

# Community Preparedness and Resilience for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender

When crises strike, local communities are the first to respond. Around the world, local authorities, organizations, and civilians are working to prepare and respond to emergencies—and saving lives. Investing in inclusive, community-led emergency preparedness is crucial to safeguard hard-won development gains; for effective humanitarian response; and for resilient families and communities.

For more than a decade, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) has focused on facilitating preparedness for crisis-prone communities. Inclusive community preparedness can help ensure that lifesaving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and supplies are available from the onset of an emergency, and mitigate the devastating consequences of crises, including increased risk of maternal and newborn deaths, sexual and gender-based violence, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>1</sup>

In 2014, WRC developed the *Facilitator's Kit: Community Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender* curriculum. The curriculum aims to build on existing capacity at the community level to identify, prepare for, and respond to risks and inequities faced by women, girls, and diverse community groups in emergencies, and includes community action planning. The curriculum was piloted in the Philippines in 2012–2014 (with UNFPA), in Iraq in 2017 (with International Medical Corps), and, most recently, in Pakistan between 2015 and 2020 (with the International Planned Parenthood Federation and Rahnuma-Family Planning Association of Pakistan).

Between 2019 and 2022, WRC and the Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) developed additional tools for the Facilitator's Kit, based on lessons learned from the pilots and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include a set of community capacity and needs assessment tools to identify existing capacities and include diverse community groups in preparedness planning; and a half-day module on epidemic/pandemic preparedness. WRC, FPAN, the Nepal Disabled Women Association, and the Senior Citizen Care Society further developed a "Quick Start Guide" with step-by-step guidance to plan inclusive, accessible assessments and workshops for older people and people with disabilities.

## WRC and partners have learned:

- SRH is an essential component of emergency and disaster risk management for health (EDRM-H), yet often is not prioritized in preparedness planning activities.
- Emergency preparedness for SRH should focus on ensuring that the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP) for SRH,<sup>2</sup> the package of priority lifesaving services that comprises the minimum standard for humanitarian health responses, is available from the onset of an emergency.
- Community preparedness for SRH strengthens services during stable times by identifying and addressing existing gaps in service delivery, strengthening supply chains, and promoting awareness and uptake.<sup>3</sup>
- Consistent coordination with and between health and disaster risk management agencies and UN, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based partners, and across sectors, at the local, sub-national, and national levels is essential for sustained emergency preparedness.

1 S. Barot, "In a state of crisis: Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of women in humanitarian situations," *Guttman policy review*. GPR 2017;20:24. <https://www.guttman.org/gpr/2017/02/state-crisis-meeting-sexual-and-reproductive-health-needs-women-humanitarian-situations>.

2 Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises, *Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings*, 2018. <https://iawgfieldmanual.com/manual>.

3 M. Tanabe, M. Hynes, A. Rizvi, et al. "Building resilience for sexual and reproductive health at the community level: learning from three crisis-affected provinces in Pakistan," *BMJ Global Health*, September 2022. <https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/7/9/e009251.full.pdf>.

- Preparedness activities are more effective when community members and governments work together to identify and build on existing capacities to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities, and when community members are involved as decision-makers in preparedness planning.<sup>4</sup>
- Adolescents, people with disabilities, people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), people living with HIV/AIDS, and older people, among others, have specific needs and vulnerabilities, as well as unique resources and perspectives that should be leveraged and reinforced as part of preparedness and response.<sup>5</sup>

## Recommendations to humanitarian and development stakeholders, including donors, to strengthen community preparedness for SRH include:

- **Partner with ministries of health and disaster risk management agencies at the local, sub-national, and national levels across community preparedness initiatives.** Ensure the MISP for SRH is integrated in EDRM-H policies, protocols, and guidance. Support linkages between local partners, including diverse community-based organizations, and government agencies to support sustainability and health systems strengthening.
- **Support coordination between development and humanitarian actors** to facilitate community, sub-national, and national preparedness and resilience for SRH in fragile, disaster-, and conflict-prone settings.
- **Provide dedicated funding for sustainable SRH emergency preparedness activities**, including monitoring and evaluation, in stable settings in partnership with authorities and local partners, and in alignment with EDRM-H frameworks.
- **Invest in capacity development for MISP implementation**, including training for health and disaster risk management policymakers and health providers (including clinical refresher trainings).
- **Provide direct, flexible, and long-term funding to local organizations led by women, adolescents, people with disabilities, people with diverse SOGIESC, older people, and other civil society organizations from the beginning of community preparedness activities.** Include sufficient time and funds to ensure equitable partnerships and robust co-design, including translation and interpretation, and accommodations for people with disabilities and older people.

For more information, contact Sandra Krause, Senior Director, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Program, at [SandraK@wrcommission.org](mailto:SandraK@wrcommission.org).



Learn more about the *Facilitator's Kit: Community Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender* curriculum.



## Women's Refugee Commission

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth who have been displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive improvements in humanitarian practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Family Planning Association of Nepal, Nepal Disabled Women Association, Senior Citizen Care Society, and Women's Refugee Commission, *Inclusive Community Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Nepal*, April 2022. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/inclusive-community-preparedness-for-sexual-and-reproductive-health-in-nepal/>.