

Immigrant Eligibility for Disaster Assistance

1. Some disaster help is usually available to all disaster survivors. Your immigration status does not matter. If you are undocumented, you can get certain kinds of disaster help.

- If the government declares your city a “disaster area,” FEMA provides noncash emergency help, such as: finding lost people; transportation; emergency medical care and medicine; crisis counseling, emergency shelter, emergency food and water, some disaster legal services; and American Red Cross emergency shelters.

2. Cash help and long-term disaster services from the government are available only to U.S. citizens and qualified aliens.

- This type of help may include: temporary rental housing; repair and replacement of destroyed housing; replacement of lost possessions; payment of medical and funeral costs; and Small Business Administration loans. You have to give a Social Security number to get this kind of disaster help. You may also have to sign papers stating you are a U.S. citizen, qualified alien, or noncitizen national.
- Qualified aliens include: Lawful permanent residents (people with green cards); Refugees, asylees, or persons granted “withholding of removal/deportation”; Persons paroled into the U.S. for at least one year; Cuban or Haitian entrants; Certain victims of domestic violence; and Trafficking victims can get disaster services like refugees.

4. If you are undocumented, but you are the parent of children under 18 who live with you and are U.S. citizens or qualified aliens, you can apply on their behalf for government disaster help. This includes FEMA cash assistance.

- You must give your children’s social security numbers. Be clear that you want services only for your children. Be clear that you do not want services for yourself. You should not be required to provide your Social Security number. Do not provide any information about your own immigration status. Do not provide any false information.

5. Helpful tips

- If you have lost papers in the disaster that prove citizenship, immigrant status, or identity, explain this to agency staff when you ask for help.
- Ask for an interpreter if you need disaster help and do not speak English. An interpreter should be provided to you at no cost. Many agencies that help disaster survivors are required by law to provide language help when needed. This includes written materials in your primary language.
- Getting disaster services from the government does not make an immigrant ineligible for citizenship or lawful permanent residence (getting a green card). It also does not make an immigrant a public charge.
- Never provide false information to get disaster or other services. This can affect your chances of getting U.S. citizenship or a green card.