

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The Bahamas has joined the global community in its efforts to contain the spread of the Novel Coronavirus. Beginning March 24th the Government of The Bahamas (GoB), enacted emergency orders restricting public transport, some local businesses, daily and weekly curfews with lockdowns that have lasted up to 7 days, in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. Widely, the population has been encouraged to work from home and stay indoors as much as possible. On 6 April, Prime Minister Hubert Minnis announced in the House of Assembly a second round of emergency orders with further lockdown periods for the rest of the month of April. The population has been ordered to remain indoors during this period with exemptions made for essential workers and essential services. As of April 28 2020 the total confirmed cases number 80 while 23 persons have recovered. There have been 11 deaths from COVID-19 so far.

IOM Response to COVID

IOM-Bahamas is supporting the GoB and the wider community by providing translations of life-saving information and other health and community-centered information produced by the Government in several languages including Creole, Tagalog and Mandarin. IOM is also in constant contact with its donors, the other UN Agencies and humanitarian organizations in an effort to render assistance to the population during this pandemic.

Emergency Shelter Assessments

From 24th February til 10th of March, IOM emergency shelter experts Richard Lines and Ned Morris conducted a comprehensive assessment to examine the current condition of each emergency shelter, assess operational effectiveness during Dorian, and consider the suitability of each shelter for the 2020 season. The recommendations are focused on what action needs to be taken to ensure the islands are well prepared for the 2020 season, but also include recommendations for improvements in the medium-term. The pair conducted many structured and unstructured interviews with representatives from the Department of Social Services, Local government officials, The Ministry of Public Works, NEMA, Humanitarian agencies, the Rotary Clubs and persons affected by Dorian. IOM has concluded that as of April 2020 thirteen of the twenty-five official emergency shelters on Grand Bahama and Abaco are usable. The capacity of these shelters is just over one-thousand five hundred people. It is crucial that repairs on these structures begin immediately, and that these shelters are equipped with the essentials, and that training is provided to shelter managers.



IOM-Bahamas completing shelter assessment on Abaco and Grand Bahama.

IOM Receives container donation

In March IOM-Bahamas completed the distribution of 40 x 40ft sea containers that were kindly donated by Wärtsilä, a Finnish company that was contracted for the expanded capacity of the BPL powerplant. In collaboration with the Rotary Club and Knowles transport, IOM transported the containers to Bahamian Non Profit organizations like Hands for Hunger, Bahamian Red Cross, Muslim Center, Indaba Project, Social Service Department, Salvation Army, Head-Knowles Foundation, Chrysalis. The containers will be utilized for the temporary storage of hurricane relief items.



Faisal Abdurrahmaan Hepburn (right), the leader of Jamaat-ul-Islam pictured with IOM-donated container trailers being used to store and distribute collected items for displaced residents

IOM Receives Better Shelters

In February, nine Better Shelters were erected on the grounds of the First Beraca Baptist Church In Marsh Harbour, Abaco to provide temporary shelter to Abaco families displaced by Hurricane Dorian. The structures have been developed by UNHCR with funding from the Ikea Foundation and are used worldwide as a dignified and affordable alternative for tents. They are especially suitable for displacements longer than 6 months. The shelters with the value of USD 1,200 each, were donated by Better Shelter as a pilot to test the structural and cultural suitability for The Bahamas. In case there is interest and need for more, Better Shelter offered IOM a very generous discount.

There has been resistance to the erection of the shelters given the current climate around immigration in The Bahamas, specifically relating to irregular Haitian migrants. Abaco has long been densely populated by Haitian migrants, many of whom who had built homes in informal communities. IOM is monitoring the situation in collaboration with the Disaster Reconstruction Authority and the Community representatives. There continues to be a need for coordination, transparent communication with the communities and additional shelter / housing solutions to enable the reconstruction of the affected islands.



Temporary shelters being installed in Marsh Harbour, Abaco for displaced residents. (IOM Photo: Korvell Pyfrom, 15 February 2020.)

IOM builds local capacity

IOM Bahamas carried out a three-day training course on Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) for disaster relief volunteers in Marsh Harbour, Abaco from 3 to 6 March 2020. Fifteen volunteers representing several non-profit humanitarian organizations currently assisting in relief efforts on Abaco including The Bahamas Red Cross, Americares, SmartAid, and IsraAid participated in the training.

The CCCM training covered topics including Humanitarian Principles, the Global Humanitarian Coordination System, Minimum Standards in Emergencies, Site Closure and Durable

Solutions, Mainstreaming of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention, Mitigation and Referral in CCCM, and the importance of Community Participation from the evacuee/displaced population. This is the second round of CCCM training that IOM has completed here in The Bahamas.



Volunteers from several humanitarian organizations assisting with relief efforts in Abaco participated in an IOM CCCM training in Marsh Harbour, Abaco 3 March 2020 to 5 March 2020 in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) at the Government Complex.

Assisting vulnerable Haitian Migrants Program

IOM in collaboration Church World Services (CWS) started a 4 month program to provide assistance to Vulnerable Haitian migrants in The Bahamas especially (but not exclusively) the ones that have been affected by Hurricane Dorian. The program will support regularization through re-documentation of vulnerable Haitian Migrants and provide information about rights and access to essential services. Community cohesion will be strengthened through multi cultural community events, influencer programs, and strategic TV ads highlighting the strength of the bond between the Bahamian people and Haitian migrants.