

# Providing Disaster Relief for Women and LGBTQI+ People in The Bahamas

*A Toolkit for Policy-Makers, Emergency  
Response Personnel and Affected Persons*





## International School on **CLIMATE MIGRATION**

### **Toolkit Project**

The Toolkit Project *Providing Disaster Relief for Women and LGBTQI+ People in The Bahamas: A Toolkit for Policy-Makers, Emergency Response Personnel and Affected Persons* was produced for **Equality Bahamas** as part of a Capstone Project of the **International School on Climate Migration (ISCM)**, an educational initiative of **Earth Refuge**. The collaborative project was carried out by participants of the 2023 ISCM program.

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## Purpose

The Disaster Risk Management Act (2022), recently drafted by the official gazette of The Bahamas, aims to coordinate the technical, financial, and operational capacities of a public body and an administrator, to implement the actions and contingency plans necessary to manage alerts and disaster emergencies in order to safeguard life, protect property, and restore normalcy to society during the disaster response, rehabilitation, and recovery phases. This toolkit on providing disaster relief for women and LGBTQI+ people was created to give the knowledge required to create appropriate policies and to give volunteers the abilities they need to treat LGBTQI+ people with respect in the event of a disaster. This advice will be especially helpful to emergency response personnel who develop training programs and respond to disasters.

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**Adaptation** is defined as an adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic events or their impacts, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities to reduce the risks of climate change to the same natural and human systems.

**Climate Change** refers to a change in the state of the climate that may be identified by changes in the mean value of its properties or by the variability of its properties, which persists over an extended period of time, and is usually due to natural internal processes, external forcing or persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use. Note that the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) distinguishes between climate change attributable to human activities altering the atmospheric composition and climate variability attributable to natural causes by defining climate change as: 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.'

**Cultural Sensitivity** or competence during and after a disaster can be understood as effectively providing services to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds and religions in a manner that respects the worth of the individual and preserves their dignity. The adaptation of preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to fit cultural contexts improves disaster personnel's ability to provide appropriate and effective services in order to best meet a community's needs.

**Disaster** means a serious disruption of the normal functioning of a community or society due to natural or human-induced hazardous physical events interacting with vulnerable social conditions, leading to widespread adverse human, material, economic or environmental effects that require immediate emergency response to satisfy critical human needs and that may require external support for recovery.

**Disaster relief** is a vital part of disaster management and refers to the immediate reaction to the occurrence of a disaster for the timely attention of the most urgent needs of the population affected by the disaster. The need to act fast when providing disaster relief can sometimes obscure the equally important but less visible need for it to be administered with careful planning and a sound understanding of the local context in order to be appropriate and equitable. Women and minority groups frequently have less social, economic and political power and are not represented as well in formal leadership structures. However, these structures are often the first and main point of contact for relief personnel.

**Disaster recovery** can be understood as the process of re-establishing acceptable and sustainable living conditions after the occurrence of a disaster – through a) the restoration and reconstruction of infrastructure and any other physical asset, natural asset, good or service, and b) the restoration of livelihoods – under conditions of lower risk than those that existed before the disaster. Recovery should also be carried out in such a way as to rebuild more inclusive societies and reduce vulnerability to future disasters, making recovering communities safer than before. The aftermath of a disaster can offer a window of opportunity for institutionalizing gender concerns in disaster management, as a shaken local economy and society becomes more sharply focused on better protecting itself against future disaster risks. If gender issues are addressed with sensitivity to local contexts, it can contribute to boosting the economy, reducing the disaster-related psychological and domestic burdens of men, and promoting the safety, prosperity and decision-making power of women. At the same time, recovery is not a neutral process. There are always different interest groups and agendas that must be balanced when deciding where and how to allocate resources. Without careful analysis and planning, the recovery process can contribute to existing gender and social inequalities.

**Emergency shelter** protects vulnerable people from danger, suffering, and exploitation following a natural disaster or man-made crisis. A shelter is defined as a habitable covered living space providing a secure and healthy living environment with privacy and dignity. Adequate shelter should provide protection from the elements, space to live and store belongings as well as privacy, comfort and emotional security.

**Food security** is defined when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. For these objectives to be realized, four dimensions of food security must be fulfilled at the same time: the physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food (at the household level), **food utilization**, and the stability of the other three dimensions over time.

**Gender** can be understood as the social and cultural construction of norms and behaviors attributed to people differently on the basis of their sex assigned at birth. Gender can also be understood as an identity. A person's innate sense of their own gender may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth, for example, trans men and women, non-binary people, and people of other genders as differently expressed across different contexts and cultures.

**Internal migration** describes the voluntary movement of a person within a country, be it **temporary or permanent**. Internal migrants move for several reasons, both formally and informally. If their movement is forced, they are referred to as internally displaced persons (IDP).

**Intersectionality** recognizes how various parts of our identity – like race, sex, gender, sexuality, class and ability – overlap to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The term was created to reflect how Black women face both racism and sexism. Nowadays, it is applied more widely to other aspects of identity, to account for the intersecting power structures that underlie all forms of discrimination.

**LGBTQI+** is an acronym that encompasses a range of diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics, indicating the spectrum of **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender**, queer, intersex + other people whose identities are not heterosexual and cisgender.

**Marginalization** can be understood as a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities. While there is no agreed definition of the concept, some examples of the most **disadvantaged sections of society** are black, indigenous and people of color, girls and women, LGBTQI+ people, individuals with disabilities, poor households, people living in informal settlements, and those affected by armed conflict.

**Mitigation** is defined as an anthropogenic intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gasses to reduce the risks of climate change to natural and human systems.

**Sexual and reproductive health rights** refers to the rights of everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, HIV status or other aspects of identity, to make informed choices regarding their own sexuality and reproduction. They are not limited to contraception and conceiving, and include the right to make informed choices about whether or when to have children; the right to access a full range of affordable and informed family planning services, including safe abortion; and the right to accurate information and services to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS, and sexual health information and education. When writing and talking about sexual and reproductive health rights, we should consider the different needs of all people, including LGBTQI+ people, and the barriers that different people might face in achieving their sexual and reproductive health rights.



EQUALITY BAHAMAS

# Providing Disaster Relief for Women and LGBTQI+ People in The Bahamas

## Introduction: Equality Bahamas

The feminist, volunteer-run organization Equality Bahamas promotes women's and LGBTQI+ people's human rights through activism, community involvement, and education of the public. It engages with government officials, participates in legal reform processes, and works to ensure that women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people take part in the decision-making process at all levels (The Bahamas Weekly, 2021). The focus of Equality Bahamas has always been to create inclusive and non-discriminatory strategies for community programming and human rights advocacy to safeguard the needs of those who are most vulnerable. This is also pursued with an holistic approach considering the relationship between gender and other crucial domains, including climate and the environment.

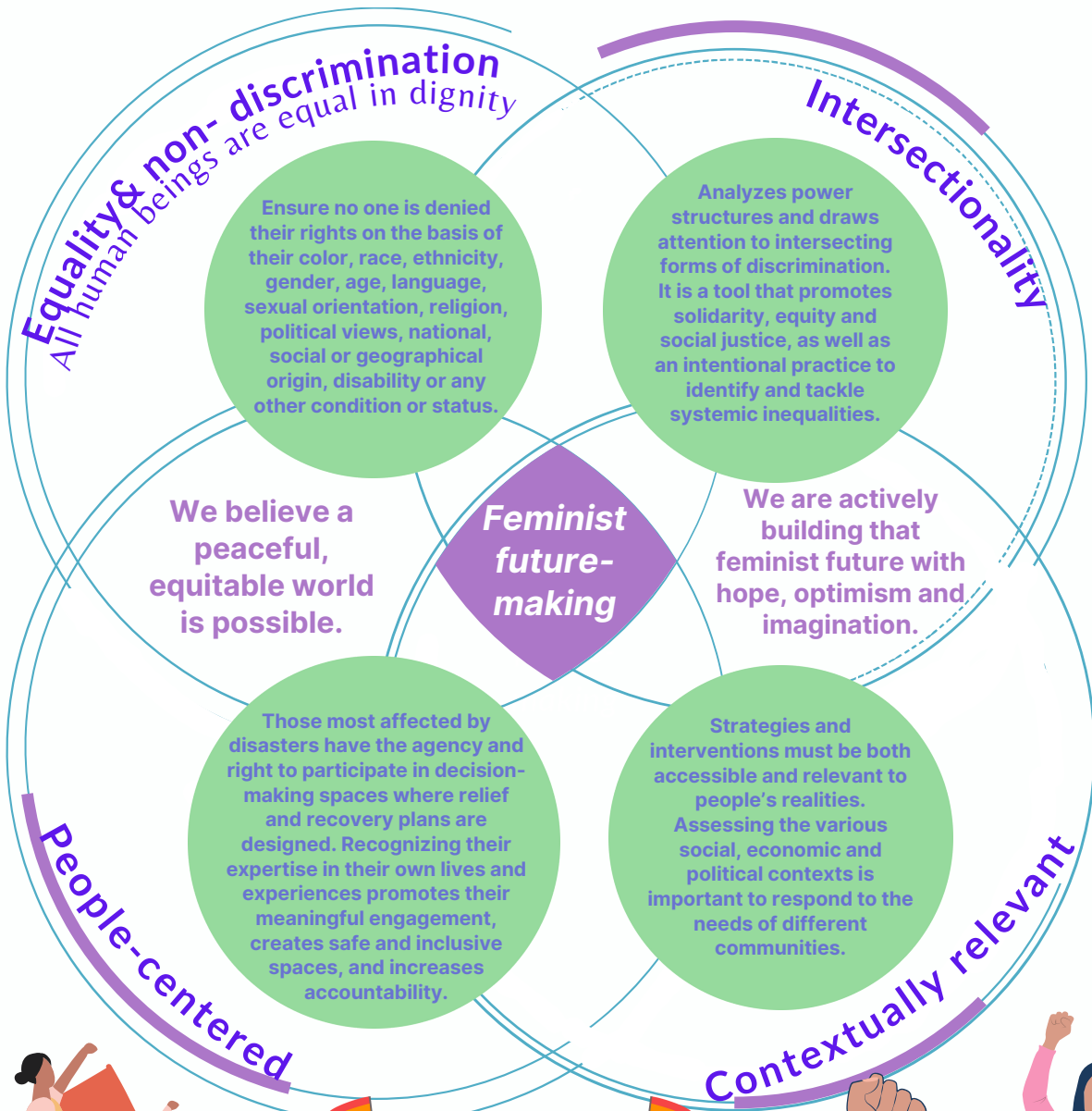
Due to the location of The Bahamas archipelago within the Atlantic hurricane belt, the islands are frequently affected by hydro-meteorological disasters such as hurricanes and tropical storms, (World Bank Group, 2021). These natural hazards interact with weak social conditions to seriously disrupt a community or society's normal functioning, causing widespread negative human, material, economic or environmental effects (Disaster Risk Management Act, 2022).

This toolkit on disaster relief for women and LGBTQI+ people was created to streamline knowledge required to develop appropriate policies and to give volunteers the tools to center the autonomy and safety of LGBTQI+ people, women and girls in the event of a disaster. The approach taken by Equality Bahamas is rooted in a commitment to inclusivity and solution-building by highlighting the importance of gender equality, empowerment, intersectionality and contextuality. This advice will be beneficial to emergency response personnel who develop training programs and respond to disasters (Disaster Risk Management Act, 2022).



# Providing Disaster Relief for Women and LGBTQI+ People in The Bahamas

In the disaster management continuum, Equality Bahamas works from 5 interdependent approaches to ensure that the needs of the most affected populations are met.





# Disaster Preparation, Response and Recovery: Centering Women's, Girls, and LGBTQI+ Community Members Experiences

## Big Picture & Forging Connections

Climate-related disasters pose numerous challenges for women in all their diversity (including transgender women and people who are assigned female at birth) and members of the LGBTQI+ community due to persisting inequalities. Such groups are often at greater risk of temporary and prolonged displacement, lack of essential resources in response to disaster, discrimination, harassment, and varying forms of gender- and sexuality-based violence (Tran, 2021).

However, women and LGBTQI+ people also play a critical role during and after disasters, and in the recovery efforts. Women and queer people organize themselves and others, possess important local knowledge and networks, are vital contributors to rescue efforts, help rebuild their communities and continue to advocate for equality and empowerment during crises.

## Action Items for Policymakers and Disaster Aid Organizations

Include women and queer people from diverse groups in disaster planning, relief and recovery to create resilient, gender-responsive policy and implementation.

Utilize and advocate for protection systems to address gender-based violence, with particular focus on sexual violence; ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) without disruptions; re-distribute the burden of care traditionally allocated to women according to traditional gender norms.

Despite the Bahamian government's lack of recognition of queer marriage or protection from discrimination (Thompson, 2019), provide internal support and recognition for LGBTQI+ and other non-traditional households. Such support and recognition must also be applied to transgender and non-binary individuals, whose gender identities are also often excluded from legal documents and social acceptance.

Require LGBTQI+ and gender-inclusive training for staff members and volunteers to prioritize the autonomy, safety, and needs of queer populations, women, and girls at all points of disaster relief (from emergency assistance to prolonged support such as securing housing).



## Tips for Women and LGBTQI+ People: Disaster Preparation and Recovery Coordination

### Map & Save Contacts for Trusted People, Shelters, and Aid Organizations



Connect with LGBTQI+ and women-supportive organizations and trusted contacts throughout the relief and recovery process to address issues such as instances of discrimination, violence, or harassment, housing repair or relocation, employment, mental and emotional upheaval, and health services.



### Prepare an Emergency Disaster Kit

- [Packing a Hurricane Emergency Supply Kit](#)
- [Bahamas Government Disaster Kit Guide](#)
- Additional Considerations:
  - Gender-affirming clothing and personal items
  - Self-defense tools: Pepper spray, whistle
  - Menstrual supplies
  - STI Prevention and Contraceptive items
  - Medications



EQUALITY BAHAMAS

# Relief Areas

Health

Water and  
Sanitation

Food Security

Shelter

Energy  
Sources

Transportation

Information  
Management &  
Communication

General: Good  
Practice  
Checklist

# Relief Area: Health



It is essential for disaster aid organizations to understand, prepare for, and enact inclusive policies that account for the diverse vulnerabilities of queer peoples, and to provide resources that directly speak to and recognize the range of ways that queer people can best prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters.

Organizations should undertake actions at the disaster mitigation/preparedness stage to ensure that relief is provided during disaster events. Relief operations can have immediate, short-term, and long-term interventions.

Health interventions include physical health, sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial and mental health assessment and care. At the mitigation/preparedness stage, the following actions should be undertaken to ensure relief operations at the event of a disaster.

## Recommended actions

- Train doctors (in first aid and counseling) to take action during the event of a disaster.
- Create a list of health-related staff with contact details to be available to relevant stakeholders.
- Supply shelters with toilet and bath facilities, adequate water supply, supplies required for hygiene maintenance, waste disposal facilities, first aid kits, etc.
- Transfer pregnant and lactating women in need of immediate health care to hospitals instead of bringing them to shelters. Otherwise, special attention should be given to pregnant and lactating women and newborns.
- Ensure volunteers trained for psychosocial counseling visit shelters regularly.
- Make an ambulance or other vehicles available for emergency transportation.
- Build capacity for sexual and reproductive health response through mentoring and technical support.
- Increase patients' access to familial networks for LGBTQI+ households ([National Disaster Interfaiths Network](#)).
- Promote mental health resources in the immediate and long-term recovery.
- Streamline access to gender-affirming clothing and underwear ([National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016](#)).
- Keep gender-affirming hormones in stock and accessible at medical care facilities ([Gorman-Murray, 2018](#)).

*\*\* It is important to monitor the quality and/or expiration dates of medicines, first aid, etc. in the shelters.*

# Relief Area: Water & Sanitation



It is essential for disaster aid organizations to understand, prepare for, and enact inclusive policies that account for the diverse vulnerabilities of queer peoples, and to provide resources that directly speak to and recognize the range of ways that queer people can best prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters.

Organizations should undertake actions at the disaster mitigation/preparedness stage to ensure that relief is provided during disaster events. Relief operations can have immediate, short-term, and long-term interventions.

## Recommended actions



- Ensure clean, piped water is available at all times in shelters. The necessary infrastructure needs to be constructed during the mitigation/preparedness stage. This should be available for all purposes like cooking, bathing, washroom, and other purposes.



- Prepare water tanks and alternative water storage in case of water contamination or unavailability of piped water.



- Make a list of water suppliers available to all stakeholders and in the shelters.



# Relief Area: Shelter



It is essential for disaster aid organizations to understand, prepare for, and enact inclusive policies that account for the diverse vulnerabilities of queer peoples, and to provide resources that directly speak to and recognize the range of ways that queer people can best prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters.

Organizations should undertake actions at the disaster mitigation/preparedness stage to ensure that relief is provided during disaster events. Relief operations can have immediate, short-term, and long-term interventions.

## Recommended actions

- Construct separate shelters in a community that will cover the population residing in a designated area of a town, city, or village in the event of a disaster.
- Use educational institutions, community centers, etc. in the areas or locations of disaster as shelters.
- For a list of the most recently updated shelters across The Bahamas, check [here](#).
- Make the shelters accessible for all (including persons with disabilities, elderly, pregnant women, children, etc.). Thus, the planning and construction should also ensure resilient design and infrastructure.
- Plan carefully for ventilation, fire control systems, lighting, pest control, sewage and waste disposal pipelines.
- Ensure space management and adequate capacity of the shelters to avoid overcrowding.
- Ensure the security of inhabitants and their belongings in the shelters.
- Awareness of risk of violence and discriminatory behavior (particularly towards vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI+ people, undocumented people, migrants to The Bahamas, women and girls, disabled people and elderly people) should be incorporated into shelter staff training to increase awareness and reduce internal discrimination.
- Collaborate with LGBTQI+ NGOs to signal which shelters have enacted procedures to protect queer individuals and households ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2020](#)).
- Respect queer households and individuals in shelter spaces, and allow queer people (particularly transgender and non-binary people) to choose the bathroom and shelter space that best corresponds to their gender identity and expression. Communicate with them directly and discreetly about what housing options they are comfortable with ([National Disaster Interfaiths Network](#)).
- Ensure record management of the inhabitants in the shelter.



# Relief Area: Food Security



It is essential for disaster aid organizations to understand, prepare for, and enact inclusive policies that account for the diverse vulnerabilities of queer peoples, and to provide resources that directly speak to and recognize the range of ways that queer people can best prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters.

Organizations should undertake actions at the disaster mitigation/preparedness stage to ensure that relief is provided during disaster events. Relief operations can have immediate, short-term, and long-term interventions.

## Recommended actions

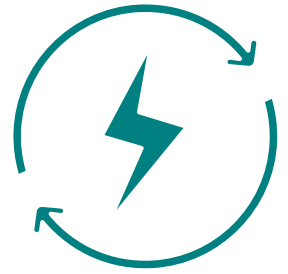


- Make culturally relevant meals available to people residing in shelters as packed foods / cooked meals.
- Provide shelters with an adequate supply of cooking kits and materials, food packets or rations and cooking gas.
- Set up community kitchens in all shelters with all necessary equipment and material.
- Dedicate a separate space for cooking to avoid pollution, smoke, and other hazards in the living space for inhabitants of shelters.
- Take special care to provide for those with dietary restrictions and medical requirements.



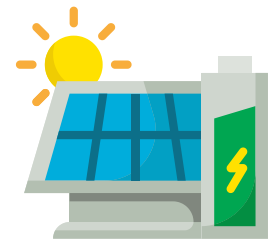
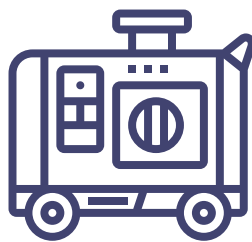


# Relief Area: Energy Sources



It is essential for disaster aid organizations to understand, prepare for, and enact inclusive policies that account for the diverse vulnerabilities of queer peoples, and to provide resources that directly speak to and recognize the range of ways that queer people can best prepare for, and recover from, climate-related disasters.

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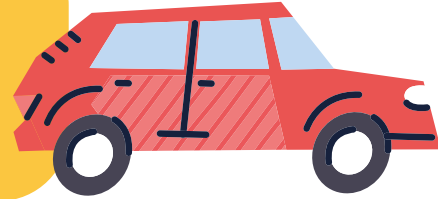


## Recommended actions

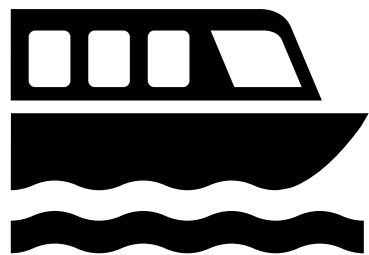
- Make proper lighting available in all nooks and corners of the shelter.
- Make generators, gensets, and emergency lights available in case of no power / electricity.
- Install solar panels on shelters.



# Relief Area: Transportation

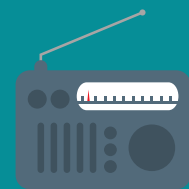


- Make ambulance(s) or other vehicles available at relief shelters for medical emergencies. Fuel and other necessities should be made available as well.
- Develop a plan for transportation in case of road blockages or problems in using vehicles.
- Improve emergency ferry services and expand access to routes throughout the archipelago.
- Promote ride-share options and subsidized or public evacuation transport for people who do not have access to a vehicle.
- Maintain communication networks with government bodies, NGOs, and communities on the ground as they monitor available routes for evacuation, providing disaster aid, and general movement for residents. Keep updated maps with available transportation routes (including ground vehicles, ferries, and airports).





# Relief Area: Information Management and Communication



- Formal and informal networks should be strengthened and activated prior to and during a disaster, including popular social media platforms, radio, news broadcasts, and official government posts.
- Develop efficient and reliable systems for gathering and sharing information (e.g., forecasts and warnings, information on relevant capacities, role allocation and resources) between stakeholders.
- Make available robust communications systems (technologies, infrastructure, people) capable of transmitting warnings effectively to people at risk.
- Provide regular updates to people in shelters.
- Have wireless modes of communication in case the formal communication lines fail during a disaster. For devices that rely on batteries, such as radios, store extra batteries in an accessible location.
- Provide emergency and response supplies, search and rescue operations, and emergency resources and support.
- Train a cadre of community volunteers to take action during a disaster – regular evacuation drills, search and rescue, providing emergency supplies, etc. They should cooperate with other stakeholders, including government, NGOs, etc.
- Signal support for LGBTQI+ people on social media platforms, through word-of-mouth and trusted community members, and via official platforms for the organization before, during, and after disaster.
- Promote hotlines and other crisis services for people to report emergencies, discrimination, or instances of violence.



# General: Good Practice Checklist



The following is a general good practice checklist for providing disaster relief for women and LGBTQI+ people that can be used regardless of the type of disaster or relief being offered.

- Establish a LGBTQI+ community liaison or champions within relevant emergency management agencies, planning groups, etc. who can help identify and promote inclusive services during disasters.
- Communicate with emergency providers about establishing policies and practices (including training for their staff) concerning sheltering or providing other forms of relief to women and LGBTQI+ individuals and families.
- Suggest how support can be sensitive to the needs of people who may be coping with changes in their gender roles (e.g., caring for young children after loss of a partner).
- Establish agreements that LGBTQI+ community members will not be denied services, if essential post-disaster services are provided to the public through faith-based organizations.
- Contribute suggestions to the design of emergency shelters and support services (toilets, water supply, lighting) that are responsive to the needs and preferences identified by women and LGBTQI+ people and keep in mind privacy and safety considerations.
- Share resources available on providing disaster relief for women and LGBTQI+ community members with professional and volunteer staff.
- Collect data related to disaster relief that includes the age, gender and diversity of the affected population.
- Ensure that response teams and staff working on relief, including any health personnel, are gender and diversity balanced.
- Do not exclude vulnerable and marginalized groups or individuals in procedures for relief registration and distribution.
- Consult with, and seek feedback from women and LGBTQI+ people to ensure that relief services and contents of relief packages actually meet their respective needs, including reproductive health needs, and are socially and culturally appropriate.
- Rigorously monitor, report on and advocate for the implementation of all related actions and for the safety of women and LGBTQI+ people. In cases where more could be done, provide recommendations to relevant organizations on how they could improve.

(Adapted from [World Bank, 2009](#) and [ICRC, 2010](#))



# Local and Regional Contacts for Disaster Relief

## General Contacts

- Emergency: 911 or 919
- Police: 1 (242) 323-0848 / 1 (242) 323-0854 / 1 (242) 323-0853 / 1 (242) 322-3816
- Marine: 1 (242) 325-8864 / 1 (242) 727-4888 / 1 (242) 359-4888
- Ambulance: 919 / 1 (242) 322-2881 / 1 (242) 323-2586
- Fire Station: 919
- Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development 24 hr Crisis Intervention:
  - New Providence: (242) 322-2763 / (242) 422-2763
  - Freeport: (242) 351-7763
- Government Information Service: 1 (242) 322-6081
- Water Company Hotline: 1 (242) 325-4504
- Coast Guard / Bahamas Air-Sea Rescue Association: 1 (242) 325-8864 / 1 (242) 727-4888 / 1 (242) 359-4888
- 2023 Updated Hurricane Shelter Storm List
- Bahamas Crisis Center 24hr Hotline to assist those in abusive or violent situations: 1 (242) 328-0922
  - Office Phones: 1 (242) 328-0922 / 1 (242) 322-4999
  - bahamascrisiscentre@yahoo.com / bahamascrisiscentre@gmail.com
- Red Cross: 1 (242) 323-7370
- Electricity Company: 1 (242) 323-5561 / 1 (242) 323-5562
- Bahamas Strong Alliance
- Bahamas Disaster Housing Assistance

## Health

- NHI Bahamas
- Public Hospitals Authority Bahamas: (242) - 323-7750
- Bahamas Psychological Association: 356-0039
  - info@bahamaspsych.org
- Information regarding med-card assistance for psychiatrist patients (only for legal Bahamas residents) for low or no-income individuals.
- Bahamas Institute of Child and Adolescent Mental Health: +1 242-356-0039
  - Email: BICAMH@outlook.com
- SASH Bahamas: STI (emphasis on HIV/AIDS) prevention and treatment
- Princess Margaret Hospital: 242-322-2861
- Doctor's Hospital: 242-302-4747
- Government COVID Hotline: 242-376-9387 / 242-376-9350 / 242-376-9357



## Gender & LGBTQI+

- Bahamas Organization of LGBTI Affairs: +1 242-819-8328
  - bahamasorgoflgbtiaffairs@gmail.com
- CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice Funding in the Caribbean
- CariFLAGS Forum: PAN Caribbean network of queer-advocacy organizations
- We Were Always Here: Queer Caribbean History
- United Caribbean Trans Network





## Suggestions for Future Research

### *Long-term recovery and planning*

The integration of gender considerations in recovery and disaster response plans is important to promote the integration of gender equality, and identify and prioritize gender-specific recovery needs ([GFDRR, 2018](#)). While ensuring inclusive access to water, sanitation, hygiene, and livelihoods following a severe event remains a critical concern to safeguard the rights of female and non-binary migrants, unrestricted and widespread availability of medical interventions and psychosocial assistance becomes exceedingly vital ([Leonard et al., 2021](#)).

The provision of medical facilities and psychosocial support address the challenges women and LGBTQI+ individuals face during migration experiences. This contribution aids in facilitating the adjustment process in informal communities and addressing displacement concerns related to crime, violence, and sexual assault. Subsequent research should also focus on exploring the notion of 'chosen family', a more encompassing concept of significant relationships that surpass genetic or legal connections ([Goldsmith, Randsmit and Mendez, 2021](#)). Last but not least, to ensure an inclusive recovery process, meaningful and active participation by women and non-binary genders in planning and other decision-making processes must be promoted actively and integrated into institutional arrangements, policies, and procedures ([Bleeker et al., 2021](#)).



**EQUALITY BAHAMAS**



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