

A young boy with short, dark hair and a bright smile is leaning over a wooden frame. He is holding a large, yellow plastic jug that is tilted, pouring water over his hands. The background is a lush, green outdoor setting with trees and foliage.

TIPS AND TRICKS

ON HOW TO ENSURE YOUR WASH COVID-19 RESPONSE IS GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSIVE

Developed by Plan International WASH COVID-19 Task Force

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Introduction

Every pandemic, disease outbreak or other crisis affects women, men, boys, girls and individuals of diverse gender identities differently. These effects are further compounded by several intersectional factors of exclusion such as disability or ethnicity. Gender norms, values and practices affect everyone, at all times and in every step in life. COVID-19 is no different. It will intensify gender issues and trigger considerations but at the same time presents an opportunity to improve gender power relationships (such as male engagement as everyone is at home!).

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, access to safe water, clean sanitation and good hygiene practices (WASH) are more critical than ever. While the most vulnerable are likely to be worst affected during the corona crisis situation, we can work to reduce the inequality through our WASH response.

This document aims to capture the most relevant *tips and tricks* from the growing number of reference documents to ensure WASH COVID-19 activities integrate Gender Equality and Socially Inclusion (GESI) considerations. It is prepared by the Plan International WASH COVID-19 WASH Task Team, with the aim to support the Plan International teams in the Country Offices. We hope this document can also be useful for other organisations that are implementing WASH COVID-19 activities or planning responses and we invite them to share their lessons learned as well. By combining our knowledge we can ensure our WASH COVID-19 prevention activities benefit all, leave no one behind and reduce gender inequality.

Why a Gender and Social Inclusive WASH COVID-19 approach is needed

Delivering equitable, empowering WASH responses for all is fundamental: women & girls, people with a disability and other socially excluded groups are more likely to feel the effects of the COVID-19 government imposed restrictions due to the following reasons:

- Women and girls are often responsible for caring for the sick, and for fetching water from busy communal water points.
- During a lockdown access to menstrual hygiene products may be more difficult than usual.
- Experience from previous disease outbreak situations indicates there are likely to be increased risks of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The greater frequency of trips that women and girls are likely to make to collect greater volumes of water for COVID-19 prevention actions may contribute to these increased risks.
- Many persons with disabilities can't quarantine themselves as thoroughly as other people, because they need regular, hands-on help from other people to do every day self-care tasks.
- Some persons with disabilities also rely on tactile references to get around in their daily lives and are therefore more susceptible to coming into contact with non-sanitized surfaces.
- For some persons with disabilities, even cleaning their homes and washing their hands frequently can be extra difficult, due to the nature of their impairments and environmental barriers.
- Mainstream COVID-19 messages might not reach the most vulnerable groups due to language issues or lack of access to mainstream media.

Gender and Social Inclusive WASH Advocacy Messages

Because women & girls, people with disabilities and other excluded groups are affected most by the COVID-19 crisis Plan works with the following top line **WASH Advocacy messages**¹:

- Water, sanitation and hygiene are the first line of defence against COVID-19. National and international COVID-19 response interventions must **prioritise investments in inclusive WASH** that respond to the particular needs of women, girls and vulnerable populations.
- Gender inequality is exacerbated in health emergencies and so national and international WASH interventions must prioritise efforts to **address the specific WASH needs of girls and women** during the COVID-19 emergency.
- All aspects of national and international COVID-19 response interventions must integrate, and take every opportunity to communicate, **clear and consistent hygiene messages** based on global guidance, which are aligned with national response communications and are gender sensitive and social inclusion.



Tips and tricks on how to ensure WASH COVID-19 responses integrate Gender Equality and Socially Inclusion (GESI) considerations

This list of tips and tricks is based on Plan's gender transformative WASH programmes and approaches. We invite you to share more of them with us to enrich the list.

- Conduct a **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment or quick scan**² to identify the COVID-19 GESI WASH 'bottlenecks' in the target communities that will disproportionately affect women/ girls and socially-excluded groups. The identified risks should be mitigated in the CO's Emergency Response Plan and COVID-19 activities. This quick scan can be done remotely by contacting gender and social inclusion groups (women organisations/ or people with disability organisations) which Plan already has worked with by phone or internet.
- Ensure that **hygiene messages and Behaviour Change Campaign (BCC) materials are gender balanced and socially inclusive**, not exacerbate negative stereotypes and seek to promote positive gender equity messages. Plan can also support the government on this point for the national hygiene awareness campaigns. For example, hygiene promotion materials should not only picture women washing kids and hands but also men and boys. WaterAid has a great, [Simple List of Dos and Don'ts in visual and mass public communications](#).

¹ Plan International: COVID-19 WASH Advocacy Messages

² In some of the target areas a GESI Assessment was already conducted before; if this is the case this could be used. In case you need support or advice, don't hesitate to contact the NLNO WASH team: gerdien.seegers@planinternational.nl



- Promote a **fair division of WASH and care workload** between women, men, boys and girls in your BCC materials. In a lot of contexts women and/or girls already have the biggest responsibility for WASH and care tasks under normal circumstances, and these responsibilities will likely increase in times of emergency/crisis. It is important to make these responsibilities the responsibility of ALL.
- Ensure **women, girls and other socially excluded groups are involved in decision-making** and are encouraged to take up **leadership roles** with the development of emergency WASH response activities, BCC materials and disbursement channels, to ensure their knowledge is utilized and the messages are tailored to reach them in an appropriate way. This could be supported remotely by calling women's organisations/ PWD organisations by phone or, contacting them online where feasible.
- Ensure that there are **social distancing measures around shared or communal WASH facilities**. Consider if communities can prioritise access so that the most vulnerable people go first to avoid congregating around water points or queuing for public toilets and prevent conflict over WASH facilities/ supplies. For example an older/disabled/pregnant person cannot stand in a queue for a long time to wait for water or use a community latrine.
- Develop **GESI-sensitive distribution mechanisms**. Ensure that when, for example, hygiene kits are distributed they reach women/ girls and other excluded groups. Consider ways that soap³ and water can be distributed for the poorest /most vulnerable households to wash their hands at home. Consider if neighbours can deliver water to the homes of vulnerable people.
- Ensure **access to sanitary products or (incontinent) nappies**, during lockdown; provide instructions on how to make/sew alternatives.

3 There is quite mixed evidence on the efficacy of ash as a cleaning agent in terms of COVID-19: [UNICEF COVID-19 Emergency Response Hygiene Programing Guidance Note -Revision 1/4/2020](#) - notes that there is "currently no evidence is available on the effectiveness of handwashing with ash in the context of Covid-19. Generally, handwashing with ash is bears the risk of contracting soil-transmitted pathogens and exposure to heavy metals. Hence, handwashing with soap is preferred over handwashing with ash, but the latter can be promoted as a last resort. Similarly from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) who [discourage the use of ash and promote soap](#).



- Make **handwashing facilities** available for homeless people in **public places** like markets, or in churches/mosques/temples if people are still going there to worship. Examples of handwashing facilities for schools that could be adapted for other public places can be found in the GIZ publication [Hardware for Group Handwashing in Schools](#), and further materials are available from the [WASH in Schools Index website](#) which has a large number of manuals, documents and technical notes related to handwashing facilities for schools
- Make family members aware they need to **help vulnerable members** to wash their hands. And ensure they are aware who are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 disease.
- Ensure we are **collecting and disaggregating data** to understand different impacts on all parts of the population. At minimum age, disability, gender and location disaggregation is needed.
- **Facilitate feedback options from women, girls and other excluded groups** to track if they are being reached by COVID-19 messages and activities. Provide a feedback loop to the government and support making their messages and activities to be more gender equitable and socially inclusive.
- Ensure that GBV risk assessments are conducted and implement actions to minimise these risks for all Plan supported COVID-19 WASH interventions drawing on global good practice in this area such as the SHARE Consortium's [Violence, Gender and WASH: Practitioner's Toolkit](#).



Resources on GESI sensitive WASH COVID-19 responses for more information

- [Planned Strategy and Action from UNICEF](#)
- Guidance from WaterAid:
 - Why inclusion matters to COVID-19 response: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/blog/putting-equality-inclusion-and-rights-at-centre-of-covid-19-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-response>
 - Accessible and Inclusive WASH technology: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/compendium-of-accessible-wash-technologies>
 - <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/handwashing-to-fight-coronavirus>
- WashEm guide on Handwashing Behaviour Change during and beyond COVID: https://washem-guides.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/washem_quicktip_coronavirus.pdf
- [Guidance from CBM on Disability Inclusion in COVID-19 response](#)
- This is a live Google Doc of public COVID-19 response-related resources: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dTCjaKh6f3SfOh_RuFEG-UMe8xAKhE527x3oAbVpzQM/edit?fbclid=IwAR1XKe-d0e7ZPUqKQacoBwQ4JUf5sSuvO4-i4zttbpj43xmhF6PHIB2CSugo#heading=h.ne373xdvvp5n
- *Letter to leaders at the EU and in EU countries: COVID-19 – Disability-inclusive response*, European Disability Forum, 13 March 2020
- *5 Things To Know About Coronavirus And People With Disabilities*, Forbes, 8 March 2020