03 [Recommendations for building and using sanitary facilities in refugee accommodation](#)
- 04 [Calendar of key WASH events in 2015 / 2016](#)
- 05 [Recent WASH publications](#)

### 01

#### **Background / Current concerns**

The Syrian conflict that began in mid-March 2011 and its effects on European refugee policy have faced Germany with formidable challenges as it has begun receiving refugees in 2015. An escalation in the multi-front war in Syria has triggered a steady stream of refugees from the Middle East to Europe at the same time as people seeking help are arriving in Europe from all over the world, especially Afghanistan, Albania, Eritrea, Iraq, Kosovo, Macedonia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Serbia.

The German Government has made it clear that many of the people arriving from war-torn regions like Syria will stay for a long time. Across the country, therefore, new accommodation is being created: barracks stand ready to serve as initial reception centres, and concrete measures are being taken to integrate the people who will stay.



The federal government, federal states and municipalities are leaving no stone unturned in their efforts to register and accommodate the large number of people now seeking help. They are focusing on ensuring dignified conditions by taking account in the accommodation they provide of cultural factors. A large number of committed civil society stakeholders are providing invaluable support in this work.

In this issue, we present the cultural specificities and requirements for toilet facilities for anyone currently involved in WASH aspects of setting up, managing and maintaining refugee accommodation and make recommendations on the use of western-style sanitary facilities and on building or converting culturally appropriate sanitary facilities in Germany.

## 02

### **Cultural diversity and specificities**

#### **Types of toilet and their use**

The sit-down toilet is the most common type of toilet in Germany and most European countries. It offers a level of comfort that has become common in western cultures in recent decades. Mediterranean squat toilets are also in use in Europe, primarily in southern Europe, France, Poland, Romania, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia.



**Sit-down toilets:** a sit-down toilet (above left) typically has an integrated flushing system that flushes and cleans the inside of the toilet after use. The toilet seat makes it comfortable to use but may pose a greater hygiene risk, especially if a large number of people use the toilet over a lengthy period.

**Squat toilets:** about two thirds of people around the world defecate in the natural squatting position using squat toilets (above right). Unlike the sitting position, the squatting position prevents restriction of the rectum and thus allows for a natural bowel movement. In addition to the health benefits of the squatting position, this type of toilet also offers hygienic benefits, especially in public facilities, since only the soles of the user's feet touch the toilet pan. The toilet trough is also cleaned with water after use, either by a flushing system or manually by the user with a hose or water container.

## Toilets with and without a flush system

Both sit-down and squat toilets are available with and without a flushing system. Pit latrines are commonplace in a few parts of the world and are often also used for disposing of waste. In some cultures, sticks, stones and other materials are used for anal cleansing, which often end up in the latrine as well. Where flush toilets are used, this practice can block the pipe system or cause problems when suctioning faecal sludge from toilets with faecal sludge tanks.

## Anal hygiene in different cultures

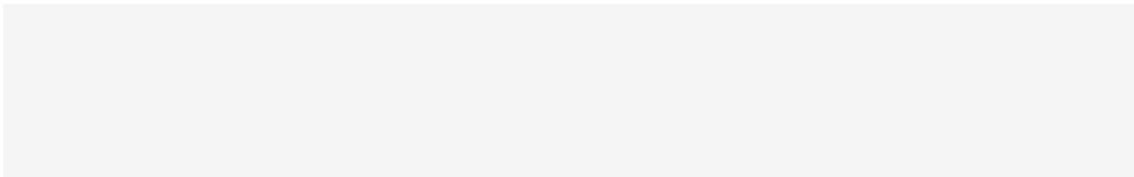
**Wiping:** wet or dry toilet paper is used for anal hygiene in Germany and most other European countries. Once used, toilet paper is thrown into the toilet for disposal. Dry cleaning materials, such as sticks and stones, are also used in some cultures.

**Washing:** water is used for anal hygiene (and after urination) in a number of cultures, including in the Muslim world. Water for cleansing is provided separately, using a hose or a bucket. As a rule, toilet paper is not used because of the rules and rituals prescribed by Islam.

## Characteristics and rituals in Islam

The lessons learned by THW and WASH Network organisations during many deployments and projects in different cultural regions mean that these projects now respect the prescribed rules and rituals when building sanitary facilities, especially in the Muslim world.

**Cleansing rituals (Islam):** rules governing ritual purity [tahara] in Islam include general rules of behaviour for urination and defecation. Children are taught the rules of bodily elimination from a young age, including the rules relating to modesty and the ban on the pubic area [aura] being shown openly. One fundamental rule is that when using the toilet, believers must not face or have their back to the direction of prayer [qibla]. Architects in Muslim countries have in the past had to design toilets in a way that avoids this problem. In modern architecture in a number of Muslim countries where these issues are less strictly observed, as well as in the Western world, believers [mumin] resolve this issue by turning slightly to the side if the toilet faces the direction of prayer [qibla]. Standing to urinate is frowned upon [makruh] in Islam, so practising Muslims cannot use western-style urinals intended to be used from a standing position, even with privacy screens. As a rule, the anal area is cleansed with water after defecation [maa], which is considered a prerequisite for ritual purity [tahara] (Eslam, 2015).



## Recommendations for building and using sanitary facilities in refugee accommodation

In Germany, public buildings, homes and mobile sanitary facilities almost always have only sit-down toilets. If these buildings are made available to accommodate asylum seekers, **damage**, **accidents**, severe **soiling** of sanitary facilities and pipe **blockages** can occur because of existing behavioural practices and a lack of experience with using these toilets. In order to adequately address these challenges, the following section provides recommendations for action and intervention in three core areas:

1. awareness-raising and education on hygiene,
2. adapting and converting existing facilities,
3. building new accommodation and sanitary facilities.

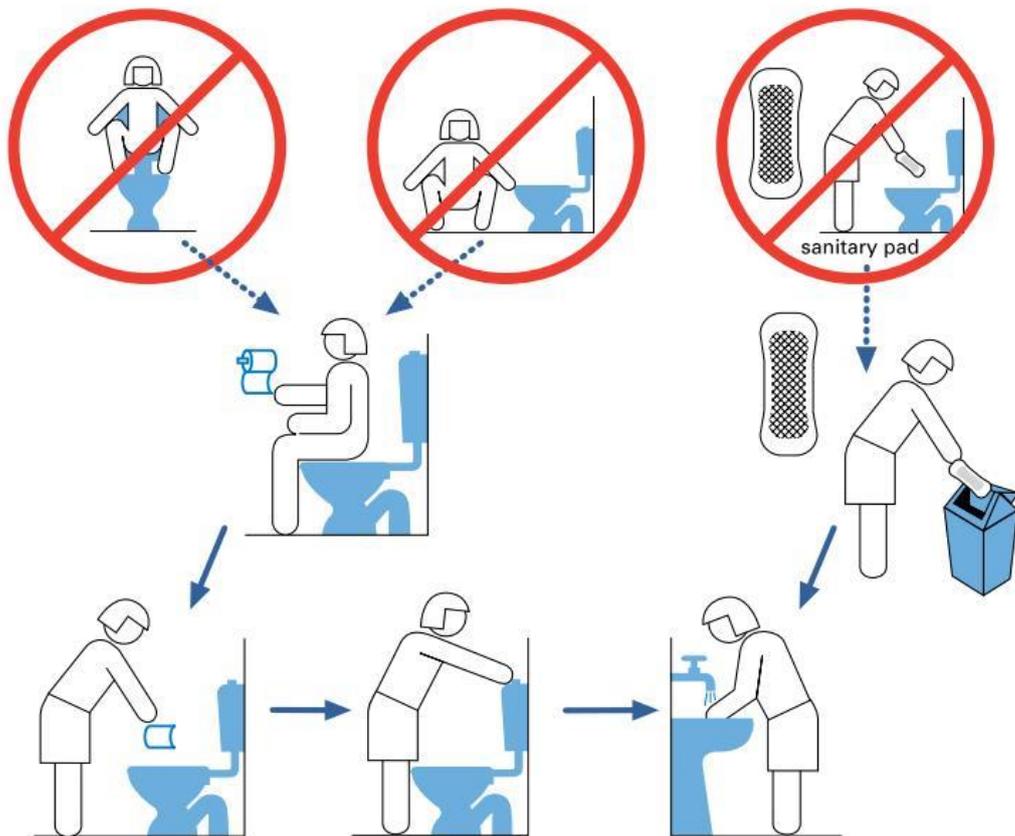
**As a basic rule, all facilities should ideally take account of both options for toilet use, and toilets (including infrastructure) for different cultures should be made available.**

### 1. Awareness-raising and education on hygiene

Appropriate hygiene advisors who already have experience of using sanitary facilities in the European cultural context should be deployed in refugee accommodation. Migrants from the Arab world (e.g. Syria) who already live in Germany could be used to guide others in how to use and take care of local sanitary facilities properly.

In addition, appropriate diagrams should be displayed in toilet facilities to demonstrate use (see the sample images from THW below, which are currently being used in international courses at its school in Neuhausen). Awareness-raising materials should be image-based or be translated to meet the needs of the user groups. The contents should illustrate the typical method of toilet use in Western cultures (sit-down toilets) and make clear that toilet paper is used for anal cleansing and then disposed of in the toilet. It is also important to illustrate how to handle materials for menstrual hygiene and child hygiene and to address the importance of hand-washing with soap. Tips to raise awareness should, of course, be accompanied by the relevant practical infrastructure.

## How to use the toilet the right way ...



Thank you very much!

## Adapting and converting existing facilities

Where hygiene advisors cannot be deployed, the option of adapting existing toilet facilities by converting them should be considered, especially if facilities are to be used by international asylum seekers in the longer term. This may take the form of replacing some sit-down toilets with squat toilets. It should be noted, however, that the drainpipe and water connections are often not completely compatible and that squat toilets may need to be raised to guarantee proper drainage.

There should also be a water supply in toilet cubicles for anal cleansing; this may be either a hose or a bucket, depending on the layout.

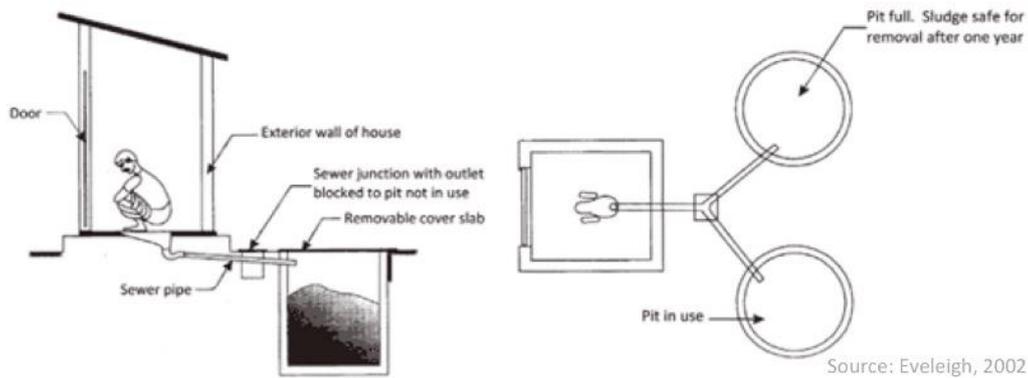
Purchasing or acquiring simple aids can also improve use of existing toilet facilities; these include portable stools or platforms (see images below). When adapting sanitary infrastructure, it is imperative to consider the special needs of children, women and people with physical or other limitations. There is already a substantial body of practical advice on inclusive thinking, which should be used. Safety and security should also be considered in heavily populated residential areas: toilets should be properly lit and located so as to deter physical attacks.



### **Requirements for future facilities (new construction)**

When new accommodation is built, sanitary facilities should ideally be equipped with both sit-down and squat toilets, allowing both cultures easily to use sanitary facilities. Toilet paper and water should also be made available for cleansing.

If temporary or portable toilets are used during construction, both sit-down and squat toilets should be ordered. Since squat toilets are often very hard or impossible to source in Germany, making enquiries through suppliers in France, the Arab world or Asia is recommended.



Freestanding toilets in camps can be built using simple methods. The illustration above shows the structure of a latrine with its own sewage tank or pit that can be built at short notice in open areas.

## 04

### Calendar of key WASH events in 2015 / 2016

18-22 October 2015  
Jordan

**IWA Water and Development Congress**

26-30 October 2015  
Chapel Hill, US

**2015 Water and Health Conference**

2-6 November 2015  
Amsterdam, the Netherlands

**3rd Amsterdam International Water Week**

11-12 November 2015 **Bonn WASH Nutrition Forum**  
Bonn, Germany

---

19 November 2015 **World Toilet Day** (Theme: Sanitation and Nutrition)

---

18-20 November 2015 **UN High-Level Water and Sanitation Days**

---

18-21 November 2015 **International Conference on Terra Preta Sanitation**  
Goa, India

---

11-13 January 2016 **SACOSAN VI**  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

---

22 March 2016 **World Water Day**

---

April 2016 **SWA High Level Meeting** (tbc)  
Washington, US

---

23-24 May 2016 **World Humanitarian Summit**  
Istanbul, Turkey

---

May 2016 **21st SuSanA Meeting**  
Location tbc

---

16-20 May 2016  
Brisbane, Australia

**WASH Futures 2016 Conference**

---

May 2016  
Peru

**LatinoSAN 2016**

---

28 May 2016

**Menstrual Hygiene Day**

---

30 May-3 June 2016  
Munich, Germany

**IFAT**

---

11-15 July 2016  
Ghana

**39th International WEDC Conference**

---

28 August-2 September 2016  
Stockholm, Sweden

**Stockholm World Water Week**

---

August 2016  
Stockholm, Sweden

**22nd SuSanA Meeting**

---

9-13 October 2016  
Brisbane, Australia

**IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition**

---

15 October 2016

**Global Handwashing Day**

---

17-20 October 2016  
Quito, Ecuador

**UN Habitat III**

19 November 2016

**World Toilet Day**

Jan/Feb 2017  
Location tbc

**FSM 4: 4th International Faecal Sludge Management Conference**

05

**Recent WASH publications**



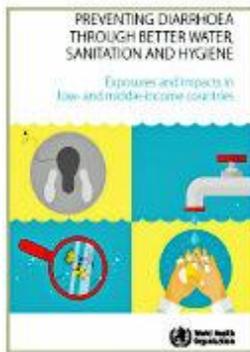
**25 Years Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water**

*2015 Update and MDG Assessment*

*Publisher: UNICEF and WHO (Joint Monitoring Programme - JMP)*

*Year: 2015*

This report reports on global progress on water supply and sanitation from 1990, when the WHO Joint Monitoring Programme was launched, to 2015. Part 1 provides an overview of progress against parameters specified in the MDG targets for water and sanitation in both rural and urban regions. The report places a particular focus on inequalities between urban and rural regions and between the most affluent and the poorest sections of the population. Part 2 provides a retrospective analysis of the evolution of water supply and sanitation and hygiene education based on observations over the past 25 years.



## **Preventing diarrhoea through better water, sanitation and hygiene: exposures and impacts in low- and middle-income countries**

*Publisher: WHO, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health*

*Year: 2014*

This document provides an overview of the latest results relating to the burden of diarrhoeal disease from inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). It is based on a series of academic publications by 14 collaborating research institutions and paints a picture of how further progress can be made in the incomplete global WASH agenda.



## **Sanitation safety planning: manual for safe use and disposal of wastewater, greywater and excreta**

*Publisher: WHO, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health*

*Year: 2015*

Sanitation safety planning (SSP) is a step-by-step risk-based approach to supporting implementation of the 2006 WHO Guidelines for the Safe Use of Wastewater, Excreta and Greywater in Agriculture and Aquaculture. This approach can be applied to all sanitary systems to ensure that the system is managed to meet common health standards.

## **Feedback and comments**

We value your feedback. Please contact us if you have any general comments, suggestions or

Contact | Robert Gensch | [robert.gensch@germantoilet.de](mailto:robert.gensch@germantoilet.de)

Publisher

In cooperation with



German  
Toilet  
Organization



With the support of



STIFTUNG UMWELT  
UND ENTWICKLUNG  
NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN



---

If this WASH e-paper was forwarded to you, would you like to subscribe?

[Click here to subscribe.](#)

*Copyright © 2015 German Toilet Organization e. V., All rights reserved.*