

## Press Release



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### **Twenty million Europeans lack safe sanitation**

**European Women's organization WECF calls for safe and affordable sustainable sanitation for each EU citizen**

**A lack of safe sanitary facilities, causing water pollution and disease; it sounds like a typical problem of a developing country, outside the EU, where European development aid could be applied. But for 20 million inhabitants of the EU unsafe sanitation is a daily practice with diseases as a result. The European Women's organisation WECF believes that each EU citizen should have access to safe and affordable sustainable sanitation and wants to put this unknown topic on the European political agenda.**

Therefore WECF organizes a High-Level Policy Dialogue on "EU Sanitation Policies and Practices in the 2008 International Year of Sanitation" Brussels, 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2008 in the Caritas building, Rue de Pascal 4-6, Brussels.

In some EU member states almost 40% of the population do not have access to safe sanitation. More than 20 million Europeans depend on unsafe sanitation such as pit latrines, soak away pits and drains. In many regions faecal bacteria and nitrates from pit latrines, infiltrate the drinking water from wells. It results in high morbidity, especially among children, and a high number of people affected by water related diseases and water pollution.

#### **International Year of Sanitation.**

To bring sanitation on top of the agenda of policy-makers worldwide, the United Nations have declared 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation. To welcome and promote this initiative, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), in co-operation with the Global Water Partnership, the European Water Partnership (EWP), Coalition Clean Baltic and KIWA Research, organizes a High-Level Policy Event. The organisers want to raise awareness and to galvanize political will within the European Union on the safe management of wastewater for small rural settlements in the EU. WECF director Sascha Gabizon says "The EU should do much more for its most needing citizens. It is not acceptable that we spend billions of Euro from cohesion funds, without addressing one of the biggest public health problems for poor people in rural areas, that of a lack of safe sanitation"

#### **Affordable and sustainable approaches**

New affordable and sustainable approaches towards sanitation are needed in the EU. In Romania, small

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babies still fall ill from blue baby syndrome, caused by high levels of nitrates and human faecal bacteria in well water. In many rural settlements inhabitants have difficulties feeding their families. Sanitation is therefore, understandably, not a priority. Especially as the common alternative in richer parts of the world, a central sewage system, is very expensive.

Inhabitants use septic pits from where toilet water infiltrates into the soil. WECF sanitation coordinator Margriet Samwel states: “Affordable, safe and sustainable sanitation alternatives do exist. WECF and its Bulgarian and Romanian members build ecological demonstration toilets. These dry toilet facilities separate the urine and sanitize the faecal. This is one of a number of modern low cost approaches, which provide an immediate solution to the health and environmental problems related to sanitation in rural areas in Eastern Europe”.

### **Launch of EU Sanitation Documentary “Access to safe sanitation – a right for EU citizens”**

The conference will see the premiere of the 7 minute documentary “Access to safe sanitation – a right for EU citizens”, produced by WECF with Earth Forever Bulgaria and Rapsode France.

This film not only shows current sanitation problems in the EU and policy changes, but also how modern low cost approaches can provide an immediate solution to the health and environmental problems related to sanitation in rural areas in Eastern Europe.

### **Millennium Development Goals in the EU**

WECF calls on the Council of ministers and the European Commission to make safe and affordable sanitation for all citizens of the European Union a key priority. The European Union should work together with NGO’s, charitable funds and governments in setting the priorities for reaching the Millennium Development Goals on Sanitation, also in the European Union. Sascha Gabizon: “Additional funding and efforts are needed to achieve that by 2015, all the 20 million people currently using unsafe latrines, have been provided with sustainable, affordable and safe solutions. It should be a priority of the European Union to first help those who are most needing. Additional funding will only become available if providing sanitation in rural areas becomes a binding obligation in the EU water directives. The European Commission should extend the directives to smaller rural communities, based on the example of the Baltic Sea agreement on reducing nutrient load from individual households”.

### **Right to safe and affordable sanitation**

The right to safe and affordable water and sanitation is one of the main missions of WECF, Women in Europe for a Common Future. WECF is a network of more than 80 organisations in 30 countries. They mobilize women to find affordable solutions to the environmental health problems in their communities and encourage women to participate in decision-making.

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### **Program of the Event**

The event will bring together key experts from different sectors: EU Commission (Environment and Health), European scientists on ecological sanitation, WHO (World Health Organization), investment organizations: EBRD, WB, representatives of the Environment, Health and Rural Ministries from the old and new member states, to present the situation on water and sanitation in the EU, to take into account lessons learned and to formulate a policy recommendation for the future.

The program of the event will have sessions focussed on:

- Policy and present situation on water and sanitation in the EU and new member states
- Experiences of the new member states in implementing the cohesion and structural funds in the field of drinking water and wastewater with a focus on the rural areas
- Solutions and enabling factors to make sustainable sanitation achievable

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*A full program of the High Level Event can be found on the WECF website [www.wecf.eu](http://www.wecf.eu):*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR FOR INTERVIEWS:  
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