



# SELF-CARE IN HUMANITARIAN AND FRAGILE SETTINGS

## THE BIG PICTURE

Nearly a quarter of the world's population lives in fragile contexts where health systems are weakest, and health needs are greatest.<sup>1</sup>

- We are living in an 'age of crises' where multiple, overlapping crises, including conflict, climate events, infectious disease outbreaks, and economic volatility, are destabilizing health systems and harming population health.
- Severe and ongoing conflicts pose a major threat to universal health coverage (UHC) due to disrupted supply chains, damaged health infrastructure, and the displacement of health workers.
- Countries with fragile, conflict, and crisis settings have a high burden of disease and death. They account for more than 70% of cases of epidemic-prone diseases such as cholera, 60% of preventable maternal deaths, 53% of deaths in children under age 5, and 45% of infant deaths.<sup>2</sup>
- The health and safety situation for women and girls in crisis settings is particularly dire. Conditions related to sexual and reproductive health continue to be the leading cause of death and suffering among women of childbearing age in humanitarian settings.<sup>3</sup>
- Recent trends of donor funding plateauing or declining are placing additional strain on already overstretched health systems.

## THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

In a world facing mounting crises, self-care can help sustain life-saving services during emergencies and strengthen community resilience.

- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends self-care interventions in conflict and humanitarian settings where health systems are overstretched, provided that an enabling environment is in place.<sup>4</sup>
- Self-care approaches complement conventional health responses, enabling individuals to manage their health when access to formal care is disrupted.
- Growing evidence indicates that self-care interventions – including for maternal and newborn health, HIV and sexually transmitted infections, contraception, safe abortion, and gender-based violence – are feasible,

acceptable, and effective in humanitarian and fragile settings. However, further research is needed to optimize implementation.<sup>5</sup>

- Self-care can help advance the objectives of the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) – the global standard for delivering essential sexual and reproductive health services in humanitarian response.<sup>5</sup>
- Digital health technologies offer a promising platform to scale up self-care interventions, leveraging increasing mobile phone ownership and connectivity in fragile and humanitarian settings to expand access to critical health information and services.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CALL TO ACTION

[Join the Self-Care Trailblazer Group \(SCTG\) in advocating for greater attention, research, and investment to advance self-care approaches in humanitarian and fragile settings and drive progress toward UHC.](#)

- Spotlight the dire and disproportionate health needs in humanitarian and fragile settings and the role self-care can play in promoting uninterrupted access to healthcare, in line with UHC goals.
- Strengthen collaboration across the humanitarian-development nexus by ensuring humanitarian representation in national self-care networks and vice versa, and fostering engagement with private sector actors and entrepreneurs to expand access to self-care products and services in crisis-affected settings.
- Advocate for the inclusion of humanitarian and fragility-affected regions in national self-care pilots, implementation, and scale-up plans from the outset of self-care guideline development, ensuring that implementation plans and operational considerations are adequately addressed and resourced.
- Urge donors, implementers, policymakers, and researchers to fill research gaps on existing self-care practices in humanitarian and fragile settings, displaced people’s preferences and needs for self-care information and products, and the feasibility and impact of self-care interventions in hard-to-reach areas.
- Advocate for flexible, long-term funding to support self-care programming, implementation research, and advocacy in humanitarian and fragile settings.

## DIG DEEPER

[Consult these resources to learn more about self-care and humanitarian and fragile settings.](#)

- [WHO expert meeting on advancing the role of self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health and rights in fragile and humanitarian settings \(2023\)](#)
- [Global Call to Action for Sexual and Reproductive Health Self-Care in Humanitarian and Fragile Settings](#)
- [Self-Care for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Humanitarian and Fragile Settings: Barriers, Opportunities and Lessons Learned](#)
- [Sexual and reproductive health self-care in humanitarian and fragile settings: where should we start?](#)

## REFERENCES

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