



# CLIMATE & MOBILITY IN **BAHAMAS**

A Case Study for the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative



Global Centre for  
**Climate Mobility**



Greater Caribbean  
**Climate Mobility Initiative**  
Enabling People Positive Adaptation Journeys



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# Bahamas Snapshot

## Study Locations

**New Providence-** the main island and urban center with Nassau as the capital, serves as The Bahamas' financial hub and a key destination for migrants displaced by storms or seeking employment.

**Grand Bahama-** an island heavily impacted by hurricanes since 2004— including Frances, Jeanne, Irma, Matthew, Sandy, and Dorian— Grand Bahama is regarded as an urban, coastal place from which many have been displaced.



Map 1. Map of Bahamas showing areas where research was conducted. Image credit: Samuel Hall 2024.

# Key Findings

- 1** Most respondents in both islands have experienced displacement or migration first-hand: 71% of respondents in Grand Bahama and 47% in New Providence were born elsewhere. Around 1 in 5 residents surveyed lived in their current areas of residence for less than 5 years.
- 2** Many residents lack the capacities or resources to migrate, even if they wish to do so. Nearly 1 in 4 respondents (23%) reported considering moving elsewhere but do not have the means to do so. Meanwhile, nearly half of all respondents (47%) have no desire or plans to move.
- 3** Most respondents not only demonstrate high levels of awareness about climate change but also report being directly affected by it. Nearly all respondents (96%) have heard about climate change, and 71% see its impact in their lives.
- 4** However, only around 1 in 4 respondents consider climate change a factor in their migration decisions. When asked about climate change's impact on their decision to move, only 5% of respondents said it is the main factor, 13% said it is one of the main factors, and 19% said it plays a minor role.

When thinking about mobility, which of the following applies to you as an individual?

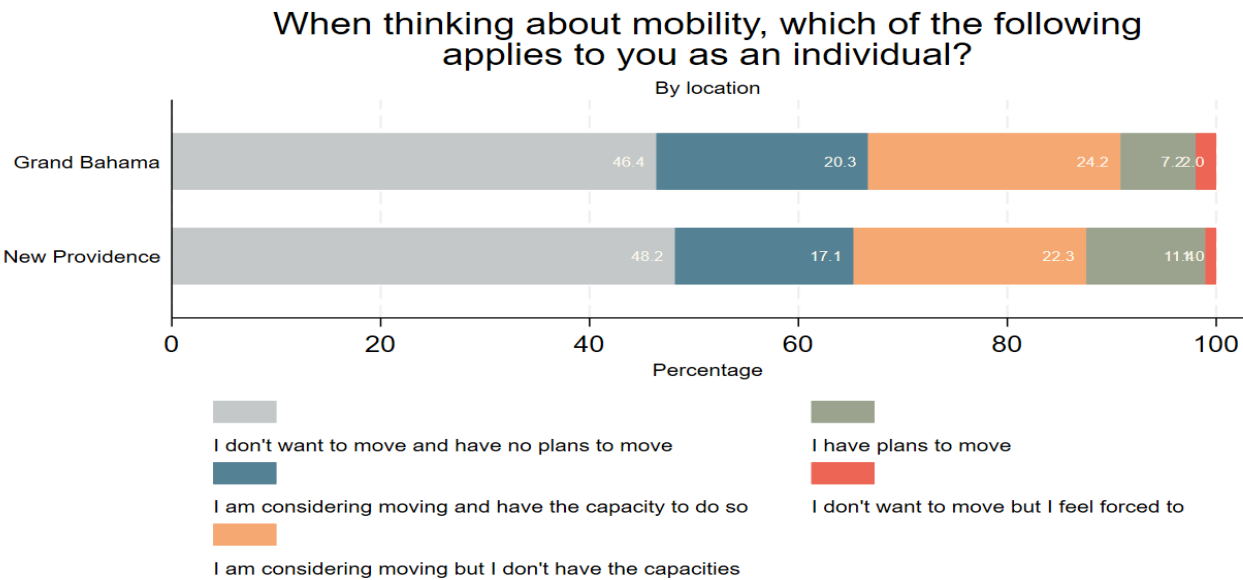


Figure 1. Mobility Intentions and future plans



Image 1: Local bay for fishermen in Nassua, New Providence, Bahamas. Photo Credit: Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean, 2024.

# Introduction

## Project Background

Samuel Hall, a research organisation specialised in migration and displacement, undertook research to address the critical issue of climate-induced human mobility in the Greater Caribbean region, assessing in particular how climate-related factors influence people's decisions to migrate or to stay and their resulting lived experiences.

This project is part of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI), a partnership of the Global Centre for Climate Mobility (GCCM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It aims to inform strategies for enabling people-positive adaptation journeys by strengthening adaptive capacities, supporting mobility and addressing climate-forced displacement in the region. The conceptual framework, based on Carling's ability/aspiration model developed for the African Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) was adapted for the GCCMI to focus on factors that shape people's vulnerability to climate change and their decision-making.

By collecting data in frontline communities affected by climate-related events, the findings from this field research complement the results of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Model, which projects climate-induced movements up until 2050. Samuel Hall engaged with the modelling efforts during the simultaneous research phases, and both teams shared their results to ensure synergy and alignment. The research findings were presented during the GCCMI stakeholder consultations in May 2024 and will inform the GCCMI's Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Report.



## Methodology

Location	<p><b>Six Association of Caribbean States (ACS)</b> member countries in the Greater Caribbean region, chosen for their diverse climate events and mobility patterns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costa Rica</li> <li>• Suriname</li> <li>• Colombia</li> <li>• Jamaica</li> <li>• The Bahamas</li> <li>• Antigua &amp; Barbuda</li> </ul> <p>Two islands in The Bahamas, selected to represent a diverse mix of urban and rural settings, both origin and destination areas for displaced populations, and regions experiencing a range of climate-related impacts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Providence</li> <li>• Grand Bahama</li> </ul>
Selection Criteria	Island country, archipelago nation consisting of over 700 islands, key economic sectors affected by climate change (tourism, agriculture, fisheries), extreme weather events (storms, wildfires) and slow onset events (sea level rise).
Key Phases	Desk review and research design, data collection and analysis, consultations and reporting (September 2023- September 2024).
Research Tools	In Bahamas, <b>370 household surveys, four focus group discussions, and four in-depth key informant interviews</b> were conducted to examine the relationship between migration and climate, focusing on mobility features, climate change adaptations, and the impact on decision-making.

Further information on site selection, methodology, and regional findings can be found in the synthesis report.

## Note on data collection and localisation

In March 2024, a local Bahamian research team led by Samuel Hall staff conducted fieldwork in the islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama. A total of 350 household surveys were conducted with community members and four focus group discussions were held with 24 participants from the sample area, including women, youth and elderly. In depth interviews were conducted with two key informants representing relevant institutions such as the Government of The Bahamas and the United Nations Mission to The Bahamas.

The research in The Bahamas was carried out as part of a regional study undertaken in six countries: Costa Rica, Colombia, Suriname, The Bahamas, Jamaica, and Antigua & Barbuda. The study aimed to understand the full range of mobility outcomes for populations in the Greater Caribbean region affected by climate change, examining the degree to which these outcomes are climate-related, how climate mobility interacts with other mobility dynamics, and the perceptions of those who have moved due to climate impacts. Throughout the data collection, Samuel Hall's team implemented a localisation approach, encouraging local researchers to lead the process and for communities to define the study's concepts themselves. A localised approach ensures that the research process is tailored to the specific context of the affected communities involved in the study.

## Note on contextualisation

This study offers an in depth exploration of two selected communities in each of the selected six countries. Given the limitations on timeframe and scope, the findings do not represent the perceptions of the entire communities, countries, or the region as a whole. Rather, they provide a snapshot into the experiences of individuals and households experiencing the impacts of climate-related factors on their life decisions. All findings should therefore be contextualised to each specific location's dynamic and features. Additional fieldwork within each country would offer a more comprehensive view, and additional country case studies would provide a deeper comparison within the region.



Image 2. Local research team in Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas. Photo credit: Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean, 2024.



## Key terminology and concepts

Climate Change	"Long-term changes in the Earth's climate that are warming the atmosphere, ocean and land. Climate change is affecting the balance of ecosystems that support life and biodiversity, and impacting health. It also causes more extreme weather events, such as more intense and/or frequent hurricanes, floods, heat waves, and droughts, and leads to sea level rise and coastal erosion as a result of ocean warming, melting of glaciers, and loss of ice sheets." <sup>1</sup>
Climate Adaptation	"Actions that help reduce vulnerability to the current or expected impacts of climate change like weather extremes and natural disasters, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, or food and water insecurity." <sup>2</sup>
Climate Resilience	"Resilience is the capacity of a community or environment to anticipate and manage dangerous climatic events and recover and transform after the ensuing shock, with minimal damage to societal wellbeing, economic activity, and the environment." <sup>3</sup>
Vulnerability	"The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to be affected by the impact of hazards." <sup>4</sup>

1 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change." <https://www.undp.org/iran/news/climate-dictionary-everyday-guide-climate-change>

2 UNDP. "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change."

3 UNDP. "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change."

4 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). "Vulnerability." <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/vulnerability>



# Context & Profiles

## Locations Profile: Climate Risks and Mobility Dynamics

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, or The Bahamas, is highly vulnerable to climate risks. The Bahamas is a small island developing state (SIDS) situated within the Lucayan Archipelago, a section of the West Indies.

It is the Caribbean nation that is the **most exposed to the long term effects of sea level rise and is frequently affected by extreme weather events like hurricanes and storms as well as rising temperatures, flooding and erosion.**

The Bahamas is made up of around **700 islands**, rocks and cays and a population of about **409,984 inhabitants**,<sup>5</sup> with 83.2% of the islands' population having lived in urban areas in 2020.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the majority of those reside on the island of New Providence (70%), mostly around the capital, Nassau.

Tourism is the main economic sector on the island. It representing about 50% of the country's total GDP, further exacerbating its economic vulnerability to climate change impacts, in particular Sea Level Rise (SLR) and storms. For example, the Ministry of Tourism's Research and Statistics Department reported a **73% drop in visitors between 2019 and 2021 due to the combined effects of Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19**, which had significant adverse consequences on the economy.<sup>7</sup> Tourism is trailed at a significant distance by agriculture, which currently accounts for under 1% of The Bahamas' total GDP; as well as fisheries, similarly representing an estimated 1%.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the sustainability of all three employment and service provision sectors is highly vulnerable to climate risks.

Moreover, close to **three quarters (73%) of the population lives in Low Elevation Coastal Zones (LECZ)** between 0-5 metres above sea level and within this group, around 130,000 individuals reside in zones under 1 metre above sea level.<sup>9</sup>

This highlights the critical risk that rising sea levels present for the Bahamian population, gradually rendering different regions uninhabitable. **Extreme heat is a critical climate risk affecting the Bahamian population as well as flooding**, especially in Nassau.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, **hurricanes make landfall on average every 3 years** in The Bahamas, which figures among the 10 countries worldwide with populations most exposed to coastal storms<sup>11</sup> and storm surges.<sup>12</sup> **The Bahamas has experienced highly destructive** hurricanes, most recently Hurricane Dorian, which led to a significant death toll, severe destruction of homes and infrastructure and high levels of displacement.



Image 3. Aftermath of heavy rains in Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas. Photo credit: Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean, 2024.

7 IOM (2023), Planning and Considerations for a Loss and Damage Financing System to Address Climate Change Induced Mobility in the Caribbean.

8 IOM (2023), Planning and Considerations for a Loss and Damage Financing System to Address Climate Change Induced Mobility in the Caribbean.

9 Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (2023), GCCMI Desk Review.

10 FGD 14, 15

11 IOM (2023), Planning and Considerations for a Loss and Damage Financing System to Address Climate Change Induced Mobility in the Caribbean.

12 Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (2023), GCCMI Desk Review.

## Respondent profile: socioeconomic and migration characteristics

Respondents	350 Survey Respondents
Age	39 Years
Gender	61% Women, 39% Men
Household Composition	<p>Average: 3.8 members, 29% were married or in a civil union.</p> <p>58% split household in Grand Bahama, 50% in New Providence.</p>
Decision Making	51% primary breadwinners, 53% decision makers
Education Level	54% secondary education, 23% tertiary education, 11% vocational training, 4% completed primary school only, of those who didn't 98% can read.
Housing	Most in solid structures.
Employment	More formal wage than informal; 13% in Grand Bahama and 25% in New Providence were unemployed.





Image 4. Survey respondents, Nassau, New Providence, The Bahamas. Photo credit: Niambi Hall Campbell- Dean, 2024.



## Migration profile

**The migration profile of respondents in The Bahamas reveals distinct patterns between New Providence and Grand Bahama.** Seventy one percent of respondents in Grand Bahama and 47% in New Providence were born elsewhere, highlighting a high degree of migration. In addition, as shown in Figure 2, a significant portion of the population in both locations have lived there for less than five years, with 16% in New Providence and 20% in Grand Bahama.

Of note, a number of respondents in New Providence were students who have moved to the capital of Nassau for education. When it comes to moving patterns, 19% of migrants to Grand Bahama moved alone compared to 40% in New Providence, where the rest relocated with part or all of their household.

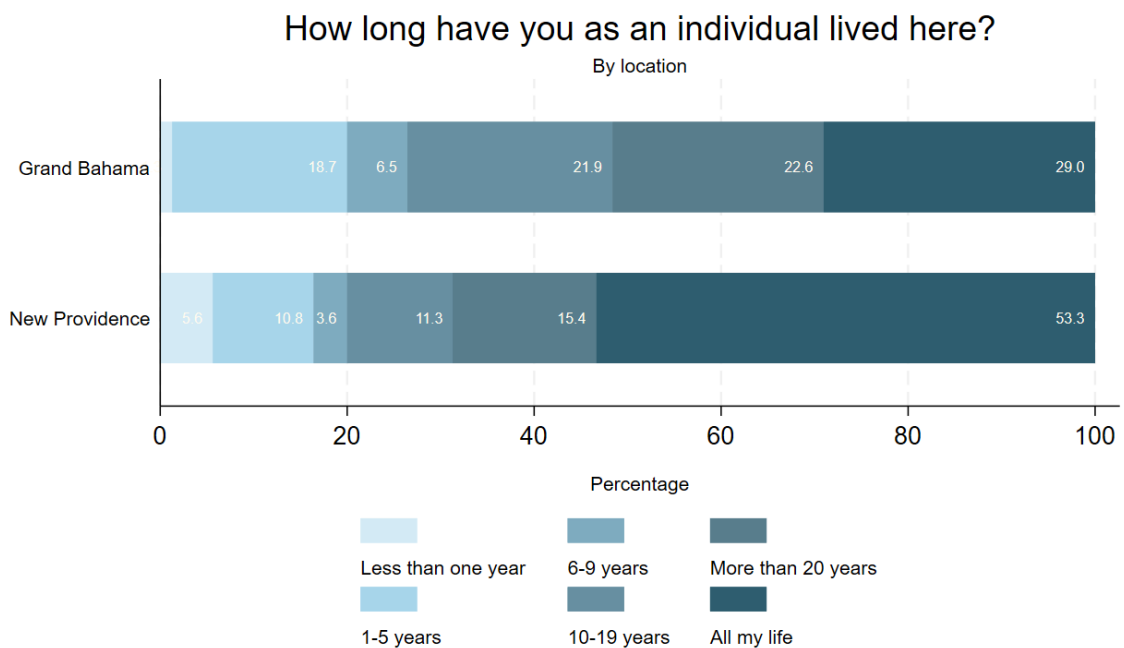


Figure 2. Duration respondents live in sampled locations

**Mobility patterns in New Providence and Grand Bahama are influenced by economic and environmental factors.** New Providence, home to the urban coastal capital city of Nassau, exhibits high migration trends driven by economic opportunities. In contrast, Grand Bahama has faced severe impacts from hurricanes, leading to significant displacement due to climate events. The situation on Grand Bahama is aggravated by limited government intervention, resulting in inadequate health and educational facilities, water and gas stations, grocery stores, and infrastructure. Consequently, during climate disasters, **residents are unable to access essential services and are at high risk.**<sup>13</sup>

This displacement often leads affected individuals to relocate to better-serviced areas, such as Nassau, which can accommodate the climate-displaced population.

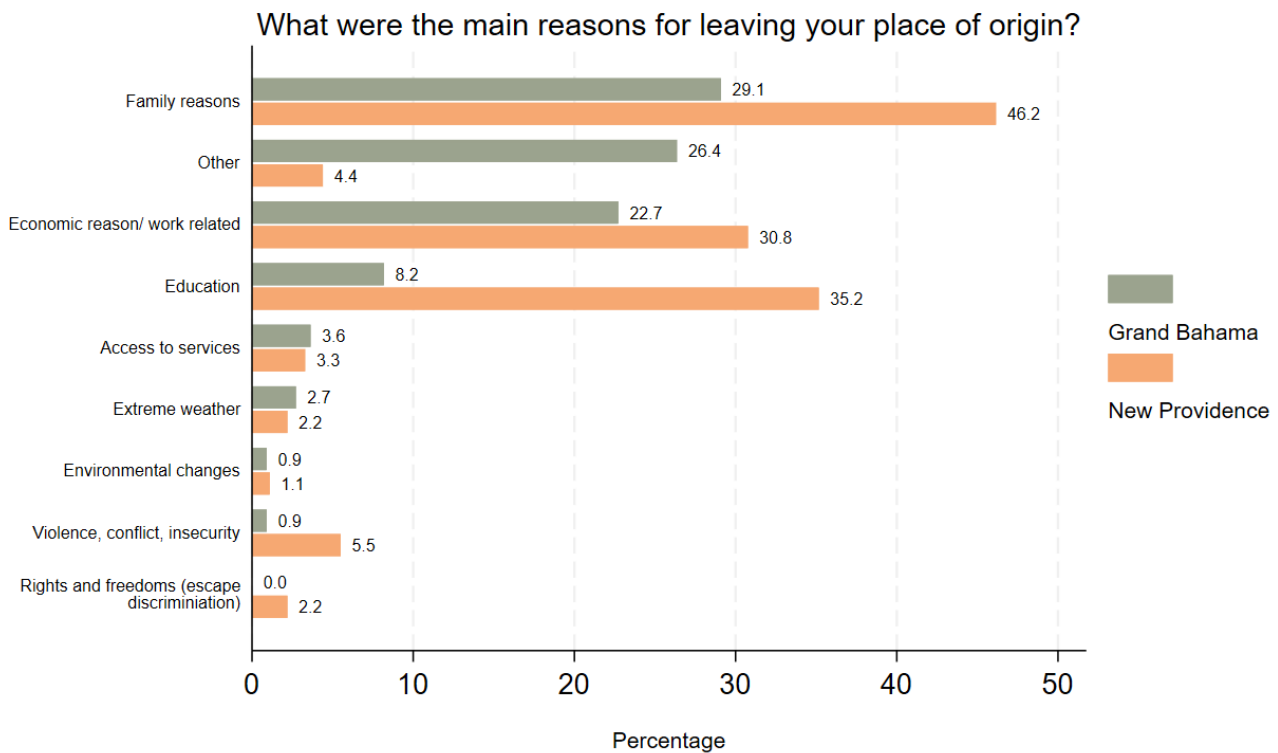


Figure 3. Reasons for leaving community of origin

In terms of housing ownership arrangements, the majority of respondents (62%) lived in houses that they own while a third (30%) lived in rental houses. Non-migrants were more likely to be living in houses that they own (74%) compared to migrants (52%).

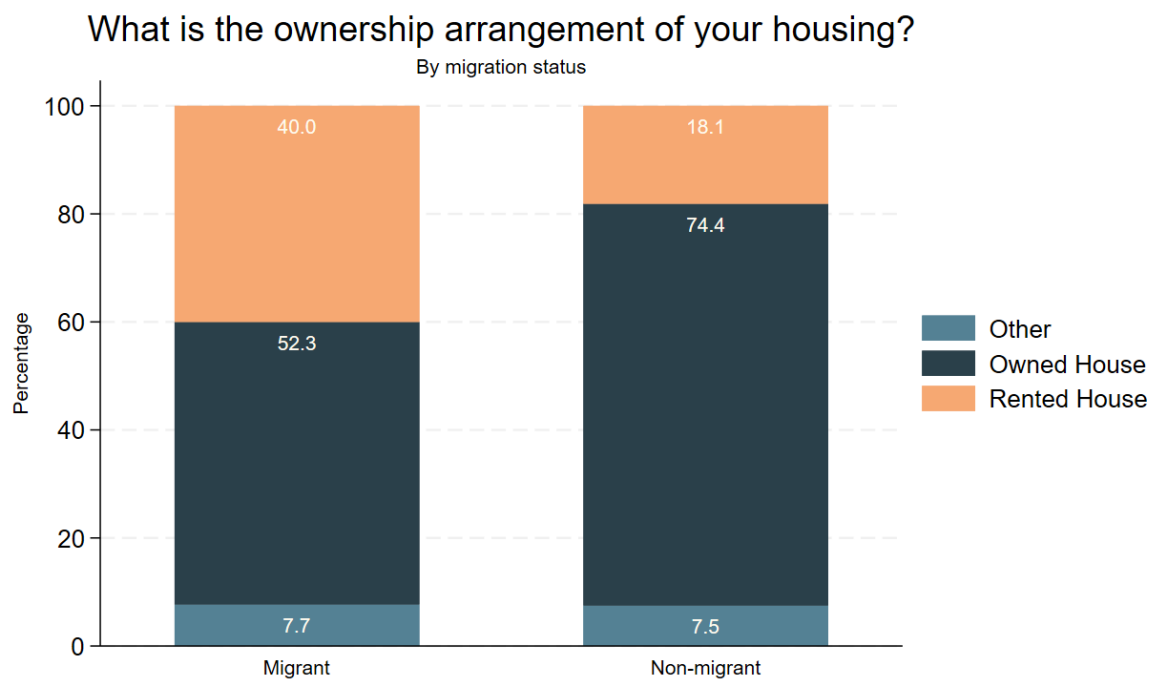


Figure 4. Housing ownership arrangements (migrant v non-migrant)

## Household profile

The capacity of respondents to respond or adapt to the impact of climate change, based on socio-economic factors, appears relatively stable yet reveals underlying challenges. A majority of respondents (59%) reported living comfortably, while only 9% found it financially difficult to get by, and 32% described their financial situation as neutral. In terms of stability of income, about 9 of every 10 respondents reported that their income was either 'always stable and predictable' or 'mostly stable and predictable'. The difference between income predictability between migrants and non-migrants is minimal. Figure 5 shows that non-migrants were only slightly more likely to report unstable and unpredictable income. Financial security perceptions were consistent between Grand Bahama and New Providence, though slightly more respondents in New Providence reported financial difficulties.

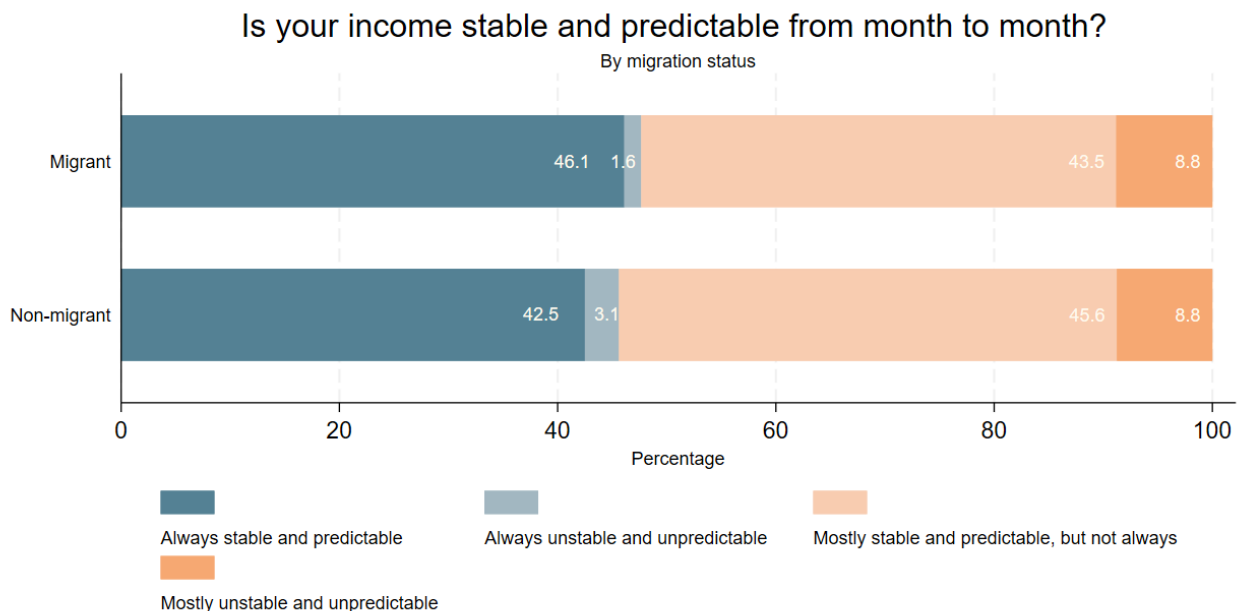


Figure 5. Household income stability and predictability (migrant v non-migrant)

There were no significant differences based on whether respondents grew up locally or elsewhere. Most respondents (89%) reported having stable and predictable income, with only 11% experiencing instability. In New Providence, interviewees were more likely to report mostly stable income.

In Grand Bahama, the economic situation remains dire. The destruction and displacement in Freeport, the island's urban centre, have left young people struggling to find job opportunities, contributing to high unemployment rates. Limited government intervention has resulted in inadequate health and educational facilities, further worsening conditions during disasters. The economic decline has intensified challenges for residents, who now contend with a lack of schools for individuals with disabilities, rising unemployment, and inflation.

Additionally, there is a need for mental health services for hurricane victims. Nassau, in contrast, has more resources, including schools, healthcare facilities, gas stations, and marketplaces, water, funeral homes, libraries, though it also faces stressors like inadequate housing and insufficient school facilities following extensive damage.<sup>14</sup>

This is likely linked to the evident desire to migrate shared by a substantial number of local residents. Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) islanders surveyed considered moving elsewhere but lacked the capacity to do so, while another 19% were considering relocation and had the means to move. This highlights a significant portion of the population feeling trapped by their circumstances, further complicating their ability to adapt to the ongoing impacts of climate change (Figure 1).



Image 5. Local neighbourhood house profile. Photo credit: Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean,

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14 FGD 12, 13, 15



# Climate-related Challenges & Impacts

## Climate Challenges and Vulnerabilities

As displayed in Figure 6 below, interviewees were asked about weather events that resulted in damages to homes, buildings, crops or roads. Notably, respondents in Grand Bahama were substantially more likely to report being affected by an array of weather events when compared to their New Providence counterparts. In both locations, tropical cyclones and severe storms were the most destructive weather events, followed by flooding and storm surges.



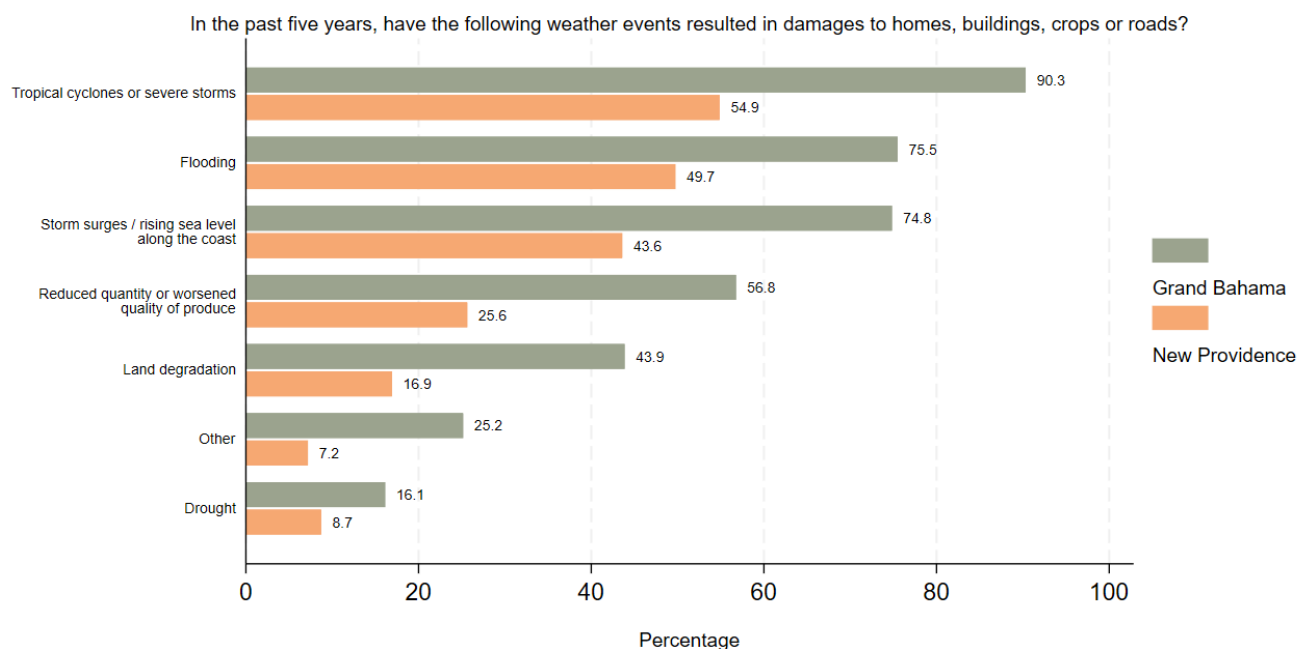


Figure 6. Weather events or phenomena resulting in damages, as reported by respondents.

## Climate-related impacts

The impact of climate change on the lives of the inhabitants of The Bahamas has been devastating. Hurricanes, especially, have wreaked havoc on the islands time and time again. Hurricane Dorian had significant impacts for the islands studied in data collection, including Great Abaco island where many respondents came to Nassau from. Hurricanes Jean and Frances, which preceded Dorian, destroyed most of the houses and infrastructure in Freeport, the capital city, and drastically affected life on the island of Grand Bahama. One participant painted this picture by saying:

*“Grand Bahama has never been the same and a lot of people still haven’t recovered from Francis and Jean. I feel like that’s when Grand Bahama lost, we lost the title of the second city and lost the title of the magic city. It destroyed a lot.”<sup>15</sup>*

Furthermore, the impact of increased hurricanes, storms and floods has created risks of water insecurity.<sup>16</sup> These events have led to water sources becoming saline and have also damaged sewage systems which end up contaminating fresh water systems, resulting in people no longer having access to clean water for consumption and home use. In addition to hurricanes, Nassau faces extreme heat and frequent flooding, which are significant climate challenges for the residents. As one interviewee stated: *“If it rains too hard, Nassau will flood,”* emphasising the city’s vulnerability to heavy rainfall and flood events.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> FGD14

<sup>16</sup> FGD13,14

<sup>17</sup> FGD14

Emotional well being and stress levels were the most frequently reported effect of climate change impacts for respondents households, reported by slightly more than half of all respondents. Around 1 in 3 respondents also reported effects on livelihoods, income and / or food security. Interestingly, around 1 in 4 respondents also reported effects on safety and security due to the risk of violence (Figure 7).

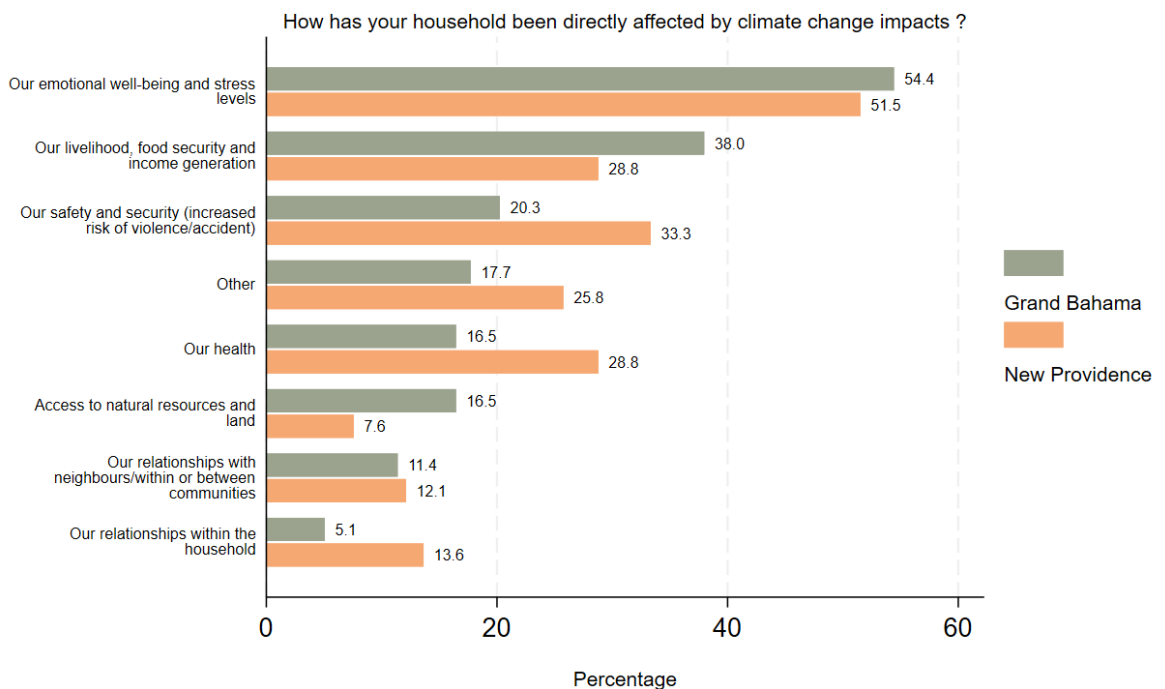


Figure 7. Effects of Climate Change on Households

When asked about the impact of climate change on social relations in the community, most respondents reported no effect (74% in New Providence and 50% in Grand Bahama). However, among those who did notice an impact, negative effects were more commonly reported (13%) than positive ones (6%). The most frequently mentioned negative impacts included migration and displacement leading to changes in community demographics (36%), closely followed by strained relationships due to loss or damage of property (35%) and changes in traditional community gatherings (31%).

**Resource conflicts and mental health issues affect both islands.** In Grand Bahama, access to natural resources and land was also a prominent issue (24%), whereas in New Providence conflicts over community resources were seemingly more common (19%) (Figure 8). These community-level effects also impact the mental health of residents. According to a key informant:

*“Either people who were immediately impacted or first responders going to the island, definitely had to battle depression, PTSD, and anxiety.”<sup>18</sup>*

18 KII12

The effects of climate damages and consequential displacement are therefore exacerbated by an absence of mental health prioritisation and conversations around mental health and psychosocial support.

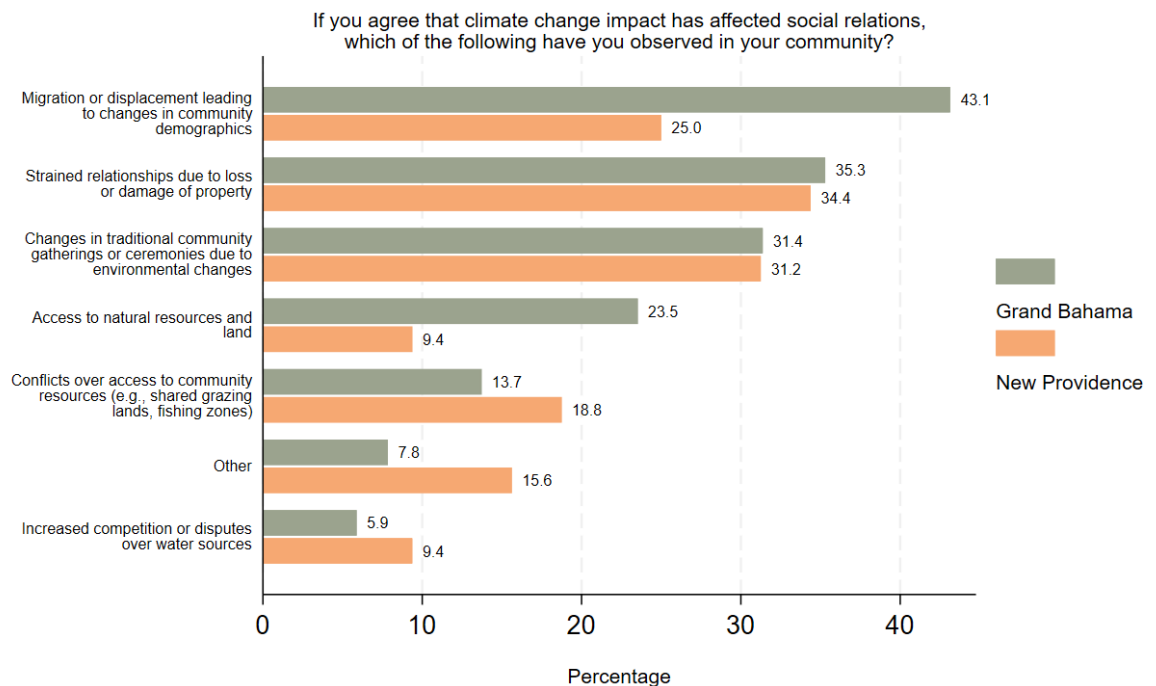


Figure 8. Effects of climate change on social relations

These climate events have also had significant impacts on traditional livelihoods in The Bahamas. Populations living in coastal areas rely heavily on fishing as their income-generating activity and their source of food and are therefore greatly affected by the decline in fish production due to climate change. Tied to the fishery industry, boat-building is another traditional occupation that has been adversely affected and with it, the erosion of a long-standing cultural practice. This loss of generational practices is because:

*“Abaco was known for a lot of fishermen and people building boats, and a lot of that got destroyed, and a lot of people moved on. Persons who are in Abaco now, how will they pass on that culture to persons who have stayed, because they have lost a lot of older folks.”<sup>19</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> KII12



Image 6. Freeport City, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. Photo credit: Erica Roxbury, 2024.

**The impact of climate change on culture and traditions is an element that was heavily emphasised by respondents in The Bahamas.** The destruction of homes, the loss of family members, the displacement of communities and general damage caused by climate events have created cycles of disconnection whereby respondents shared experiencing a loss of “culture, history, dignity and identity,” essentially their sense of home. As a result of climate change, respondents explained undergoing a form of deracination due to the extreme transformation of their environment by climate events, often over a short period of time. These climate events are also hindering the connectivity of the smaller islands in The Bahamas as, for instance, the bridges that used to connect them were destroyed by successive hurricanes.<sup>20</sup>

**Low income people in The Bahamas are disproportionately affected by climate change due to their areas of residence and inability to access resources.** This has to do with the fact that higher income people reside in geographically higher places where the impacts of hurricanes are lessened by the landscape in contrast to people living in the valleys, inlands and coastal regions, which are subjected to floods and other consequences of hurricanes.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, respondents reported inequitable access to resources, in Great Bahama particularly, highlighting that resources are only accessible in the city of Freeport while those in the outskirt cities and rural areas tend to be neglected.<sup>22</sup> They also mentioned the misuse of government and donor resources dedicated to mitigating climate impacts,<sup>23</sup> and that nepotism was an important issue leading to inequitable access to resources, whereby those close to politicians benefit while others are forced to live off scarce resources.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> KII12

<sup>21</sup> FGD13

<sup>22</sup> FGD12

<sup>23</sup> FGD13

<sup>24</sup> FGD12

# Responses & Adaptations

## Adaptations and Strategies

Data collection revealed that while respondents generally felt capable of coping with climate shocks, their trust in their households, communities, or governments to provide adequate support was minimal. Key adaptation measures identified include household preparedness, community-level actions, government support, and food security initiatives. However, issues such as limited governmental intervention, misuse of resources, and a lack of collective community action were highlighted as significant challenges.

Respondents were more positive than negative about their own ability to cope with climate shocks, with men being more optimistic (63%) compared to women (51%). Interestingly, respondents in Grand Bahama were slightly more positive than those based in New Providence.

However, most respondents reported that their households have not taken specific measures to prepare for or adapt to the impacts of climate change: 70% in New Providence and 63% in Grand Bahama. Respondents with no migration experience were slightly more likely to report no measures being adopted (70%) when compared to respondents who have been born elsewhere (63%), which could be attributed to a level of informedness.



Respondents expressed scepticism about whether their communities were collectively preparing for climate change impacts. Many respondents did not think their communities were taking sufficient action, particularly in New Providence, where more participants expressed doubt (Figure 9). This lack of community action was linked to perceptions that climate change issues were not a priority in their communities. These community-level issues also impacted mental health, with one key informant noting that both people directly affected by disasters and first responders suffered from depression, PTSD, and anxiety.

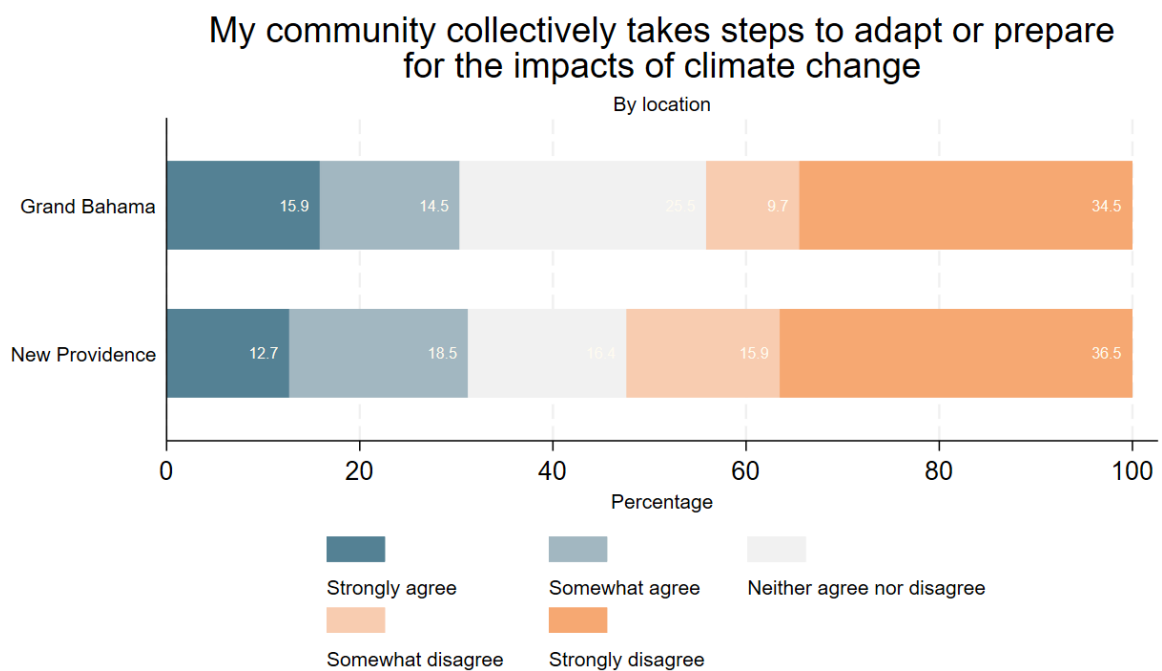


Figure 9. Assessment of community-level adaptation and preparedness.

The perception that climate change is not a priority among community members is largely influenced by the government’s approach—or lack thereof—toward addressing climate issues.<sup>25</sup> Few respondents felt that local or national authorities provide sufficient support or resources for those considering migration due to climate impacts (6%), while 17% acknowledged that some support is provided, but more is needed. The vast majority (57%) reported that authorities do not offer enough support, and 17% were unaware of any available assistance.

In Grand Bahama, the misuse of the government and/or donors’ resources is a contributing factor to exacerbation of the climate change issues based on the perception from communities that government officials take the resources for themselves instead of sharing with the affected members of the community to deal with the effects of climate change. A key informant engaged in hurricane response shared experience of this first hand:

*"I could attest to that because I see it myself. Some, I had some family staying over with me after Dorian, after Dorian. I had to go, that's around (the time) I was working with the Ministry of (name omitted). And I was helping out with NEMA. They'd actually taken some of the supplies that they had sent over from the States to aid over here. some people were in charge of it, they'd actually taken the share to keep for themselves. And they only gave a small portion of it to some of the people."*<sup>26</sup>

In New Providence, more respondents acknowledged some level of government support, although there were also more individuals completely unaware of any support when compared to the situation in Grand Bahama. While there were no major differences based on migration background, slightly more men (20%) were completely unaware of any support when compared to women (15%). The results imply that there may be further differences in levels of informedness about available support mechanisms based on socio-economic status of respondents or other disparities in outreach efforts. This is especially true for previous migrants, like the Haitian population, who experience layered vulnerabilities based on past experiences and documentation.

26 FGD13

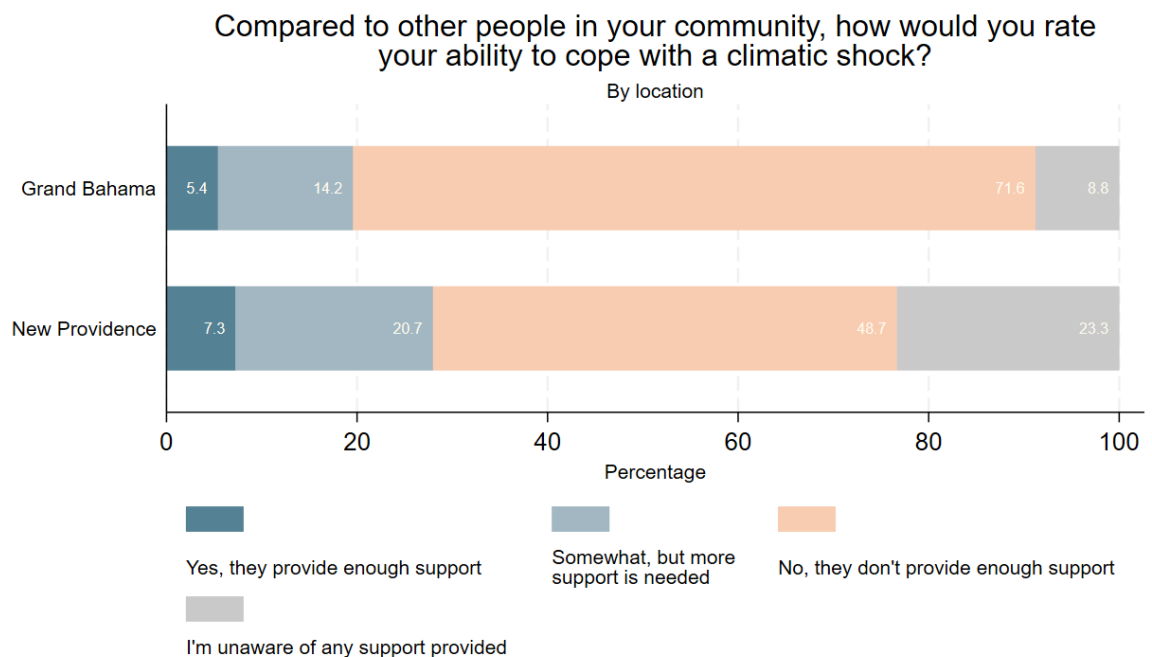


Figure 10. Assessment of government support

**Inhabitants of The Bahamas often feel they have no option with regards to damages than to try and rebuild or migrate.** The process of rebuilding homes and infrastructure following the destructive passage of hurricanes incurs significant financial costs in the process, both to individuals and overall to the economy.<sup>27</sup> In addition to housing solutions (such as installing hurricane shutters and sand bags) when dealing with food insecurity on the islands, people have started to think about starting home gardening where they can grow vegetables and fruits to sustain themselves and the people in their community. Participants expressed that a collective gardening initiative, especially in Grand Bahama, could increase food production and combat food insecurity.

27 FGD13



Image 7. Community beach conservation effort, Nassua, New Providence, Bahamas. Photo credit: Sherline Chase, 2024.

## Mobility as an adaptation?

**Mobility appears to be a common response to climate change in The Bahamas islands studied.** Respondents on the islands of Grand Bahama affirm that migration is rampant as a result of intense climate events like hurricanes, especially for people residing in coastal regions.<sup>28</sup> In addition to hurricanes, people in The Bahamas are also suffering from extreme heat in the summer, all of which are worsening living conditions and forcing people to resort to migration.<sup>29</sup> Also, climate-induced mobility appears to create sequences of migration due to the loss of livelihoods. Due to the damages caused by the series of hurricanes in the past, the level of the business operations in The Bahamas slowed down and others closed completely and with the high numbers of people displaced to other cities like Nassau. Local economies became smaller, further hindering the operations of those businesses. High levels of unemployment in Grand Bahama led to people moving to other cities in search of job opportunities due to the impacts of climate-induced events.<sup>30</sup>

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28 FGD13

29 FGD13

30 FGD13

Additionally, the language used by respondents to describe their mobility-response to climate change indicates that mobility was seen as a necessity. According to focus group participants, they had to relocate, and did not really have a choice.<sup>31</sup> During the outbreak of intense climatic conditions like hurricanes, people move with their families. Generally, women are most likely to experience highly difficult times during these moves, as they still have to take care of their children and household needs, while still processing the climate events driving their mobility.<sup>32</sup> Material destruction, the loss of livelihoods and the associated trauma and mental health impacts that inhabitants go through due to extreme climate events have increased the movement of children and working-age populations, usually to the capital city of Nassau.<sup>33</sup>

These instances of forced mobility due to high levels of suffering as a result of climate change make the notion of mobility as adaptation seem problematic to respondents. People having their lives uprooted by climate change and being displaced because their homelands are no longer habitable appears to be perceived as more of a necessary response than an adaptive response to climate change.

## Involuntary and voluntary immobility

In the face of climate change, the decision to stay or leave during climate events involves a complex interplay of voluntary and involuntary factors. Economic necessity, cultural attachment, and family dynamics significantly influence these decisions. While some individuals choose to remain in their homes due to deep-rooted cultural beliefs and personal attachments, others are compelled to stay due to economic constraints or responsibilities to support their families.

Three out of ten respondents (30%) have reported that at least one of their household members work in other locations and regularly stay away. In half of the cases, such mobility of individual household members supported the livelihoods of households who stayed behind: 49% of respondents who had family members working away reported that these family members sent money home. Meanwhile, those with caregiving responsibilities or care needs often remain behind. 24% of survey respondents with split households reported leaving behind elderly family members, followed by 20% who left behind children, and 17% who left behind women.

Attachment to home and cultural norms are factors significantly impacting decision-making, especially for older people. The older generation in The Bahamas still stay home during climate disasters, choosing immobility regardless of danger.<sup>34</sup> The concept of Home is strongly embedded in their beliefs of peace and good health; they believe that home is still home and that people are not supposed to leave and migrate even if there is a problem.

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31 FGD13

32 FGD13

33 KII12

34 FGD14

*"My grandfather did not want to leave. And he was the only one living there about, he would have been about 78, 79 at the time, and he didn't want to move. He wanted to stay there in this big house by himself and if anything did happen to him I guess he wouldn't have cared because he would have been in his home. And so, it was a very emotional thing for my family because they don't want anything to happen to their father. But that is, I think that is the relationships that Bahamians have with their homes or their idea of what is home."*<sup>35</sup>

Older people also look negatively on young people's decision to migrate, rejecting the idea of migration as climate adaptation, seeing it instead as deviance to their cultural practices and values as Bahamians. One participant reflected this tendency, "Aside from opportunities and resources, I think it's ingrained in our culture that it's better to stay together than apart. You never know what's going to happen."<sup>36</sup>

They also tend to guilt the younger generation into staying, adding another consideration to young people's decision-making process.<sup>37</sup> Also, tied to this attachment to home is climate-mobility decisions made on the expectation of eventual return. People tend to migrate internally rather than externally so that it will be easier for them to return to their home after climate events (FGD 12, 14). They make mobility decisions such that their migration is temporary and will allow them to return to their home areas.

*"People are still building, they go back and they're different, so this doesn't happen. It's kind of a different environmental change, I think. I've seen where they're not giving up where they were, because home was home."*<sup>38</sup>

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35 FGD14

36 FGD14

37 FGD12

38 FGD13



# Looking Ahead: Decision- making

## Factors Influencing Decision-making

The factors influencing climate-response and mobility decisions range from **the habitability of people's home base, the availability of livelihood opportunities, attachment to home, stereotypes around migration and the presence of support systems in potential migration locations.** The combined effects of sea level rise and destructive hurricanes have made that many regions of The Bahamas, in particular Grand Bahama, are **increasingly becoming uninhabitable**, implying that inhabitants have no choice but to decide to migrate.<sup>39</sup>

However, the role that economics plays in this decision is paramount. People in Grand Bahama would reportedly stay in climate-compromised conditions if there were jobs available to them. When making mobility decisions, people also tend to decide to move to places where they have family members or friends, highlighting the importance of social ties and support systems in guiding climate-mobility decisions (Figure 11).<sup>40</sup> **Respondents mentioned relying heavily on family members and friends for support and to integrate in the new locations.**

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39 FGD13

40 FGD13

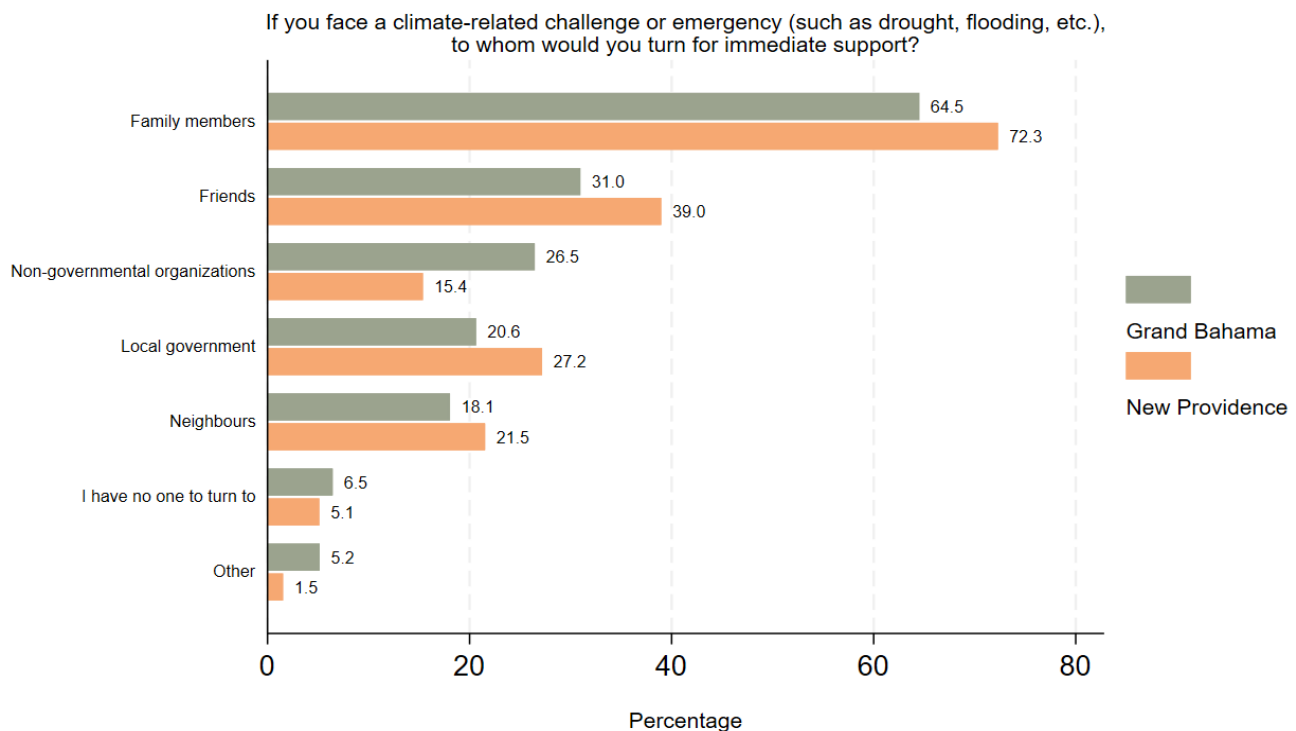


Figure 11. Support mechanisms

Another significant element influencing decision-making is the stereotype or negative preconception that people in The Bahamas have of migrants vs. “expats” or expatriates, someone who lives outside of their country. **The perception of migration in The Bahamas is often understood through the migration experience of Haitians and Jamaicans there which has been characterised by xenophobia, marginalisation and discrimination.**

The Bahamians’ expectation of such negative treatment if they move externally to other Caribbean countries negatively impacts their climate-mobility decisions.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the negative perception of migrants, particularly from Black communities in the Caribbean, white migrants from England often gain access to spaces and opportunities. Emigration to North America or Europe is perceived as a status symbol, indicating a level of exclusivity and discrimination within the same migrant activity.

*If people have to because of a storm, everybody’s gonna be like, “Yeah, you gotta move” so on, so forth. But if people look at the migrations, like the amount of xenophobia that we have towards Haitians, and Jamaicans that’s a whole different problem, conversation that’s a whole different conversation. You have these, sorry to say certain Bahamians are very, very prejudiced against Haitians. And you have a whole spiel of all these Haitians doing this, doing that. But who is taking care of the menial jobs and or the actual backbone of society? I’m gonna leave that right there.”<sup>42</sup>*

<sup>41</sup> FGD13

<sup>42</sup> FGD13

Economic factors are also strong determinants of mobility decisions. **The search for better livelihood opportunities and unemployment resulting from the adverse effects of climate change on local economies frequently drive migration to other parts of The Bahamas, particularly in cities like Nassau.**<sup>43</sup>

Also, because of the island's history of destructive hurricanes, insurance premiums for housing have exponentially increased, resulting in inhabitants no longer being able to afford to live in their communities, resulting in people deciding to migrate.<sup>44</sup>



Image 8. Post effects of a storm. Photo credit: Photo credit: Jannifer Thurston, 2024.

## Climate and mobility decision-making nexus

**Understanding the nexus between climate and mobility in The Bahamas reveals a complex interplay of motivations behind migration.** In Grand Bahama, migration motives vary with each person, with some individuals moving due to climate-induced disasters, while others seek job opportunities. As one respondent noted, *“Yeah, but you gotta realise that in Nassau, it is overpopulated, but Nassau has the most jobs.”*<sup>45</sup> This highlights the dual pressures of climate impacts and economic prospects driving migration decisions. This is also reflected in the survey results, as 3 in 4 respondents did not consider or factor in climate change in their migration decisions, and few (5%) thought of climate change as the main reason in their consideration to move (Figure 12).

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43 FGD12

44 KII12

45 FGD12

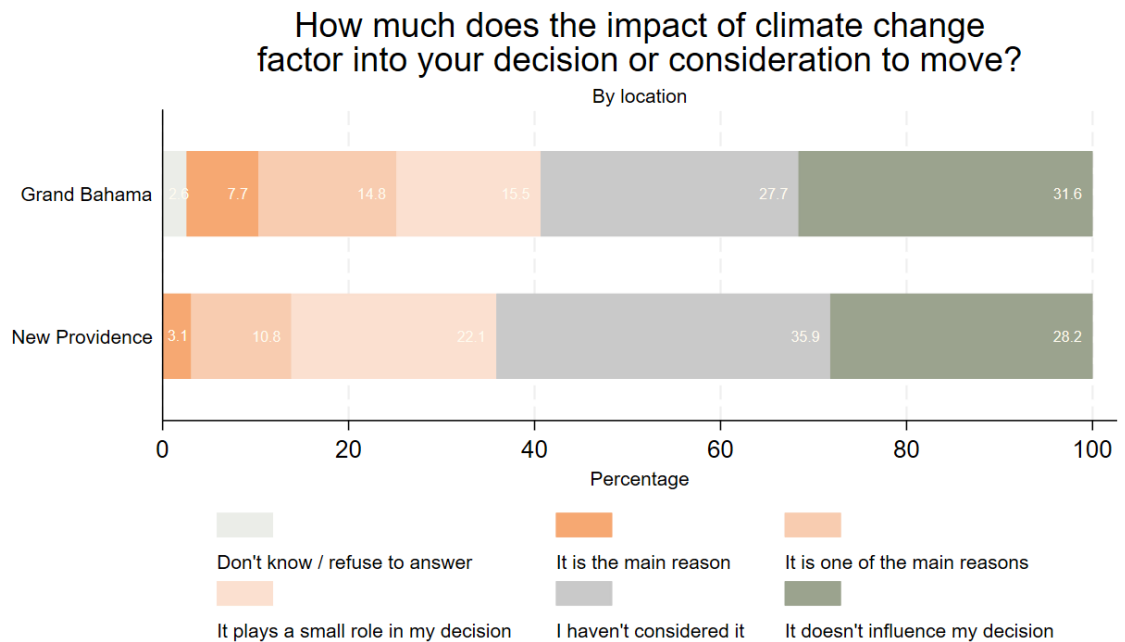


Figure 12. Climate mobility decision making

Residents of Nassau express concern over the lack of effective contingency plans for mitigating climate-induced disasters, contributing to their migration considerations. While around half of all respondents in The Bahamas surveyed (47%) had no desire or plans to move, the other half aspired, considered or planned to move. Nearly one in four (23%) considered moving but lacked the capacity to do so, while 19% had the capacity and were contemplating relocation. A smaller proportion had concrete plans to move (10%), and fewer than 2% felt forced to move despite not wanting to (Figure 1).

Reflective of the complicated future prospects of the islands, many residents surveyed preferred to move abroad and permanently if so. When considering potential destinations, more than one-third (36%) of respondents indicated they would move to another country. 4 in 10 respondents (40%) preferred moving locally: to a different area within the country (21%) or a different neighbourhood (19%). Most respondents (65%) reported they would move permanently.

The broader implications of climate-induced migration extend beyond physical displacement. One participant emphasised the profound impact on personal and cultural identity:

*"One day you were a self-sustaining person, and now you are a climate refugee... there is a giant eye on a disaster when it happens, but then the news cycle changes."*


This sense of "emplaced displacement" underscores the loss of culture, history, dignity, and identity as environmental transformations force people from their homes. It also highlights how a feeling of a lack of capacity is exacerbated by a perceived lack of support from both one's own government, and the international community.

*"You know... we all know what's going on in terms of sea levels rising and stuff like that. What does that mean for the future of The Bahamas?"<sup>46</sup>*





Image 9. Value and asset mapping, focus group discussion, Freeport, Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. Photo credit: Tonette Minnis, 2024.



# Conclusions: Findings on Climate Mobility

The Bahamas faces profound challenges due to its vulnerability to climate change, highlighted by its small island status and dependence on sectors highly sensitive to environmental shifts.

The impacts of hurricanes, storms, flooding, and rising temperatures have been devastating, particularly affecting coastal communities and the tourism industry, a pillar of the national economy. With a majority of the population residing in low-lying coastal zones, the threat of sea level rise is imminent, rendering many areas increasingly uninhabitable.



The frequency of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, underscores the urgent need for adaptive strategies and resilient infrastructure. Past experiences of disaster displacement from hurricanes and migration between islands provide lessons for the future, in terms of how addressing climate challenges in The Bahamas requires integrated approaches that prioritise resilience-building, equitable resource distribution, and community empowerment. This path forward is evident in the key findings of this case study:

- **The Bahamas is acutely vulnerable to climate risks**, with hurricanes like Dorian causing significant human and economic losses. Extreme weather events, sea level rise, and coastal erosion threaten livelihoods, housing, and infrastructure, particularly in low-lying coastal areas.
- **Climate-induced migration is prevalent**, especially from severely affected areas like Grand Bahama (and Abaco) to more resilient regions such as Nassau. Displacement is driven by both immediate impacts of hurricanes and long-term anticipated environmental changes, which are disrupting communities and economies.
- **Migration is viewed more as a necessity** than a choice for many Bahamians affected by climate change. Despite efforts to rebuild, financial constraints, lack of resources, and government support hinder effective adaptation measures at both individual and This is particularly true for Grand Bahama, where, due to destruction and displacement, youth unemployment—and consequently, out-migration—remains high
- **While some consider moving to mitigate climate impacts, significant barriers such as financial constraints and attachment to cultural and familial ties complicate migration decisions.** Migration choices are also shaped by gender and generational dynamics, with elderly, children, and women more likely to remain behind in split households. When entire families relocate, caregiving responsibilities and associated challenges disproportionately fall on women. Meanwhile, older residents, strongly attached to their land and community, often choose to stay even in dangerous situations.
- **There is widespread dissatisfaction with the government's response to climate impacts**, with perceived misallocation of resources and inadequate support for affected populations, especially undocumented Haitians. Community initiatives to enhance resilience are perceived to be limited, reflecting gaps in climate adaptation planning and implementation.

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Image 10. Coast in Nassua, New Providence, Bahamas. Photo credit: Niambi Hall Campbell- Dean 2024.



# About Us

**Samuel Hall** is a social enterprise specialising in research, program evaluation, and data analysis in migration and displacement contexts. Since 2010, we've focused on understanding the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities. Our work across Africa, South, and Central Asia shows that real change often begins at the grassroots level, where local activists, migrants, and displaced people lead constructive dialogues and actions.

**The Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI)** is a joint undertaking coordinated by the Global Centre for Climate Mobility and the Association of Caribbean States, bringing together 25 countries, amongst them numerous Small Island Developing States, whose people are most at risk from the impacts of sea level rise and other climate related stressors. The initiative's partners include the World Bank, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).