
**Thirtieth anniversary of the
Fourth World Conference on Women and the approval of the
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing, 1995) in
Latin American and the Caribbean**

**NATIONAL REPORT
BAHAMAS**



30th Anniversary of the 4th World
Conference on Women and The
Adoption of the Beijing Declaration
and Platform For Action

BAHAMAS 2024
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REVIEW

On Implementation and
Action in The Bahamas

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Ministry of Social Services
The Bahamas

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



On behalf of the Government of The Bahamas, I offer congratulations on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Thirty years ago, a delegation from The Bahamas, joined thousands of women and men from around the world in Beijing, China for what was labeled the most important of the four world conferences on women held between 1975 and 1995. Years of advances to secure equality in law and practice were brought together during this conference.

The Government of The Bahamas remains committed to the agenda of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through the promotion and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action twelve (12) critical areas of concern: women and poverty; education and training; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women in conflict, and the Girl Child.

This report presents the progress made of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Specifically, updates are provided for the period 2019 to 2024. Programmes and initiatives that were initiated within the 2014 to 2019 reporting period, for example, the Strategic Plan to Address Violence saw the launch of programmes to address violence in a few Family Island communities, including Abaco, Grand Bahama, Exuma, Ragged Island, and Eleuthera. The Department of Gender and Family Affairs within the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting has engaged a cross section of stakeholders from the Government, Non-Government Sectors, Civil Society and the Private Sector in the preparation of this present report. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this initiative. Let us continue to work to promote gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women and girls.

Myles K. LaRoda, M.P.
Minister of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting

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Finally, gratitude is extended to Dr. Cherita Moxey, lead consultant for this project.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BahWEN	Bahamas Wildlife Enforcement Network
BCCEC	Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation
BDoC	Bahamas Department of Corrections (formerly Her Majesty’s Prison)
BNSI	Bahamas National Statistical Institute
BPAF	Bahamas Protected Areas Fund
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BTVI	Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute
CEDAW	Committee on The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CSJP	Citizens Security and Justice Programme
DGFA	Department of Gender and Family Affairs
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DoSS	Department of Social Services
F.O.A.M	Families of All Murder Victims
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GoB	Government of The Bahamas
IDB	Inter-American Bank
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross
ILEA	International Law Enforcement Academy
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MNS	Ministry of National Security
MoETvT	Ministry of Education and Technical & Vocational Training
MoSS	Ministry of Social Services
NAC	National HIV/AIDS Centre
NAP	National Apprenticeship Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHI	National Health Insurance
NIB	National Insurance Board
NTA	National Training Agency
NRCM	National Reporting Cooperation Mechanism
ORG	Organization for Responsible Governance
PHRC	Parliamentarian Human Rights Committee
RBDF	Royal Bahamas Defence Force
RBPF	Royal Bahamas Police Force
SBDC	Small Business Development Centre
SBP	Standards Benefit Package
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence

SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TIPS	Trafficking in Persons
UB	University of The Bahamas
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
URCA	Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority
WHA	World Health Assembly



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bahamas boasts being idyllic paradise offering an unparalleled blend of natural beauty, rich history and vibrant culture with over 700 island escapes – ripe for exploration and indulgence. The population density of the country is 399,314, an intercensal increase of 1.1%. In 2023, there were 109.6 women per 100 men¹. During the intercensal period, the female population of the country grew by 14.1% to 206,770, which was a higher growth rate compared to men, by 13.1% to 192,544.

This 30th Anniversary Report is grounded in the contemporary history of The Bahamas which begun with a quest for religious freedoms. August 1st 1834 (Slave Emancipation) was a milestone for the people of this country in its trajectory toward respect for human rights, freedoms of all humanity and the rule of law. These tenets, enshrined in the nation’s Constitution (the supreme law of the land), thrive today – serving as a compass for future generations.

The country’s democracy framework is a bicameral parliamentary with executive, legislative and judicial branches. The country is an import-dependent island economy. In 2023, the World Bank projected a GDP expansion of approximately 4.3%, largely driven by the tourism sector, which accounts for approximately 50% of national GDP². This is followed by the financial services sector which accounts for nearly 20% of GDP; with the balance contributed by retail and wholesale trade, fishing and agriculture, and light manufacturing sectors.

Recognized as a Small Island Developing State, the country is faced with perennial challenges. Namely, its climate change vulnerabilities owing to its positioning in the hurricane belt and its nominal elevation above sea level. Moreover, its archipelagic geography necessitates funding allocations for duplicating essential services and infrastructure across its 30 inhabited islands. The country’s high-income classification serves as another glaring challenging, erecting barriers to accessing non-reimbursable funding and other international funding targeted at women’s equality. This, even in the face of having the highest income inequality in the Caribbean.

Without doubt, the strongest headwinds experienced by The Bahamas during this reporting period were the Category 5 Hurricane Dorian, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant unprecedented high rates of inflation. Together, these accrued estimated losses \$13.1b and disproportionately impacted marginalized groups, including women and girls.

In spite of these headwinds, The Bahamas stands proud of many national milestones, including those related to women’s equality. Notably, the country lauds the consistency of its voice in the international dialogue on women’s equality; and its unwavering commitment to advancing women’s equality as evidenced by its recent drafting of a National Gender Policy, coupled with its continued implementation of new and scaling-up of existing programmes geared toward

¹ <https://hia.paho.org/en/countries-22/bahamas-country-profile>

² IDB Report on the Covid-19 Effects and Impacts on The Bahamas.

empowering women and girls. The Latin America and the Caribbean ranks third out of eight regions, with an overall gender parity score of 74.2%³. The constant country sample shows that since 2006, the region has gone furthest out of all regions, reducing its gender gap by 8.3 percentage points. The vast majority (86.3%) of the 22 Latin American and Caribbean economies have closed at least 70% of their gender gap⁴. The Bahamas' global gender gap index was 73% index in 2021, up from 72% index in 2019, this is a change of 1.39%⁵.

Other hallmark achievements relate to women participation together with women in education and entrepreneurship; and its steps to mainstream gender perspectives in national policies. Also, statistical systems, processes and legislation have been augmented to support gender analyses. Furthermore, the public health sector is poised to implement an integrated e-medical records which has potential to yield granular and sex disaggregated data to better inform national gender equality policies and normative guidance. The sector is also in the final programmatic design stages to incorporate GBV services into the delivery of primary health care.

The top five national priorities over the last 5 years for implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action include:

1. Enactment of legislation to address discrimination & violence
2. Climate change and its impact on women and girls (13WAMM)
3. Disability inclusion
4. Gender-Based Violence prevention (TIP Tier 1, FICC)
5. Economic empowerment, through identified economic clusters in specialized education and sports programmes to be done in conjunction with the University of The Bahamas
6. e-Bahamas Revolution, to advance The Bahamas a digital society, inclusive of SMART Technology.

There is more work to be done, especially in strengthening legislative and normative frames undergirding women's equality, empowerment, and public participation - among others. To which the country is committed. Fielding and Ballance (2019) note that gender-based violence continues to be a source of concern in The Bahamas. Structural inequality between the sexes is present in the law and cultural attitudes can work to circumscribe the expectations of women⁶.

Now in its 51st year of Independence, The Bahamas' resolve to leverage the momentum of past achievements to accelerate strides on the unfinished agenda of women' equality; and for enhancing the quality of life of all persons within its territory is unequivocally stronger than ever.

³ The Global Gender Gap Index annually benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

⁴ World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2024).

⁵ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Bahamas/topics/World-Rankings/World-Rankings/Global-gender-gap-index>

⁶ William Fielding and Virginia Ballance (University of The Bahamas). Learning gender-based attitudes in The Bahamas. International Journal of Bahamian Studies. October 2019 (25)1.



THE SECTION ONE

COUNTRY
HIGHLIGHTS

SECTION ONE: HIGHLIGHTS

Elements of Review Process: The country-level review took the form of desk reviews, focus group sessions and one-on-one discussions with key stakeholders as well as data harnessing and analyses.

Progress & challenges based on statistics: A notable strength of this 30th Anniversary Report is the intentionality of the process to ensure voices of diverse stakeholder groupings, inclusive of underrepresented and marginalized groups. This, no doubt accords with the tenets of social inclusion required for achieving Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

One of the major challenges to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is the absence of mature information systems across key government agencies and private sector players. Linked to the foregoing is the uneven availability of disaggregated data at national and sub-national levels. These information system limitations influenced data availability and consequentially prolonged the interval between data request to data fulfillment, in many instances. Another challenge relates to competing national and inter-governmental priorities which impacted responsiveness to consultation invitations.

The unexpected shocks of Hurricane Dorian (2019) and acute COVID-19 pandemic (2020 – 2022) sharply foregrounded extreme vulnerabilities among low-wage workers, informal workers, persons living in rural areas, irregular migrants, elderly persons, persons living in poverty, unhoused persons, as well as those living in situations of violence. These shocks resulted in significant setback on many fronts – including on women’s equality. These setbacks were buffered to some degree by the responsiveness of the Government of The Bahamas, through the introduction, modification and innovation of processes. The Government was supported in its efforts by private sector, local NGOs, and international actors. The collective efforts of all, expanded and multiplied medical assistance and services (e.g. medical, food, and shelter) as well as rebuilding efforts and compliance with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) measures. The Government’s policy initiative to implement and expand tax-free zones was another notable mitigating measure to these shocks.

Good Practices for implementing BPfA: The Bahamas is proud of its establishment of the National Reporting Committee Mechanism led by the Office of the Attorney General. The objective of the Committee is to promote timely national reporting. The Committee comprises representatives from Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as non-governmental organizations and civil society actors.

Support needed: Expanded funding, augmented human talent and strengthened key national capacities are immediate needs gaps that may be impacting the full implementation of the BPfA. Related to funding, it is recognized that the archipelagic geography of The Bahamas necessitates duplication of essential services and resources across all thirty (30) inhabited islands. This necessary duplication constrains the budget that might be otherwise available if the country were a single land mass.



SECTION TWO

PRIORITIES,
ACHIEVEMENTS,
CHALLENGES &
SETBACKS



SECTION TWO: PRIORITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

Question 1 – Notable Achievements and Challenges in achieving gender equality

Over the past five years, what have been the most important achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women?

The advancement of equality for women in The Bahamas (and globally) interplays with and centres on the broader fulcrum of socio-economic, normative, legislative labour market dynamics and other determinants. Against this backdrop, the important achievements and challenges and achievements are reflected.

IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS

Expanding Access to UHC

Without health (physical and mental), attainment of women’s equality is put further out of reach for Bahamian women and girls. To this end, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to advancing universal primary health care, in the first instance. The enactment of the National Health Insurance Act (2017) laid a legislative regime for introducing, implementing and managing UHC. Of note, The Bahamas’ implementation of NHI has become a flagship and model of best practice in the Region of the Americas.

The value proposition of NHI rests in the elimination of fee-for-service at the point of care, making health care more accessible for a wider proportion of the Bahamian population. As of July 2024, enrollment peaked at 159,668 Bahamians (or 40% of the population). Of this enrollee number, 97,098 (or 60.8%) are women, with initiatives on-going to increase enrollment to at least 60% of the population by the end of 2024/2025.

The NHI scheme appreciates that women have unique health care needs, with reproductive health and disease prevention at the core. The primary care standard benefits package (SBP) under this scheme helps women take control of their health by providing:

- PAP smear
- Screening for breast and cervical cancer
- Pregnancy care
- Annual examination
- Cancer prevention
- HPV vaccination

Maternal mortality in the country is declining. Similarly, the rate of adolescent fertility (girls aged 15 - 19 years) has decreased since 2010⁷. The rate in 2021 was higher than the average rate in its income group (Figure 1).

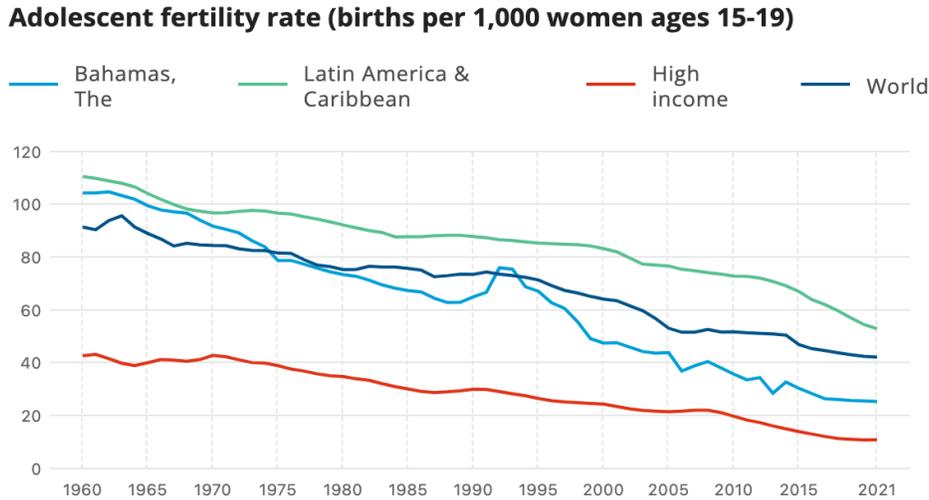
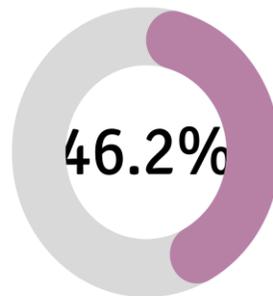


Figure 1: Adolescent Fertility Rate (Bahamas). Source WorldBank Data

Removing Barriers to Educational Engagement

Notwithstanding the Government’s longstanding commitment to providing education for its people, it is recognized that access may not be optimized if other negating factors are at play. In the Bahamian context, one such negating factor was the availability of food given that nutrition does play a part in education outcomes. Students who either have no breakfast or consume poor quality breakfast, struggle more to focus and grasp instructional concepts than those who do. This is most true for children in vulnerable communities usually at the lowest income levels. As a policy response to this, the Government launched a nationwide breakfast programme for public primary schools in January 2024. To-date, over three thousand (3,209) primary school students across eleven (11) schools are enrolled (Figure 2).

Female Primary School Students Enrolled in the Governments Public School Breakfast Programme



Boys: 1,727 vs. Girls: 1,482

Figure 2: National Breakfast Programme Uptake. Data Source: MoETvT. Graph: Consultancy

⁷ <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/bahamas-the>

The Empowered Voices of Bahamian Women in Society

The Bahamas has seen over the last five years, women are assuming leading roles in environmental conservation and protection, health care, tourism, investment, education and faith-based communities - to name a few. The Power Passion Purpose (P3) Project, which seeks to unite, inspire and connect different generations of Bahamian female leaders and game-changers. The organization has a network of 40 mentors and more than 50 professional partners who possess a wealth of knowledge from various fields, including finance, education, agriculture, medicine, business, law, the arts, communications and more⁸.

Bahamas Commonwealth of Women Parliamentarians Group (CWP) is an organ designed to bring together women parliamentarians (in both the lower and upper chambers) to strengthen cooperation, work toward common goals and amplify their voices.

International Collaborations

Fostering and maintaining international collaborations are critical to The Bahamas for sharing experiences, gleaned lessons learnt and aligning with best practice as well as bringing leadership to the global conversations on women's rights. These collaborations are also important for attracting and mobilizing resources to accelerate national efforts on equality for women and girls.

In this vein, the Report flags three noteworthy international collaborations. Firstly, The Bahamas is a Party to nine (9) Human Rights Treaties, namely the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC); Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); and Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The implementation, by States Parties, of their legal obligations under each treaty is monitored by a dedicated Treaty Body, comprised of elected human rights experts from all regions of the world.

Secondly, The Bahamas was elected to the UN Human Rights Council on 12 October 2018; and concluded its tenure on 31 December 2021.

Thirdly, a Bahamian national, Ms. Marion Bethel, is currently serving her second consecutive term (2021-2024) as a Member of the CEDAW Committee, which monitors the implementation of that Convention. In so doing, Ms. Bethel is the first Bahamian national to serve on a human rights treaty body.

⁸ <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2020/jul/21/bahamas-need-recognise-female-contributions-societ/>

Fourthly, in 2022 The Bahamas became a signatory to the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF). As background, the MSDCF is the United Nations instrument for planning and implementation of its development activities towards the fulfillment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The MSDCF outcomes cover all SDGs, recognizing their interconnected nature. This demonstrates its commitment for stronger collaborations to drive equality through the design and adoption of laws and policies to eliminate discrimination, address structural inequalities, ensure the advancement of those at risk of being left furthest behind and to use relevant data and information towards this end. The second priority area of the MSDCF incorporates equality.

IMPORTANT CHALLENGES & SETBACKS

Unforeseen Forces of Nature

The country is highly vulnerable to external shocks, including natural disasters and climate change (as evidenced by 4 major hurricanes in the 8 years prior to the pandemic). These natural disasters along with the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted tourism —the main engine of economic growth— strongly unleashing a deep recession in 2020. Not only were livelihoods and lives impacted, but social outcomes were also negatively impacted.

During the pandemic, a survey conducted by IDB and Cornell University showed that 72.5 percent of households reported an income loss in April 2020 resulting from employment loss, business closures, and loss of rental income. Educational attainment was also hampered by disruptions driven by the switch to online teaching and unequal access to devices as well as support. The impact has been disproportionate, affecting lower-income households more severely⁹.

Together, these shocks may have reversed, or at best stalled progress on women’s equality efforts in The Bahamas.

The Labour Force and Unemployment

It is well established that unemployment serves as a barrier to advancing women’s equality. Specifically, it increases economic dependence on partners, family members and friends, thereby weakening or totally cancelling the decision-making power of the unemployed woman. It also potentiates poverty; stunts career progression and heightens vulnerability to stress and mental health issues (such as depression and anxiety). In The Bahamas (2023), women are the main contributors to the labour force (men, 46% compared to women, 54%). In that same year, the unemployment rate was recorded at almost nine percent (8.8%) – with a sex variance of men, 9.1% and women, 8.5%. Fewer women were unemployed in 2023 compared to 2019 when the sex disaggregated unemployment rate stood at 9.2% for men and 9.9% for women¹⁰.

⁹ IDB Group Country Strategy with The Commonwealth of The Bahamas (2024-2028).

¹⁰ Bahamas National Statistical Institute. Labour Force Reports 2019 and 2023.

Notwithstanding the above, university education seemed not to confer a competitive edge for women in the labour force, as women experience inequality in the labour market even with higher unemployment levels, despite education advances¹¹. Pointedly, the unemployment rate among women with university degrees rose by 33.9% from 11.2% in 2019 to 15% in 2023. The unemployed level of university-degreed men went relatively unchanged between 2019 (5.2%) and 2023 (5%).

Unemployment in youth (those ages 15 – 24, inclusive) has been shown to have lifelong effects on income and employment stability, because affected young people start out with weaker early-career credentials; and show lower confidence and resilience in dealing with labour market opportunities and setbacks over the course of their productive years. From a global perspective, youth are 4-times more likely to be unemployed than adults¹². Youth unemployment in the Caribbean is among the highest in the world, with the unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 reaching 42.7% at last report. In The Bahamas youth unemployment has remained high – reaching 20.7% for women, 19.5% for men, and 20% for both sexes¹³.

The youth unemployment reality is likely the result of myriad factors, which include¹⁴:

- Widening skills gaps and shortages;
- Key industries are not producing enough growth to drive sufficient employment expansion;
- The sequential and additive toll of Hurricane Dorian and the COVID-19 pandemic, are still reverberating, slowing progress on critical infrastructure and other components that can drive improvements in the labour market; and
- Increased cost of business due to increased minimum wages, national insurance contributions and cost of fuel (as examples) directly impact recruitment capacity and volumes.

Possible in-roads to address these challenges could be prioritized policy actions to improve retention rates in the educational system (particularly among boys); to close the performance gap between public and private educational institutions; and to undertake definitive measures to substantively diversify and strengthen the economy beyond the top two GDP contributors - tourism and financial services industry.

Legislative Framework for Economic Empowerment for Women

In 2023, The Bahamas scored 81.3 percent (81.3%) on a World Bank index measuring legal frameworks for economic equality for women. Comparatively, this was 4.8 percentage points higher than the Latin American and the Caribbean regional average scored of 76.5%¹⁵. For context, a score of 100 means women are on an equal legal standing with men across all of the areas measured in the Index. Important precursors to economic equality are equal pay,

¹¹ MoSS please give the reference for [1], as indicated in v6

¹² Solutions for Youth Employment. <https://www.s4ye.org>

¹³ The Bahamas National Statistical Institute

¹⁴ Voluntary National Report (2023). Ministry of Social Services, The Bahamas.

¹⁵ World Bank. Women, Business and the Law (2022).

entrepreneurship opportunities and bargaining power. On the same Index, The Bahamas received 75% on the issues of equal pay and entrepreneurship; and noted that the bargaining power was unequal between married men and married women – favouring the former. Regarding pay equality, national data shows that the average male employed in the hospitality sector earned more than their female counterparts¹⁶.

Whereas these measurements in isolation reflect relative optimism, the trend data (Figure 3) does support tempered optimism, as The Bahamas has seen no changes in these measurements for the last twenty years. That is, the scores received in 2003 have been constant up to 2023 – suggesting that structural systemic challenges persist in the laws that affect women’s economic opportunity.

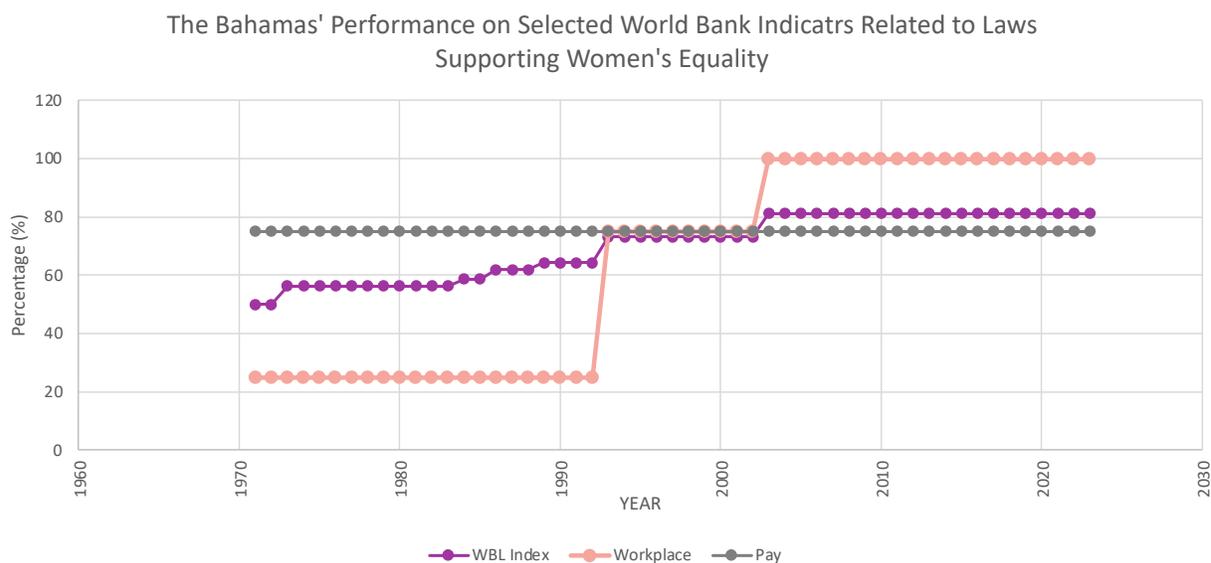


Figure 3: Indicators for Laws Supporting Equality. Data Source, WBL. Graph, Consultancy.

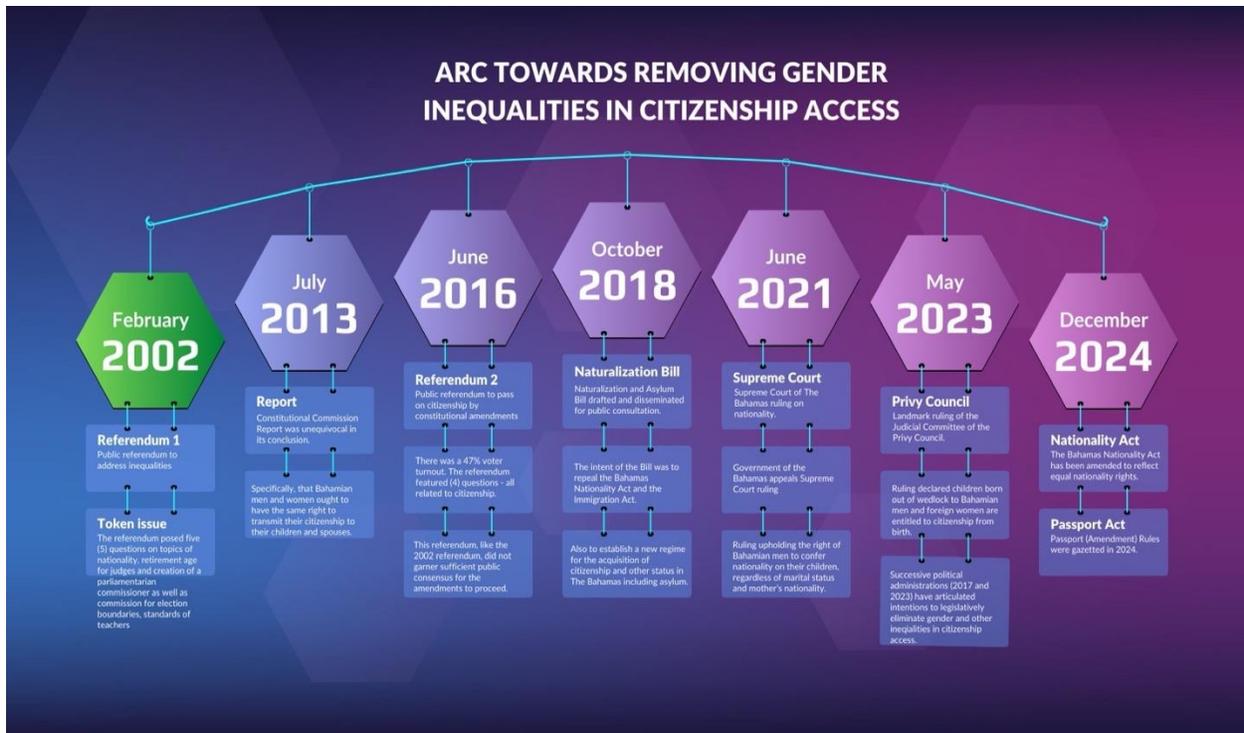
Inequality in the Law for Women Conferring Citizenship

The Bahamas is among twenty-four (24) countries worldwide where women are still not able to pass on their nationality to their children¹⁷. Article 9 of the Bahamian Constitution permits that children born outside The Bahamas to a Bahamian woman married to a foreign man have a right to be registered at the age of 18 and before 21. Legal scholars have suggested that this provision clearly espouses a gender bias, and should on that account be changed.

Notwithstanding national efforts to recast citizenship-related legislation in more gender-neutral language to ensure Bahamian men and women are on equal footing with respect to the acquisition and transmission of nationality, this issue remains unresolved. Public conversation and agitation though have been steady.

¹⁶ Bahamas National Statistical Institute (formerly, Department of Statistics). Occupation and wages in the Hospitality Sector Report, 2019.

¹⁷ António Guterres (United Nations Secretary General). All Women Must Have Same Rights as Men to Pass On Citizenship. The Nassau Guardian, April 6, 2023



Global Economic Classifications Disenfranchising To Movement on Gender Equality

The Bahamas is consistently classified by the World Bank as a high-income country. This classification disadvantages the country from benefit from broader internationally available technical support and funding to advance the gender equality agenda in the country. Paradoxically, though classified as high income, a 2023 measurement of the Gini coefficient for the country places The Bahamas as the most income unequal country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a Gini of 0.57¹⁸. This reality should spur greater funding opportunities for the country in the space of women’s equality.

Harmful Social Norms and Attitudes

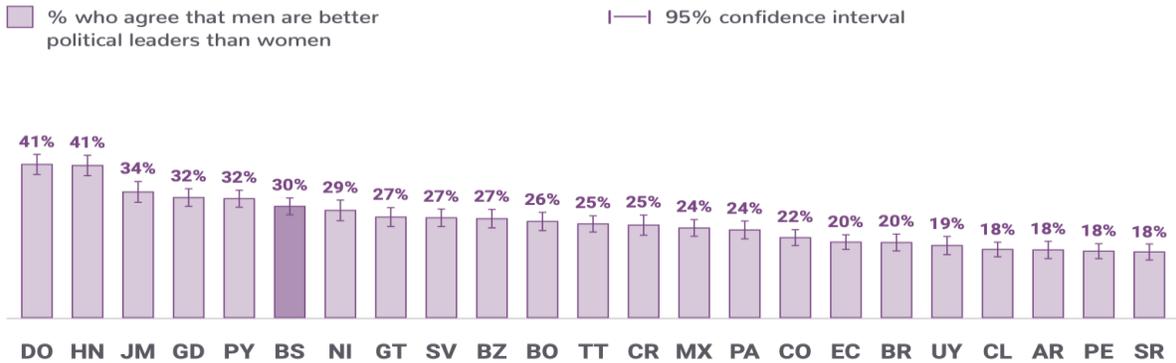
In the Bahamas, there is high support for women’s right. But recent data suggests that The Bahamas has an uphill climb to women equality. According to the UN’s Special Rapporteur on violence against women, gender-based violence in The Bahamas is “hidden, denied and... accepted as normal”.

The 2023 Pulse on Democracy (Bahamas) Report found that 1 in 3 Bahamians think that men are better political leaders than women (Figure 4); and that 42% of men would understand or approve of a husband hitting his wife if she was unfaithful¹⁹.

¹⁸ United Nation Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Report, 2023.

¹⁹ Laing et al. Pulse on Democracy in The Bahamas (2023).

Bahamas is among the countries with the highest percentage of people who think men make better political leaders than women



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 4: Attitude Toward Women In The Bahamas

Violence Against Women

Violence against women is of global and national concern.

GBV EXPERIENCE AMONG BAHAMIAN WOMEN



Figure 5: GBV Experience Among Women. Data Source, IDB. Figure, Consultancy.

An IDB-driven women’s wellbeing survey conducted in The Bahamas (2022) highlighted that gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls. In light of the findings (Figure 5), GBV remains a relevant topic and cause of concern for the country.

Question 2 – Legal and policies priorities for accelerating progress

Over the past five years, what have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?

The top five (5) priorities identified by The Bahamas for accelerating progress over the past five years are:

- Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice.
- Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls.
- Poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security.
- Eliminating violence against women and girls.
- Women entrepreneurship and women’s enterprises.

For each of the priorities a narrative will detail the rationale for the prioritization as well as the executing and/or implementing mechanisms for addressing the topic.

Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice

The Government of The Bahamas remains committed to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women through responsive legislation, policies and programmes. This section will highlight the important achievements by the government over the period 2019-2024. Additionally, the challenges encountered during the reporting period that hampered national progress will be presented.

High-Level Political Commitments

As a further demonstration of its commitment, the House of Assembly adopted a resolution in April 2023 to establish a Parliamentary Human Rights Committee²⁰. The Committee’s main objectives are to assess or evaluate all matters related to the protection and enforcement of human rights in The Bahamas; measure the level at which human rights in The Bahamas is consistent with The Bahamas’ regional and global obligations; and report to Parliament every three months with a view to guiding the legislative process. Further, the committee aims to consider and report matters related to the investigation of alleged human rights violations through parliamentary inquiries, holding public hearings on human rights-related issues and carrying out on-site visit

Equality Before The Law And Civil Matters

Under the law, women are treated equally with men with respect to their legal capacity to conclude contracts and administer property by virtue of Article 15 of the Constitution, which outlines the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. In addition, the Married Women’s Property Act provides that:

- Contracts entered into by married women bind them separately.

²⁰ <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2023/apr/27/human-rights-committee-resolution-passed-hoa/>

- Women and men have equal rights to administer, maintain and dispose of property, regardless of whether it is acquired during marriage or brought into the marriage,
- Women and men have equal access to justice, including women in rural areas,
- Women have equal capacity to sue and be sued, and
- Women (wife) and men (husband) share equal rights to acquire the matrimonial home in which they resided whether the spouse died testate or intestate.

In The Bahamas, there are no legislative barriers or prohibitions on women being called to the Bar; representing clients before courts and tribunals in accordance with the Legal Profession Act; and serving in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal of The Bahamas. There is also no legal discrimination in women's equal access to private and public legal services.

Legislative Framework Undergirding The Acceleration of Equality, Non-Discrimination and Access To Justice For Bahamian Women and Girls

By codifying rules and norms, laws enshrine the protection of rights, promotion of justice, set clear standards and expectations; and facilitate social change. For these reasons, The Bahamas has strengthened its Protection Against Violence Act (2023), drafted a Nationality Amendment Bill (2024); and the Ombudsman Bill (2024).

The Protection against Violence Act (2023)

Note is made of the Domestic Violence Act (Protection Orders Act) 2007, which provided the legal framework to protect victims of domestic violence. Historically women have been the primary victims of domestic violence.

The Protection against Violence Act, enacted in August 2023, aims to create a safer Bahamas by addressing the pervasive issue of violence, particularly violence against women. The legislation recognizes that violence undermines the very fabric of our society and endangers the wellbeing of our citizens. By taking decisive action, The Bahamas demonstrates its commitment to building a nation where every individual can live free from the fear of violence and harm. Victims have the right to be treated with compassion, dignity, confidentiality, and privacy. This provision reaffirms The Bahamas' commitment to respect and protection for all its citizens, ensuring that victims are not only heard but also provided with the necessary support to rebuild their lives. The Protection against Violence Act demonstrates a genuine dedication to providing extensive support services for victims. This includes safe housing, legal, psychological, and medical assistance, as well as access to readjustment and training programmes. By offering a comprehensive range of services, the government aims to uplift and empower victims, guiding them on a path towards healing and recovery.

The Act aligns The Bahamas with global best practices, ensuring that the nation fulfills international obligations under conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belem do Para). By enacting this legislation, The Bahamas not only showcases its dedication to combating violence but also takes a firm stand against gender-based discrimination.

The Nationality Amendment Bill (2024)

This Bill is currently only in draft, and has not been tabled for debate in the House of Assembly. Pursuant to Article 13(a) of the Constitution, the Nationality Amendment Bill seeks to make provision by ordinary law for the acquisition of Bahamian citizenship by persons who presently do not acquire such citizenship under the Constitution.

At present, the Constitution only makes provision for the acquisition of citizenship by persons in specific categories. These provisions have given Bahamian men and women an unequal ability to pass on their citizenship. The Bill is necessary to remedy these inequalities while simultaneously taking a step in the direction to eliminate statelessness in The Bahamas, ensuring the continuity of good governance and upholding the principles of the rule of law.

The Ombudsman Bill (2024)

The objective of the Ombudsman Bill 2024 formalizes the mechanism and procedure for any aggrieved citizen, regardless of sex, to report experiences of mistreatment while interacting with government agencies. It is an institution that has as its primary role the promotion and protection of all human rights. The Bill aims to empower the Ombudsman in The Bahamas to investigate complaints about maladministration in the activities of all Government institutions, bodies, offices, or agencies.

Importantly, the 2017 version of The Ombudsman Bill was withdrawn as it provided a legal basis that was only partially compliant with the Paris Principles. The 2024 Bill is viewed to be more comprehensive in scope.

Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls

Access to Universal Pre-Primary Education

According to the latest published national census (2010), there are approximately 12,000 children ages 3 to 4 years old in The Bahamas. However, according to the Ministry of Education, less than half were enrolled in registered pre-school programmes²¹. Pre-school education plays an irrefutable role in early cognitive development; early literacy and numeracy skills acquisition; and emotional development as well as it has a strong association with better academic performance and pursuit of higher education. Given these critical roles and the observed national deficit, the Government of The Bahamas is firmly committed to achieving SDG 4.2 by 2030, ensuring that every Bahamian child between the ages of 3 to 5 years has access to pre-primary education. Implementing on its commitment, the Government's Private Pre-School Partnership Initiative was launched in November 2018, with eligible families receiving vouchers up to BSD \$2,000 per child per year.

²¹ Minister of Education. Contribution in the House of Assembly 2021.

By 2022, four years after its inception, the government had secured contractual arrangements with 118 private pre-school operators; and had disbursed 6,200 vouchers²² – translating to BSD \$12.4m. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 1,400 vouchers disbursed, amounting to BSD \$2.8m. The national budget allocation for that year was BSD \$2,183,317 for this initiative.

Formative Education Enrollment

The sex distribution in the general population is males 48.22%; and females 52.78%²³. Overall, factoring the pre-school, primary, and secondary years, the sex distribution of students is equal across the male and female sexes. Exceptions to this are seen in the high-risk and special needs student populations, which are more heavily skewed towards male representation at 82.1% and 59.1%, respectively for these sub-populations (Figure 6).

School Type	Males	Females	Totals	% Female
All Age	7,368	7,620	14,988	50.8%
Alternative	23	5	28	17.9%
Junior	3,064	3,030	6,094	49.7%
Preschool	303	368	671	54.8%
Primary	10,316	10,058	20,374	49.4%
Secondary	3,785	3,822	7,607	50.2%
Senior	2,791	2,974	5,765	51.6%
Special	554	383	937	40.9%
Total	28,204	28,260	56,464	50.0%

Figure 6: Table of Public School Enrollment by Sex and School Type

Bahamas High School Diploma

The high school graduation rate for the country in 2019 was 49% overall²⁴; and deemed concerning in an IDB CCS Report. As a policy response, and to reach its goal of an 85% high school graduation rate by 2030, the Government of The Bahamas established a Commission in July 2022 to review the qualifying parameters for the high school diploma. Based on the recommendations of the Commission, the government amended and implemented new qualifying standards/criteria, which are comparatively less stringent and will enable more students (including girls) to attain the Bahamas High School Diploma. In 2023, 57% of the females met the criteria to earn the Bahamas High School Diploma, compared to 41% male senior students.

²² Ministry of Education. Press Release – More Students Have Access to Pre-Primary Education. December 2nd, 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/ya5fee5t>

²³ The Bahamas National Census (2022), Preliminary Report. Bahamas National Statistical Institute.

²⁴ The Nassau Guardian June 2019.

The Bahamas Education and Learning Management System (BELMS)

The Bahamas Education and Learning Management System (BELMS) was implemented during the pandemic. This platform has been an indispensable tool in providing real-time data on key performance indicators such as student attendance. Monitoring of these indicators better have positioned the Ministry of Education to adjust policies and re-programme funding to address critical concerns revealed by the data. For example, the BELMS equipped school attendance officers to be more responsive and targeted in their approach to curbing and mitigating chronic truancy. The BELMS' data has also had utility in guiding approaches to the National School Feeding programme, and leveraging the programme as a pull factor, incentivizing chronically absent students.

Women and Girls in STEM

Meaningful efforts have been made to ensure equal access to education for girls, including scholarships and programmes encouraging girls' enrollment in STEM fields. Nationally, there is celebration of the accomplishments of Bahamian women such as Aisha Bowe, the first woman of Bahamian descent employed at NASA as an aerospace engineer; Dr. Adelle Thomas, a distinguished senior scientist in climate analytics recently elected to the Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change (IPCC) during its 59th session held in Nairobi, Kenya, on 28 July 2023. Similar pride exists for Nikita Mullings and Dr. Charlotte Paige-Rolle, Research Director at Orlando Immunology Centre who was pivotal in the Covid-19 vaccine trials in 2021. These Bahamian success stories in the STEM field have been igniting.

Nationally, more and more opportunities at the primary, senior high and tertiary levels are becoming available. These are complimented by civil society-driven actions that have expanded moments to and exposures for networking, leadership and guidance on STEM-related topics. This is more fully explored in questions 13 and 23 of the Report.

Participation of Females in Higher Learning

In addition to the expanding availability of post-secondary education in the country, accessibility remains a core prong of national development in The Bahamas. At the centre, gender equity focuses of giving equal access to resources and equal opportunities as well as providing the means of benefiting from this equality. The Government of The Bahamas, through the Scholarship and Educational Loan Division (SELD) of the Ministry of Education, awards scholarships for nationally prioritized fields of study as one such mechanism for improved accessibility.

Data trends (Figure 7) reflect that females receive the lion share of these scholarships. Between 2019 to 2023, the SELD awarded 2,676 scholarships and grants. Of these, females received 70% of scholarships.

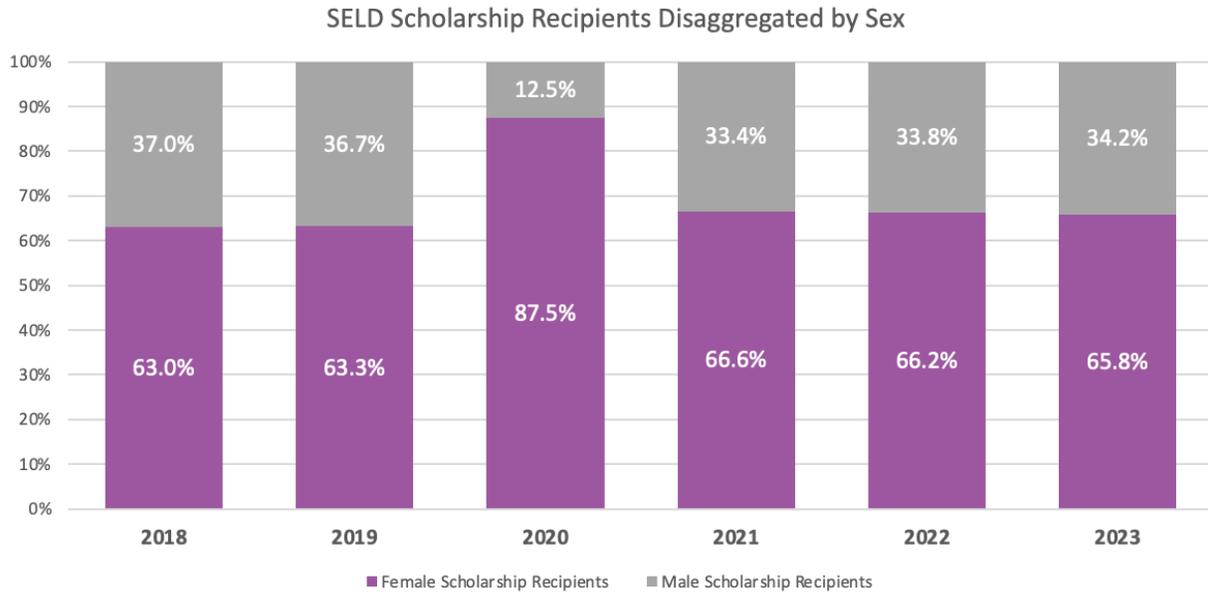


Figure 7: Scholarship Awards by Sex. Data Source, MoETvT. Figure, Consultancy.

The University of The Bahamas (UB) offers an array of traditional degree programmes. While the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) offers post-secondary certificates in technical and vocational fields. Between 2019 and 2023, on average, 73% of women comprised the graduation pool at UB. However, slippage is observed in the post-pandemic years (Figure 8), dropping to 66% in 2023.

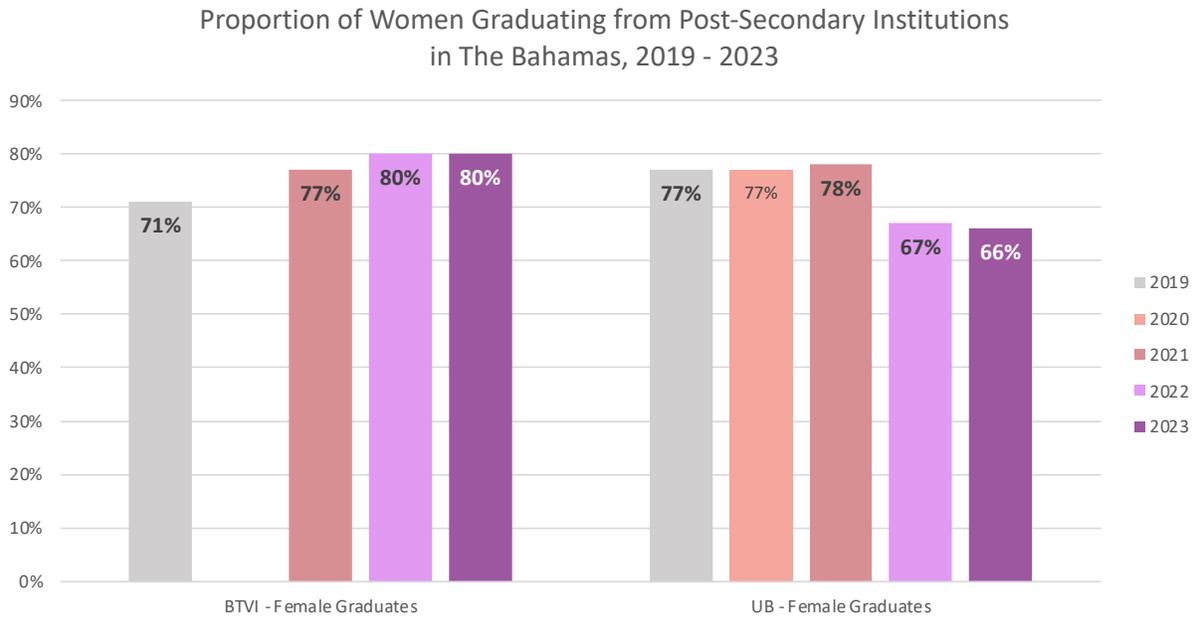


Figure 8: Graduation Rates of Tertiary Institutions. Data Source, Annual Reports BTVI and UB. Figure, Consultancy

For BTVI, the graduation class is typically 77% females, with the year-over-year proportion is increasing.

Although graduation rates are higher for females than males, there is observed disparity in enrollment rates in fields traditionally dominated by males, such as information technology, construction, carpentry, electrical installation, heating ventilation and air conditioning, construction and electrical installation – and the like (Figure 9). Image is illustrative of this point for the academic year 2022/2023. It is recognized that this is not isolated to The Bahamas, but in fact is a worldwide phenomenon. Nonetheless, there are promising growth trends at BTVI in reversing the disparity of female enrollment in these and other non-traditional (male dominated) trades. BTVI concedes there is need to engage the female population differently, ensuring that the training choices they make are informed and led.

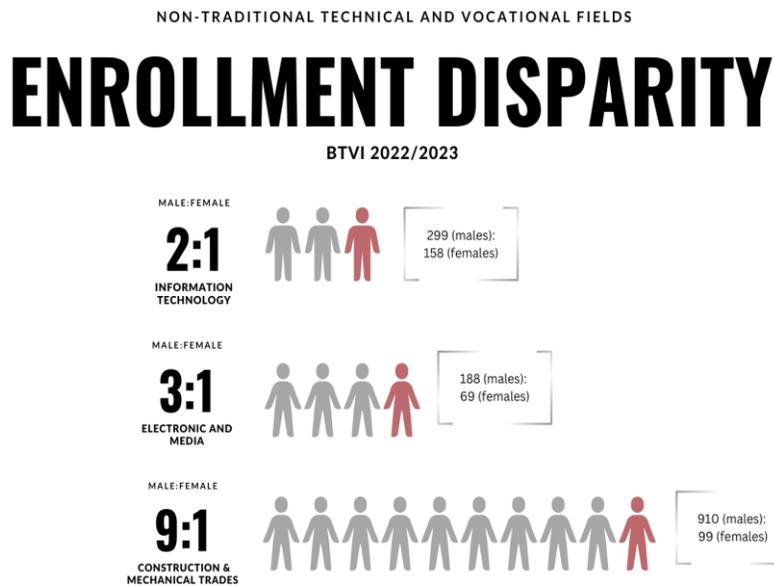


Figure 9: BTVI Enrollment for Selected Fields. Data Source, BTVI Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

Admittedly, accessibility to higher education pursuits for both traditional and non-traditional fields is multi-factorial, underscoring that attempting to achieve numeric balances in education merely is not sufficient. Global constraining factors that impact access for men and women in different ways, including, but not limited to:

- a) Financial Barriers.
- b) Norms, Traditions, and Perceptions That Promote Negative as well as Attitudes And Gender Stereotyping.
- c) Personal Choice;
- d) Lack Of Reliable Transportation.
- e) Safety And Security;
- f) Migration Status;
- g) Absence Of Student Housing Or Distance Learning Options;
- h) Education Achievement In Prerequisite Requirements;
- i) Special Needs; And
- j) Socio-Economic Status - Marital and Parental Status Etc.,
- k) Employment, Poverty, Place of Residence.

The National Training Agency (NTA) focuses on job preparation and readiness for young Bahamians. The NTA offers vocational training programmes tailored to women, aimed at enhancing skills and increasing economic empowerment.

Poverty Eradication, Agricultural Productivity and Food security

Over the past few years, the Department of Agriculture has endeavored to implement initiatives that empower and attract youth to the sector, including women. However, it is important to note that there are no programmes/projects targeting women specifically.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the implementation of the Emergency Food Production Plan. Under this Plan, initiatives aimed to boost household food security, especially for single parent households. These included the distribution of backyard garden starter kits through the Backyard Gardening programme; the distribution of layer hens for table egg production; and distribution of Hydroponics Systems to promote the use of modern technology in the sector. There is an increasing proportion of households in The Bahamas headed by women. According to data from the Bahamas National Statistical Institute (BNSI), female-headed households grew from 35% in 2004 to 42% in 2019.

The Chicken Layer programme was launched during the pandemic and provided layer hens to qualifying recipients. This programme was a direct response to the precipitous increase in the cost of living and the sale price of eggs, along with other basic food essentials - resulting from disruptions to food production and the supply chain. This programme was deemed a success for two reasons. First, it added to the level of household food security and self-sustaining practices at the individual level. Second, recipients were motivated to elevate this backyard egg production into a business endeavour, which in-turn served as a viable, easy, and additional source of income. The table egg production caught traction and attracted women, young boys and girls; and later made in-roads into to local schools. In fact, the Youth Female Farmer of the Year (2023) is a young high school student with an egg farm; and the Farmer of the Year awardee (2023) is a woman. Unfortunately, there is no data on how many women or girls benefited from the emergency Food Production Plan.

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) reports an active farmers' registry of 1,500 farmers in the country, as at the close of 2024. There is no sex disaggregation of the data. But, the DoA indicates a steady increase in the number of women applying to be registered as farmers.

Violence Against Women and Sexual Offences

The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act addresses sexual and domestic abuse, including of wives and de facto wives. Offences recognized under this Act include: rape, sexual assault by a spouse, sex trafficking, sexual offences in relation to children and sexual offences in relation to persons with mental impairment.

In The Bahamas, sexual harassment is a criminal offence also governed by this Act. The statutory definition recognizes that sexual harassment may be comprised of a single act of

abuse or by any person in a position of authority. It is also provided for in the Protection Against Violence Act which defines violence as including amongst other things, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, online harassment, and financial abuse.

Violence against women, including domestic violence and rape, is a serious issue. The Royal Bahamas Police Force Annual Report on Crime Statistics (2020) indicated that sexual offenses increased by 34% with 213 cases, compared to 159 in 2019. These offences included rape, unlawful sexual intercourse and attempted rape.

There are renewed calls for the criminalization of marital rape in The Bahamas. Many non-profit groups concerned with the advancement of women have published ‘Letters to the Editor’ in national news publications and have also appeared on talk shows, the nightly news, and in print, making the clarion call for action on the issue of marital rape.

The Government is currently reviewing draft legislation that addresses marital rape and has initiated an open-ended consultation process concerning the proposed legislation. In September 2022, the Government of The Bahamas circulated for consultation a Bill to criminalize marital rape. The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2022, would repeal section three of the current law by removing the words “who is not a spouse” from the definition of rape.

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs held a one-day symposium on the proposed Bill concerning marital rape. Advocacy groups, faith-based leaders, civil society actors, educators, and law enforcement among others were in attendance. The symposium not only dissected the elements of the Bill, but also provided insights in GBV through lived experiences and testimonials.

A National Task Force for Gender-Based Violence has been established to comprehensively tackle the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) in the country. This taskforce partners with local NGOs and other communities of practice to co-create innovative approaches, programmes and methodologies for stamping out GBV, including amendments to legislation.

Additionally, as indicated earlier, Royal Bahamas Police and Defense Force officers, healthcare workers, Ministry of Tourism frontline staff, Department of Social Services staff and Civil Society representatives, among others regularly receive training relevant to gender-based violence. This includes sex crimes against children.

Women’s Entrepreneurship and Women’s Enterprise

The Government’s commitment to investing in private sector growth has yielded positive returns. This is substantiated by the Ministry of Finance report of a 58% increase in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) between 2017 and 2020. With the help of targeted investments to grow the sector, the report lauds that an additional 13,986 SMEs have opened their doors, increasing economic activity and creating new jobs in the process.

The Government vehicle being utilized to influence and expand the SME ecosystem in The Bahamas is the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Access Accelerator Programme, launched in September 2018. As of September 2020, the SBDC had approved nearly \$60.5m in funding for SMEs to support the visions of new and seasoned Bahamian entrepreneurs (both men and women). It is highlighted that a significant proportion of this total was focused, in part, on keeping small businesses afloat during the pandemic – that is fiscal year (FY) 2020/21 under the Accelerated Bahamas Recovery Plan. By the mid-year point of FY 2020/2021, having considered more than 1,400 applications, \$70m had been approved and disbursed to assist small businesses²⁵.

Notwithstanding this progress, the SBDC has had a growing awareness that the number of businesses currently owned by women remains lower than number of businesses owned by men.

By early 2023, the SBDC had supported 955 women-owned businesses to access \$26,098,569 in grant, loan and equity funding. This equates to roughly \$27,585 per female entrepreneur. We also helped 976 men-owned businesses to access \$46,021,067 in grant, loan and equity funding. This equates to roughly \$47,155 per male entrepreneur. The application approval disparity between men and women is nominal at 2%. However, when analyzed by the average quantum approved (\$27,585 versus \$47,155), the disparity becomes considerable at 72%. The SBDC points to two possible explanations - women's lower debt appetite and risk tolerance, which are related to a woman's entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Figure 10 distinguishes the top 7 business industries SBDC applicants accessed funding for, disaggregated by sex – women (left graph), men (right graph).

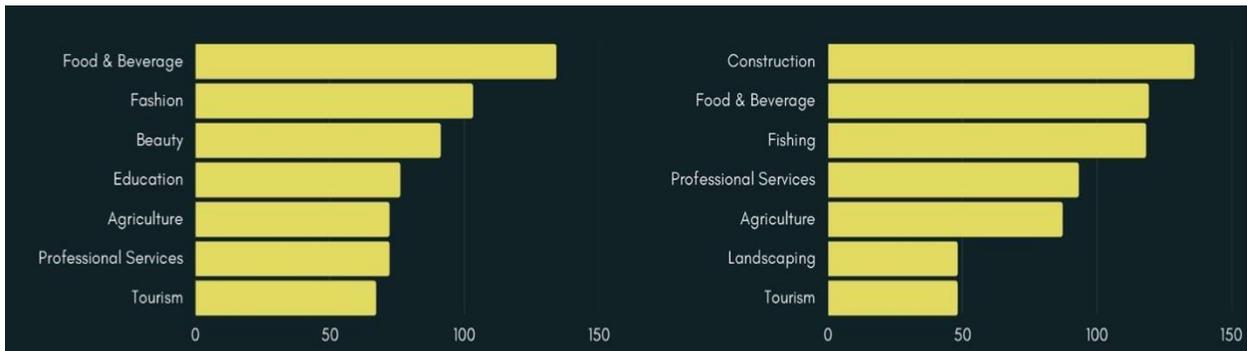


Figure 10: Top 7 Business Industries Accessing SBDC Funding, Disaggregated by Sex. Data Source and Figure: SBDC

With these observations, the SBDC innovated the design and launch of a Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative under its guaranteed loan programme in April 2023. Co-collaborators on this initiative are the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers

²⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/2r9cxwea>

Confederation (BCCEC) and the Bahamas Development Bank. Under the Initiative, existing and startup MSMEs can access grant, loan and equity funding²⁶ as follows:

- Up to \$10,000 in standalone grant funding
- Up to \$20,000 in matching grant funding
- Up to \$50,000 in micro loan funding
- Up to \$500,000 in guaranteed loan funding
- Up to \$250,000 in equity funding

By August 2024, the SBDC reported that through its Women Entrepreneurs Initiative, \$604,782 in grants had been awarded to 83 women across New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands. These grants to women spanned diverse fields including chefs, educators, creatives, entertainers, home caretakers and others. At this time, almost thirteen hundred (1,222) women-owned businesses have been funded for a total of \$30.4m²⁷.

In addition to funding access, other objectives of the Initiative are:

1. Information sharing through virtual sessions to discuss three funding programmes offered by the SBDC such as the Women Entrepreneurs Standalone Grant Programme, Micro Loan Programme and Guaranteed Loan Programme;
2. Knowledge transfers, cross pollination and networking through hosted Tea Parties on the islands of New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Andros and Long Island to connect with women entrepreneurs who graduated from the U.S. Embassy Academy of Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) Programme and women entrepreneurs who obtained funding through the AWE and the SOC;
3. Facilitate mentorship groups that support women who own or lead businesses and produce a weekly podcast series that promote these women to a wide audience across The Bahamas; and
4. Publish 60 to 180-second videos showcasing women entrepreneurs on the SBDC's social media platforms, and traditional media platforms.

The annual budget for the Women Entrepreneurs Initiative is \$4,177,500; and over a 3-year period this budget is forecasted to assist 500 women entrepreneurs (roughly \$41,775 per woman) to enhance business knowledge and operations through training, mentorship, networking and funding opportunities.

Between 2021 to 2026, the government has committed to \$250 million in financing for the SBDC with the first injection of \$35 million being allocated in the 2021/2022 budget.

Improving access to capital financing has been an instrumental method of facilitating private sector growth. However, the Government is also providing new tax and employment incentives

²⁶ Funding can be directed to startup or expansion costs, including but not limited to: training certifications, leasehold improvements, production equipment, incorporation fees, financial accounting software, liability insurance coverage, website development, marketing campaign, supplies and packaging

²⁷ Tribune August 15th 2024. SBDC awards over \$600k as part of its 2024 Women Entrepreneurs Initiative.

to small businesses, and working on its own modernization and digital transformation to be better facilitators of private sector growth.

The National Labour Force Survey (LFS, 4th Quarter 2023) quantified a total labour force of 214,170; and gives insights into the women entrepreneurship²⁸. Of this total labour force, entrepreneurs account for 15.3%; and there are double the number of men in entrepreneurship (10.2%), compared to women at 5.1%.

Looking only at women’s participation in the labour force, only 10.5% of the 104,435 women in the labour force are entrepreneurs. This is compared to 19.8% of all men in the labour force who are entrepreneurs.

The classification of the labour force by employment status gives the opportunity to explore each category individually. 32,775 persons fall into the self-employed (entrepreneurship) category. Significant sex variances is appreciated, with only 33.6% of all entrepreneurs being women (Figure 11). Prior to the launch of the SBDC (September, 2018), this statistic stood at 31.4%, representing a narrowing of the gender gap in entrepreneurship - signaling possibly early signs of the programme ‘s effectiveness.

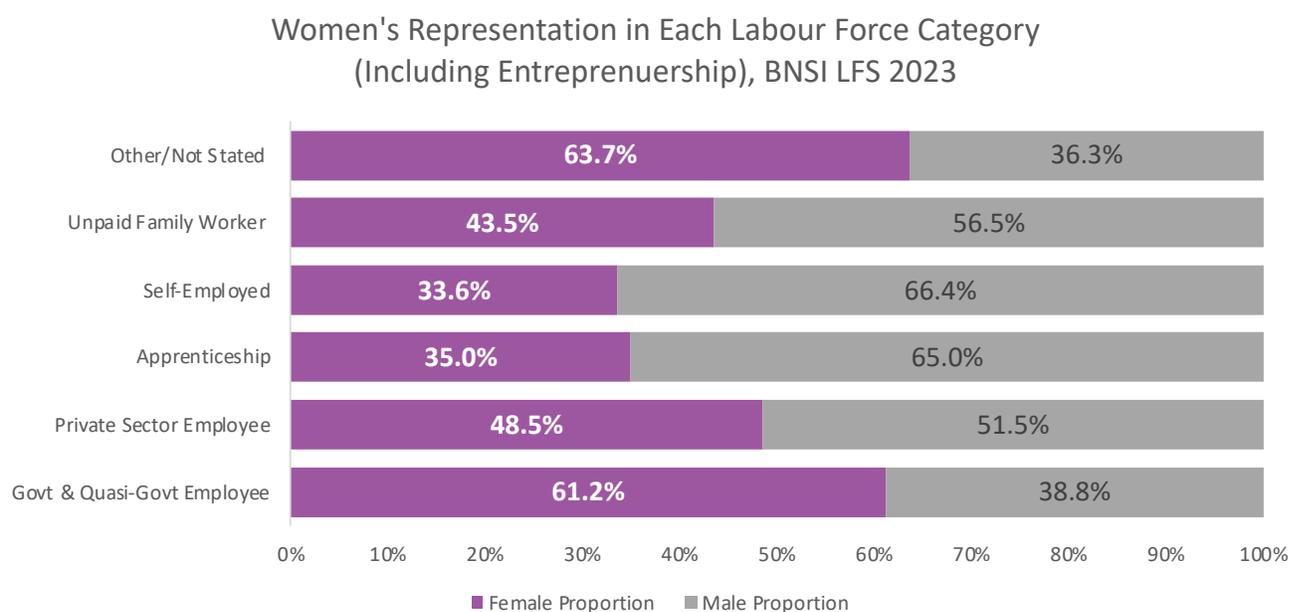


Figure 11: Women Entrepreneurs in The Bahamas. Data Source, BNSI. Figure, Consultancy.

Initiatives driven by the SBDC, the Bahamas Development Bank and the Tourism Development Corporation (TDC) together bolster and support a culture of entrepreneurship in the country. The mission of the TDC is to provide a platform that enables small business owners to thrive in a dynamic retail landscape. The SBDC is committed to nurturing entrepreneurship, fostering creativity, and cultivating a vibrant local economy. This mission is enabled through its Business Unit comprising a product development arm, business development arm, linkages arm and sectoral engagement arm.

²⁸ The self-employed category in the LFS is used as the proxy for entrepreneurship.

Question 3 - Actions to Prevent Discrimination

Over the past five years, what specific actions have you taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?

Five (5) actions have been identified by the country as undertaken during the period under review to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls:

- Women and girls living in remote and rural areas
- Women and girls with disabilities
- Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS
- Older women
- Women and girls in humanitarian settings
- Other (TIPS)

Women and girls living in remote and rural areas

Persons living on the Family Islands, including women have benefited from the Access Accelerator programmes. Their flagship programme “the guaranteed loan programme” offers startup and existing businesses access to grant, loan and equality funding.

The Access Accelerator has funded clients on 15 islands in The Bahamas, including Abaco, Acklins, Andros, Berry Islands, Bimini, Cat Island, Crooked Island, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Inagua, Long Island, Mayaguana, New Providence and San Salvador.

Family Island communities, including the women and girls, face different realities compared to the population residing in New Providence and Grand Bahama. Specifically, access to secondary and tertiary care are limited. Breast cancer and cervical cancer screening usually requires traveling to the capitol. Likewise for chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Similar to these health services, access to banking services can pose significant barriers for women doing business and for promoting a culture of financial savings. The cost of living on Family Islands is also higher compared to New Providence, seemingly associated with transportation costs.

Women and Disability

The 2010 national Census pegged the total Bahamian population at 351,461. It further informed that 10,138 of the population were persons with disabilities (PwDs). The preliminary findings from the 2022 national census shows a population increase to 399,314. The disaggregation of those with disabilities has not yet been released. However, using WHO global estimates of 16%, it is projected that the likely prevalence of PwDs in 2022 is 63,890. Gender-specific global estimates show disability prevalence within any given population tends to be higher among women (estimated at 19% of the population) compared to men (estimated at 12% of the population). The 2010 national census revealed that women with disabilities accounted for

approximately one percent (1%) of all women in the country. As the publication of the 2020 Census is anticipated, it is believed that this proportion has since grown²⁹.

Women with disabilities benefit from all provisions under the Disabilities (Equal Opportunity) Act, which is in the early stages of review for modernization of the legislation. The commitment to ensure opportunities for all abilities, sits at the highest level. The Bahamas hosted the 13th Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Minister’s Meeting in August 2023, where the government noted that work is on-going to tear down barriers against women with disabilities. At that same meeting, the Minister of Social Services informed that not only are women and girls disproportionately represented with a disability prevalence rate, but they also face multiple barriers that may result in low economic and social status, increased risk of gender-based violence and abuse³⁰. Also in 2024, the Office of the Spouse of the Prime Minister coordinated and executed a national event titled “Honouring Women Living with Disabilities and Mothers with Disabled Children”, in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

Complimenting these are actions of civil society. Notably, Disabled Access Breast Screening (DABS) which aims to improve equitable access to breast cancer screening for disabled women. Other CSOs specifically focused on women with disabilities are Erin Brown Connects Disability Advocacy and the Mammogram Access programme.

The Bahamas has continued improvements in the education of women and girls with disabilities by making the University of the Bahamas (formerly, The College of The Bahamas) free for all full-time students who meet the admission eligibility criteria. The University has established an Office of Disabilities and Compliance with an accompanying Students with Disabilities Policy (2017)³¹.

Equal Opportunity to education is the law of the land and is currently practiced by the Ministry of Education to accommodate all students and to ensure that no one is left behind. Schools are required to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities offering assistive and adaptive devices and access to a sign-language interpreter, when necessary. All girls are encouraged to excel in any field of their choice including STEM in the public and private school system. Special classrooms are available with lower student to teacher ratios to enable attention to those who need the one-on-one instruction, especially for those with learning disabilities. A Government assessment and intervention centre now exists at the Majorie Davis Centre. Inclusive education for all school-age children is offered. The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) has enrolled two blind students.

The rights of Women and Girls with disabilities are promoted by public education and awareness campaigns, Public Service announcements, Town Halls, on-going education and

²⁹ Denise Maycock. Organization launches programme to help disabled women in getting mammograms. The Tribune, March 28th 2023.

³⁰ <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/officials-working-to-tear-down-barriers-against-women-with-disabilities/>

³¹ <https://www.ub.edu.bs/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/POLICY-Students-with-Disabilities-2017-09-001.pdf>

information campaigns, PSA's, talk shows and attendance at community events and fairs. Campaigns are also broadcasted on social media, radio and television.

Anchoring much of the national action and advocacy on persons with disabilities is the National Commission of Persons with Disabilities, which was statutorily established in 2014, with mandates to implement the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act.

Access to affordable quality healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

Health system strengthening: In 2022, on heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Bahamas embarked on an aggressive health system strengthening initiative toward universal access and universal coverage of quality health for all residents. Workstream include governance strengthening through comprehensive legislative additions and amendments for enhanced integration across public sector primary and tertiary level services, revised clinical care pathway for women's healthcare as well as incorporation of information communications technology solutions to achieve one health record per patient as well as enhanced patient engagement in their care through electronic health platforms. This is anticipated to improve quality of care to the population inclusive of women and girls.

Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response: In August 2023, the Bahamas Parliament enacted the Protection Against Violence Act, 2023 (PAVA). This law strengthens the response to GBV by enforcing legal measures and supporting the 2015 Strategic Plan, ensuring quick access to justice for victims through a multi-disciplinary approach to managing victims and offenders. Most recently, the public health approach to violence prevention has been conceptualized for the Bahamian context and the specific to the health sector, the Gender-Based Violence Primary Care Clinical Handbook has been developed.

Nutrition and food security: The national wellness programme was implemented in 2023, designed to address the risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity which is prevalent in the general population, inclusive of women and girls has been implemented. The programme focuses on empowering individuals and communities to adopt healthier lifestyles, while emphasizing preventive care through education on the importance of balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, and the dangers of smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Specific to women and girls of childbearing age, there is also a focus on optimizing health for women of childbearing age prior to pregnancy for best outcomes of mother and baby.

Women and HIV/AIDS

HIV disease has been tracked in The Bahamas since 1985. HIV/AIDS statistics in the country demonstrate that HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence owing to improved protocol regimes and access to free antiretroviral medications through government-funded procurement mechanisms. Not only is AIDS-related mortality declining, but there have been significant decreases in new infections (incidence) overall in recent times. As of December 2023, the national HIV prevalence was 1.0% (male: 1.1% versus females: 0.9%). Cases among females

decreased by 77% between 2012 (n=157) and 2021 (n=36). The proportion of females living with HIV on antiretroviral treatment who achieved viral suppression increased from 75% in 2020 to 92% in 2023 (Figure 12).

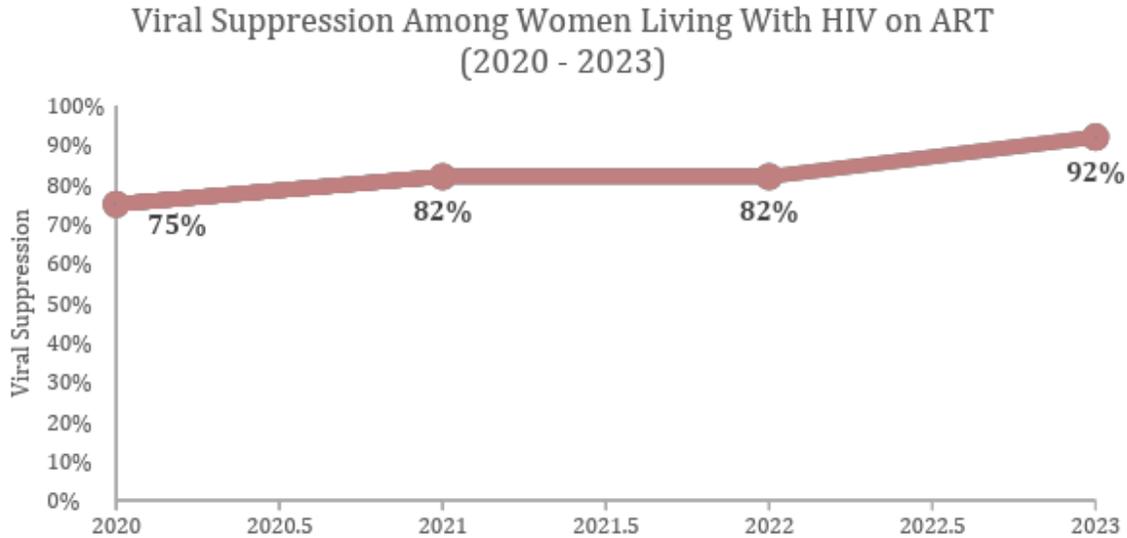


Figure 12: Women With HIV Achieving Viral Suppression. Data Source, NAP. Figure, Consultancy.

New HIV diagnosis is trending downward in the country (Figure 13), from a peak in the mid-1990s. Females accounted for 32% of the 112 new diagnoses in 2021, which equates to one out of every three new HIV diagnoses in the country. New diagnoses of HIV cases among young females (aged 15-24) decreased from 22 cases in 2012 to 4 cases in 2021.

One case of HIV transmission from mother-to-child was reported among the 33 HIV positive women delivering live infants in 2021. This resulted in a mother-to-child transmission rate of 3.0%. There were no mother-to-child transmissions in 2023.

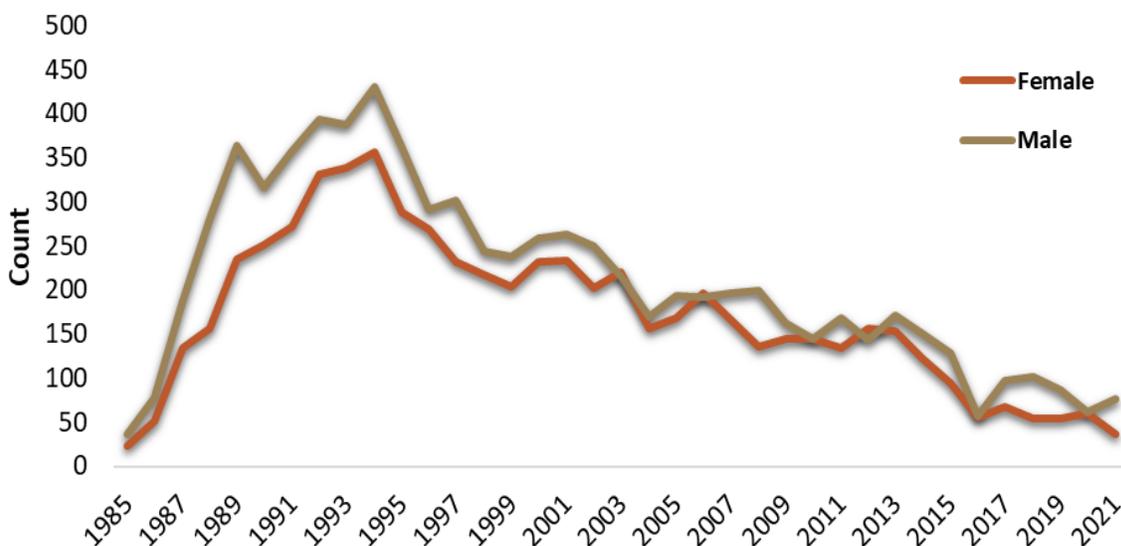


Figure 13: New HIV Diagnoses in The Bahamas. Data source, NAC.

Number of Newly Diagnosed HIV Cases by Year and Sex, The Bahamas, 1985 – 2021.

All women infected with HIV/AIDS who are reported to the Ministry of Health & Wellness are linked to care and receive free services through a variety of programmes at the National HIV/AIDS Centre (NAC). NAC programmes include the pediatric clinic, which is holistic care from birth to seventeen years, and the adult clinic, which includes adult females in New Providence, the Family Islands and prison. Physical, mental and social assessments are made, and referral is completed. Clients are provided with antiretroviral treatment and multidiscipline free care.

Integration of HIV services into other areas of healthcare and well-being remains an objective of The National HIV/AIDS response of the Ministry of Health. The NAC is currently working with other stakeholders and agencies to improve the management of tuberculosis, opportunistic infections and sexually transmitted infection through early identification and treatment. The NAC is also developing ways improve access to nutritional and psychosocial services for persons living with HIV. The NAC is well on its course in accomplishing these objectives through consistent food donations, in addition to linkage and referral to STI clinic. The NAC pediatric clinic conducts assessments of all children under the age of 18 for STIs.

Health authorities attribute this progress to positive trends to increased testing, and educational programmes. In addition, access to treatment for HIV in The Bahamas now includes free services such as doctor visits, blood work, medication and prescription, and multiple Community Health clinics provide HIV/AIDS services several times a week. The Bahamas has also introduced modern treatments such as access to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) treatment — a daily medicine used to reduce the risk of infection following exposure to the virus.

To address inequities in health outcomes within the HIV/AIDS population, the country's comprehensive HIV/AIDS Programme has:

- **Preventive Measures:** Enhanced preventive measures including widespread education on safe sexual practices, availability of condoms and PREP where applicable.
- **Treatment Accessibility:** Ensuring that antiretroviral therapy (ART) is accessible and affordable for all women and girls living with HIV.
- **Support Networks:** Establishing support networks for women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, providing them with counseling, peer support, and resources.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting national campaigns to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, aiming to reduce stigma and encourage testing and treatment.
- **Integration of Services:** Integrating HIV/AIDS services with other health services to provide comprehensive care and support for affected individuals.
- **HIV Services:** Increased availability of HIV testing, counseling, and treatment services specifically for women and girls. The National HIV/AIDS Center provides free of cost, now streamlined, “one-stop-shop” clinical services for all PLHIV and their contacts. This includes access to treatment and care for pregnant HIV positive women and their partners. Intravenous Zidovudine (IV-AZT) has also been made available to the hospital pharmacy to facilitate deliveries among women whose HIV status is positive or unknown upon presentation of labor and delivery. In addition, the National HIV/AIDS Centre, STI Unit and Tuberculosis Unit were combined to form the Infectious Disease Unit of the Ministry of Health & Wellness in 2022. As a result, HIV positive persons, including women and girls, do not require a referral to seek treatment for these linked conditions and vice versa. HIV self-testing was also approved by the MOH&W in November of 2023, which makes HIV testing more accessible to all people in The Bahamas, available free of cost for at risk individuals, including sex workers and transgendered women, at the National HIV/AIDS Centre.

Women and girls in humanitarian settings

In emergencies, violence against women and girls can be exacerbated.

Training and Education

In the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, which struck The Bahamas in September of 2019, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs (DGFA) in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) received training on Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The former focused on causes, risks and consequences. The latter was a survivor-centered approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Training was also extended to first responders, frontline workers, and civil society organizations, specifically those concerned with migrant populations. Sessions were held in New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco; the islands most affected by Hurricane Dorian. A staff member of the DGFA was subsequently certified by UNFPA on Gender-based violence during emergencies. DGFA staff were also trained by UNFPA personnel in Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

In July 2019, the Government facilitated the participation of three government officers in a CEDAW Training in Trinidad and Tobago conducted by the Women’s Human Rights Institute. It promoted women’s human rights advocacy, informed the participants about the institutional structure and mechanisms of CEDAW, and provided participants with the capacity to train others. Since then, several training programmes on CEDAW have been conducted in The Bahamas both virtually and in person. Participants included officials who are concerned with human rights, including reporting obligations, and policy development officers, and civil society partners.

Engagement with Civil Society Sector

The Government, through the DGFA, fosters, maintains and grows collaboration and relationships with civil society actors to maximize synergy, leverage capacities and multiple impact in a resource constrained setting. For example, in 2018 the Department gave small grants to the Bahamas Crisis Centre for its ‘Early Intervention programme for Children Exposed to Violence’, a specific trauma-focused therapy for children ages 2 to 18 who have experienced all forms of violence, and to the Zonta Clubs towards the ‘16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence’ Campaign.

In November 2019 and 2021, the DGFA partnered with the Zonta Clubs of Nassau and New Providence to engage the legislative branch of government to observe the ‘16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence’ campaign. Among other activities, special sittings in Parliament for representatives from women organizations, broadcasted live to reach the entire nation, were held during which the Speakers of the House of Assembly, the Women’s Affairs Minister and other parliamentarians (from both political parties) brought public awareness to the issue of violence in The Bahamas and highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts to eradicate Gender-Based Violence.

On Women in Leadership and Decision Making, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs has collaborated with the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership Bahamas Chapter (CIWiL), whose mission is “to monitor, strengthen and increase women’s political participation and leadership.” In August to September 2020, CIWiL and its partners conducted a five-part Webinar series on, ‘Strategies to Attract and Prepare Women for Political Leadership’. Serving and former parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, from the Caribbean region and across the political divides, presented in the series. Over 20,000 persons viewed the sessions, which were accessible on Facebook Live.

In addition, the Department is in discussions with partners to conduct a ‘Women in Political Leadership and Decision-Making Course.’ It will be a recurring course and will aim to facilitate an enabling environment for potential women leaders and decision makers.

Research

From a broader, national perspective, the nation's tertiary educational institutions are engaged in research on women's equality. Note is made of the research titled "Learning Gender-based Attitudes in The Bahamas" (Fielding and Ballance, 2019).

The Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development is responsible for shelter management in The Bahamas. The Department of Gender and Family Affairs in collaboration with the UNFPA conducted focus group sessions in shelters in New Providence following the passage of Hurricane Dorian in November 2019. These focus groups were asked to assess the needs and concerns of women and girls living in shelters. Results from the focus groups informed the Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) strategy and recommendations were presented to gender-based violence partners. Also, a referral pathway for Gender-based violence was created; and is available in both English and Creole.

In 2020, the DGFA partnered with the University of The Bahamas to administer a national online survey, 'Family Safety Survey - COVID-19 Bahamas'. It gathered information about family safety and the prevalence of domestic violence during COVID 19. Over seven hundred (700) responses were received. Initial findings from that survey were that domestic violence was up 2%. The Bahamas Crisis Centre also reported a 30% uptick in domestic violence related calls. To address this uptick, the Department, in partnership with stakeholders, including Government and Non-government agencies, created anti-gender-based violence messages on social media and for printed distribution.

Local Government (Women in the Family Islands)

Every district in The Bahamas, with the exception of New Providence, has a district council. District Councilors are elected by the population of that district in accordance with the Bahamas Local Government Act. As stated earlier, Bahamian women can exercise their full right to vote in all elections and public referenda. There are no prohibitions to women being Family Island Administrators, District Councilors or Town Committee Members. In 2024, nineteen (or 58%) of Family Island Administrators are women. Family Island Administrators are involved in decision making and implementing of public policies and delivering government services on Family Islands³².

Trafficking In Persons (TIPS)

The Bahamas as a major migratory route between the Americas and Caribbean often means that thousands are at risk as they seek a better way of life. Simultaneously, persons in The Bahamas with limited awareness of the phenomenon are themselves at risk for being exploited.

The TIPS Unit continues to focus on the four pillars of trafficking, namely: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Partnership. The Unit has been actively engaging in new ways to

³² www.ub.edu.bs/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/WPS35-Keyron-Smith-Out-Island-Governance-references-1.pdfhttps:

prevent human trafficking; protecting victims who have been or suspected of being trafficked; maintaining the status of those prosecuted for suspected cases of trafficking; and engaging in effective partnerships to increase the general populace knowledge on the topic. See the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act 2008.

The Government of The Bahamas continues to provide comprehensive assistance to trafficked women and their dependents. The TIPS Unit also has a Secretariat which meets monthly and consists of government and non-government stakeholders. The stakeholders reflect sector such as health, social services, education, law enforcement, psychological and civil society.

Responding to this national threat involves the continuous education and training of diverse stakeholder groupings across the length and breadth of The Bahamas.

In fulfilment of this mandate, the TIPS Committee trains persons of Bahamian and non-Bahamian origins. These training exercises are targeted and include participants from the vulnerable and high-risk groups within the community. Additionally, there are continuous local and international training for government officials on the front line, non-government representatives, faith-based representatives and persons apart of civil society. Training in TIPS has been continuous over the past five years (Figure 14).

Individuals Trained in Trafficking in Persons Protocols	
Years	Persons Trained
2024	2,000
2023	1,216
2022	3,344
2021	4,336
2020	572
Total	11,468

Figure 14: Capacity Building in TIPS. Data Source, TIPS Unit, RBPF.

TIPS also introduced a TIPs Girls Prevention Seminar in 2023 designed to educate primary and secondary girls between ages of 8 to 17 years on the signs and protocols of trafficking. During the period, approximately 250 were sensitized and it is hoped that the programme will continue in the future.

The Section has been able to maintain its United States Department of State TIER 1 status which speaks to efforts to fight for human dignity and human inalienable rights. This represents the ninth (9) consecutive year that The Bahamas has maintained its Tier I status.

Question 4 - Crises Impact on BPfA

Over the past five years, how has the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what measures have you taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls?

The Bahamas has experienced two (2) consequential crises in the reporting period that manifested in significant inflationary pressures translating to added economic strain for the entire population, including women and girls.

Climate Crisis and Pandemic

The Bahamas experienced a Category Five (5) Hurricane in September 2019 which devastated Grand Bahama and Abaco islands, two islands in the archipelagic chain; and recorded its first confirmed COVID-19 case in March 2020. Individually and together, the impact of these have been profound – disrupting the national way of life; and posing economic threats which disproportionately impacted marginalized groups, including women and girls.

In country, an almost equal proportion of women (442) and men (440) died from COVID-19. In addition to the mortality toll, the duo crises increased poverty among women lacking employment, housing, food, water, and transportation.

The duo also exacerbated the problems of women and girls, including those with disabilities, were experiencing. To respond to the observed uptick, the Government through its social services arm and in conjunction with the Bahamas Crisis Centre, activated an abuse hotline; and a Domestic Violence Special Unit was commissioned within the RBPF.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, families were adversely affected and displaced from their homes. This disproportionately impacted single parent homes. Many families resorted to living in their cars, as many homes were uninhabitable or had no electricity and/or water. This displacement affected the psychological well-being of many. In response, the Government through the Ministry of Health & Wellness and the Bahamas Psychological Association activated teams who traveled to these islands to render psychological first aid and other psychological services.

Climate change events and other external shocks serve as humbling reminders of the fragility of vulnerable Small Island Developing States, such as The Bahamas. These shocks necessitate diversion of national budget allocations from other important global agendas, initiatives and conventions (like the BPfA). These events resulted in an increased national debt; re-programming of fiscal funds previously earmarked for BPfA implementation; and a decline in national momentum on the sustainable agenda of women's equality and the protection of rights for women and girls.

Notwithstanding the shocks precipitated by this duo, including a contracted revenue and GDP, the Government was quick and decisive in its response to mitigate negative impact. Namely, increasing funding allocation, forging key partnerships and standing-up supportive mechanisms to make available increased assistance capacity for temporary shelters, utility and rent assistance, food vouchers and unemployment benefits. Many of the shelters were not in compliance with international building codes and suitable for women and girls with disabilities. The Government was also aggressive in securing COVID-19 vaccines for the population, as a

health protection measure to reduce the incidence of death and severity of disease. The majority (55.3%) of vaccines administered in the country was to women³³ (Figure 15).

Bahamas' Covid Vaccine Administration, Disaggregated by Sex
(2021-2023)

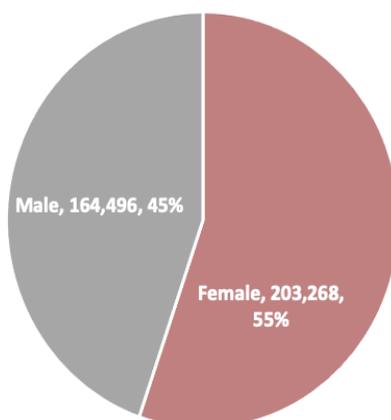


Figure 15: Covid-19 Vaccine Uptake. Data Source, EPI. Figure, Consultancy.

The Government's inclusive economic recovery strategies further extended to address the vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalized groups. The government declared Grand Bahama and Abaco as Economic Recovery Zones, providing unprecedented economic concessions, including duty and VAT-free imports on food and construction materials. This facilitated the recovery of over 400 businesses and between 8,000 to 9,000 homes. Additionally, financial assistance through the Small Business Development Center disbursed over \$3 million to micro and small businesses affected by the hurricane.

Social assistance was commendably augmented to meet the needs of the population. In a budget communication, the then Minister of Social Services informed the House and the public that the food assistance, burial assistance, major appliances, water and electricity, temporary shelter, foster care, allowance, disability allowance, school uniforms, disaster relief, medical assistance and grants are all available to women and girls by the Department of Social Services. During this time of crisis, social workers capacity was augmented on five Family Islands; and a call centre was activated for easier access to services and assistance. In the same communication, the intent to establish a new family court was announced with the aim to expedite cases that affect women and girls. To undergird the provision of these social supports, the budget allocation to Ministry of Social Services and its Department were increased to facilitate needed talent recruitment and availability of funding to operate its services.

During Covid many faith-based organizations activated telephone hotlines. The Royal Bahamas Police Force website also served as a useful resource. The website contains tips for personal safety and specific safety suggestions for females, seniors and PwDs. The website's resource

³³ Covid-At-A-Glance, Ministry of Health & Wellness (Bahamas).

also extends to crisis prevention, bullying, conflict resolution, domestic violence, suicide help resources and links. The RBPF has ongoing public awareness campaigns and personal involvement in the lives of our most vulnerable through community policing.

Question 5 - Actions on laws and policies

Over the next five years, what are the priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/ or programmes?

Between 2025 – 2030, The Bahamas seeks to prioritize the following five (5) areas to accelerate progress:

- Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls
- Eliminating violence against women and girls
- Political participation and representation
- Promoting gender equality as part of environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes

International Instruments

The Bahamas recalls its commitment to varied regional and international instruments pertaining to civil and political rights. These include: • The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966) • The Inter-American Democratic Charter of the Organization of American States (2001) • The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Charter of Civil Society (1997) • The United Nations Convention Against Corruption • The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) • The International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination • Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) • The Commonwealth Harare Declaration (1991) • The Charter of the Commonwealth (2012). These commitments provide the country with a roadmap for and accountability on achieving women equality in The Bahamas and ILO convention 159 (2022).

Within the realm of international relations, in November 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the Bureau of Human Rights and Human Security. This specialized Bureau empowers the Ministry to act as a focal point in addressing human rights concerns with various public and private sector stakeholders on critical thematic areas that align with the human rights objectives of the Government of The Bahamas. Gender mainstreaming is a key area for the Bureau.

By virtue of a standing invitation issued by the Government of The Bahamas to United Nations UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders on 6th June, 2013, the Bureau facilitated the Country Visit, held from 27th November, 2023 to 8th December, 2023. During the visit, the Government of The Bahamas gave the WGAD uninterrupted access to places of deprivation, shelters, detention facilities and access to detainees, and migrants for in-depth interviews. The group were granted access to facilities such as:

- The Bahamas Department of Corrections (BDOCS)
- Carmichael Road Detention Centre

- Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre
- The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls
- The Simpson Penn Centre for Boys

At the conclusion of the visit, the Government utilized the recommendations from the WGAD to implement improvements and are in the process of establishing new policies relating to women and girls, which will be implemented within the next five (5) years.

The visit by the WGAD is a clear testament to the nation's unwavering dedication to the principles of human rights and its steadfast commitment to openness in addressing potential breaches of these rights. The Working Group (WG) is scheduled to present the report at the 57th Session of the Human Rights Council, in Geneva, Switzerland from 9th September to 11th October, 2024 and The Bahamas has been afforded a five (5) minute slot to deliver an intervention before the Council.

Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls

There are various community colleges and organizations in The Bahamas that assist with furthering education for young women and girls. The DGFA partners with a wide cross-section of NGOs to promote educational and economic empowerment. Notable among these are FEMSTEM, PACE and STRAW.

- 1) FEMSTEM, established in 2019, is an organization dedicated to empowering young women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Since its inception, FEMSTEM has been actively awarding scholarships and prizes to young women for their exceptional achievements in these fields, aiming to increase the percentage of women in STEM careers. In 2020, FEMSTEM expanded its efforts by offering formal afternoon STEM training and capacity- building classes, benefiting over 150 young women that year and awarding them with international scholarships. The organization has since grown significantly, contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5, 10, 11, and 7 by promoting quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and affordable and clean energy. This programme has had tremendous impact and growth.
- 2) The PACE School is a special programme for teenage mothers unable to complete school due to their pregnancy. The programme has been able to see many young women to a place where they can stand alone as a supportive parent and a strong woman. (PACE)
- 3) S.T.R.A.W Inc Center for Young Women is a specific development programme. The organization helps young women making poor decisions and are in danger of becoming distracted from school or within society. It is there to equip young women with the tools, techniques and a positive support system to avoid drifting off in life. (STRAW INC).

The strides made toward equity and equality for women and girls through the Department of Gender and Family Affairs have been great.

- Protection against violence for women and girls
- Williamae Pratt Centre for Girls programmes expansion and new staff capacity training
- Urban Renewal programme
- Reuniting girls with their families after completing the programme
- Expansion of computer training courses. These courses target older persons; computer literacy for adults; job readiness for young adults
- Executing summer camps for persons with disabilities
- Etiquette programmes for all ages

Eliminating violence against women and girls

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to developing feasible policies and mechanisms in partnership with civil organizations to better respond to and accelerate the progress of women and girls. Through responsive policies and programmes, the Government continues to support the individual needs of victims, survivors and their families using the victim and survivor centered, and trauma and violence informed approaches. Several initiatives the Government engaged included:

1. The Citizen Security and Justice Programme was an initiative funded through a \$20m loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The programme commenced in 2016 and sought to use multi-faceted approaches to crime and violence-prevention and reduction in The Bahamas. Though the CSJP has concluded in 2023, the Government utilize curriculums developed under the programme and inclusive of the Healthy Relationships Curriculum and Gender Based Violence Curriculum which are still available to support our youth on the issues of gender-based violence. The curricula are executed at the three community centres developed under the programme. The Government is in the process of building a new community centre with plans for three more in vulnerable communities.
2. With the assistance of police officers, residents throughout The Bahamas gain knowledge and skills on mediating challenges involving gender-based violence, sexual assault, conflict resolution and parenting. To date, 400 community members have been certified during multiple-day workshops conducted and are able to share the same within their respective communities.
3. Police Officers attached to Urban Renewal, the 'Neighbourhood Watch Programme' and the Domestic Violence Unit work with primary and secondary students to provide them with skills and the knowledge regarding healthy relationships and domestic violence. Using role play, officers engage with the students to demonstrate the consequences of their actions. For the participants, the training programme addresses nine distinct forms violence including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, cultural, spiritual, financial abuse, verbal abuse and neglect. In addition, the programme seeks to break the cycle of violence by equipping community members with the knowledge and skills on how to recognize these signs and when they do, how to intercede for a positive outcome.
4. The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services provides anger management training for inmates to assist with conflict resolution, family life and parenting skill. The training offers inmates a deeper insight into the reasons for their behaviours and its impact on

family life and incarceration. The training also serves to impact recidivism by educating offenders on and preventing domestic violence.

5. The Government of The Bahamas, through the Royal Bahamas Police Force, established the Domestic Violence Unit in July 2021. The goal is to use multi-faceted approaches to address the crosscutting underlined issues related to gender-based violence and explore new strategies to prevent and reduce such occurrences. The goal is to do more than just record and investigate such incidences, but connect victims and survivors with experts, government and non-government organizations that could provide critical and timely recovery services.

Gender-responsive disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience building

The Government of The Bahamas is keenly aware and has embraced the significant role that women play in disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience building. In 2024 the Government of The Bahamas began the process of gender optimization in the Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF) (see National Democratic Institute – Women, Peace and Security Training Outline). The goal is to increase awareness of international instruments that promote women’s participation in peace and security operations, generate awareness on why women must be involved in peace processes, and explore mechanisms for the involvement of women in peace and security operations and how they have been used globally.

The Government has partnered with the Government of the United States and its National Democratic Institute to begin training members of the RBDF. To date, for the first time in the agency’s history, two women were promoted to the rank of Captain. One of the women also represents the agency on the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). It should be noted that most of the workers in the command centre of NEMA during national disasters are females.

It is the goal of the Government to expand gender optimization to address disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience building to all of the branches of law enforcement agencies in The Bahamas. See Women Peace and Security Training Guide.



SECTION THREE

PROGRESS
ACROSS THE 12
BPfA CRITICAL
AREAS



SECTION THREE: PROGRESS ON CRITICAL BPfA AREAS

This section will explore The Bahamas' progress on the twelve (12) critical BPfA areas grouped under five main themes:

- Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work
- Poverty eradication, social protection and social services
- Freedom from violence stigma and stereotypes
- Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions
- Peaceful and inclusive societies
- Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

A: INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT, SHARED PROSPERITY AND DECENT WORK

The critical areas linked to this sub-section of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work are:

- Women and poverty
- Women and the economy
- Human rights and women
- The girl child

Question 6 – Gender Equity in the Work World

Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?

Comparative analysis of the 2019 and 2023 national labour force surveys (LFS) shows consistency in top three occupations Bahamian women engage in – clerical (84.6%), professional and technical (68.8%), and sales and services (66.7%). Moreover, the proportion of women participation in each occupation has increased between the two survey periods – with the exception of elementary occupations.

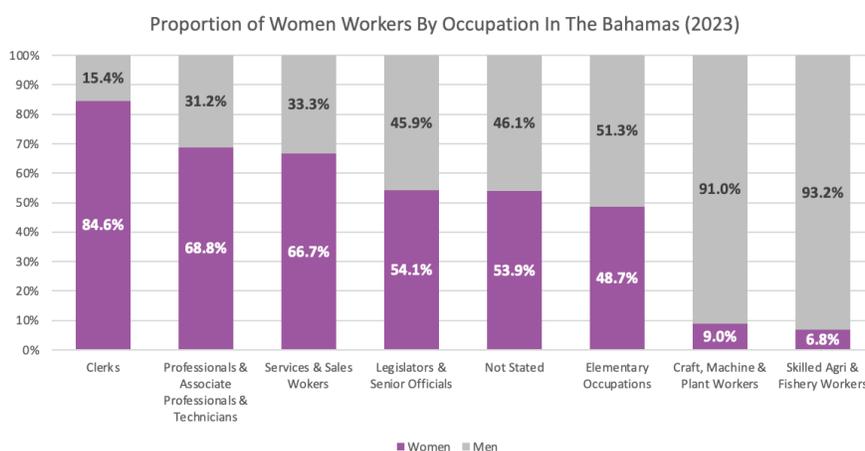


Figure 16: Bahamian Workers By Occupation and Sex. Data Source: BNSI, LFS (2023), Figure: Consultancy.

Figure 16 depicts the 2023 proportions. These statistics are evidence of progress on gender equality and empowerment of women in The Bahamas.

Women in Law Enforcement

The Government of The Bahamas continues to encourage more women to participate in law enforcement. The Government is keenly aware and embraces women’s meaningful participation in strengthened law enforcement because it understands that it makes conflict prevention and peacekeeping efforts more effective and efficient.

As previously stated, The Bahamas in 2024 has embraced gender optimization in the Defence Force with the goal to expand the programme into other areas of law enforcement. To complement, in its recent recruitment exercise (July 2024), the agency passed out the largest group of women in its history. The same recruitment drives will be transferred to both the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the Department of Correctional Services.

As part of its commitment to inclusivity, the Government of The Bahamas continues to ensure that the respective leadership teams of law enforcement have female representation. The Government strongly believes that having a gender perspective fosters the opportunity to surveil and detect persons being negatively impacted due to gender.

Of the agencies under the remit of the Ministry of National Security, the following reflects the composition of women as members of our law enforcement senior executive leadership team over the last five years (Figure 17):

Women in Senior Executive Leadership Positions 2020-2024						
Agency	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	% of Leadership
Royal Bahamas Police Force	1DCP 1ACP	1DCP	1DCP 1ACP	2 ACP	2 ACP	13% 2 of 15
Royal Bahamas Defence Force	0	0	0	2	2	16%
Bahamas Department of Correctional Services	1	1	1	1	1	14%

Figure 17: Women in Leadership in the Bahamian Uniformed Branches. Data Source: RBPF.

Historically, within the Police Force (RBPF) the first female at the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) was appointed in 2009. The second female ACP was appointed in 2014, and in 2017 a third female was ascended to the rank of ACP, who in 2020 became the first female Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP). Within the Defence Force (RBDF), two females were promoted to the rank of captain in 2023 and still remain on the strength. Within the Department of Corrections, the first female Deputy Commissioner of Corrections was appointed in 2014 and remains on strength. She is one of three women to ever be promoted to the senior team in the agency’s history.

Women in Vulnerable Employment

Workers in vulnerable employment are the least likely to have formal work arrangements, social protection, and safety nets to guard against economic shocks; thus they are more likely to fall into poverty. Vulnerable employment among women was 8.6% and among men was 22.3% in The Bahamas for 2022³⁴ (Figure 18). The rate of vulnerable employment is lower for men and women in The Bahamas compared to the average rate in Latin America & Caribbean (modeled ILO estimates). The 2022 Bahamas' LFS (2019) sets vulnerable female workers at 3,390 and male vulnerable workers at 11,355 - ratio of 1:3. This may have import especially given the link between financial strain as a precipitating factor violent behaviour towards women and girls within relationship and home settings.

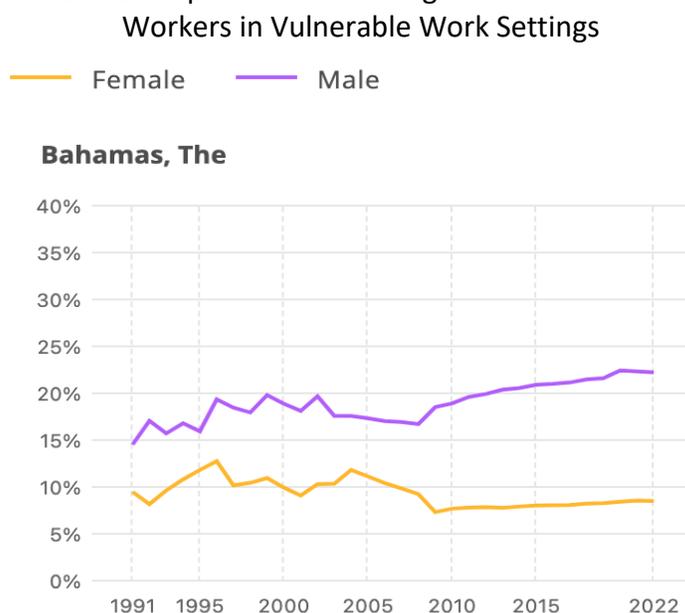


Figure 18: Proportion of Vulnerable. Data Source, World Bank (modelled ILO estimates).

Contributing factors for these observations include the following:

Laws, Policies and Practices

In the intervening years since the last Report, The Bahamas has undertaken significant measures to advance equality and rights in the workplace through legislative reforms and strategic initiatives. There have been no amendments to The Employment Act (2001), the Industrial Relations Act and the Labour Code (Section 6). These laws remain as the national legal regime prohibiting discrimination based on gender and ensuring that men and women are treated equally in hiring, promotion along with other employment practices – across both public and private sectors. Even though these anti-discriminatory regimes exist, policymakers concede that more work is needed to ensure enforcement³⁵.

³⁴ <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/bahamas-the>

³⁵ <https://ewnews.com/addressing-gender-wage-gap-in-private-sector-impractical>

According to the WBL Index (2024), The Bahamas scored 50 (out of 100) in legal frameworks related to women in the workplace. The Index shows that although there are no legal restrictions to a woman obtaining a job in the same way as a male, there is no law explicitly prohibiting discrimination in recruitment based on marital status, parental status and age.

On this same index, The Bahamas scored 0 (out of 100) in supportive frameworks related to women in the workplace. This is unexpected but qualified as there are no nationally published guidelines on non-discrimination based on gender in recruitment; and there is no formalized, specialized body that receives complaints about gender discrimination in employment.

Listed below are some significant actions, initiatives and policies reflecting the country's growing commitment to promoting equal opportunities, addressing disparities, and cultivating a more inclusive workforce.

- Aligned with the United Nations General Assembly's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, The Bahamas' has developed a cohesive and comprehensive Decent Work Agenda that prioritizes gender equality, strengthens social protection measures, and eliminates discriminatory employment practices. In December 2021, The Bahamas achieved a milestone by launching its second-generation Decent Work Country programme (DWCP, 2021 - 2026). Developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and led by the National Tripartite Council (NTC), the DWCP prioritizes integrating principles of decent work into national policies.
- To bolster economic security and uphold the dignity of all workers, The Bahamas implemented an increase in the minimum wage from \$5.25 to \$6.50 per hour, which means a minimum weekly wage of \$260. This was effected nationwide on January 1, 2023. This adjustment reflects ongoing efforts to ensure equitable compensation and improve living standards for workers across the country.
- The development and implementation of a comprehensive National Gender Policy. This policy outlines strategic objectives and actions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across various sectors, including the labor market. It aims to create an enabling environment where both men and women can participate equally and benefit from economic opportunities.
- Efforts have been undertaken to facilitate the transition from informal to formal work, including legal and policy measures that benefit women in informal employment. Hurricane Dorian and the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the magnitude of the workers in the informal economy – when previously the contribution was thought to be significantly less, a reality mirrored around the world. In fact, the informal economy comprises more than half of the global labour force; and more than 90% of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) worldwide. As a demonstration of its commitment to finding viable solutions to this, The Bahamas has recently participated in interactive ILO and OAS courses designed to create a framework to ensure a smooth transition to the formal economy. At the 112th session of the ILC held in Geneva, Switzerland,

government officers participated in the General Discussion Committee on Decent Work and the Care Economy. The Government is eagerly awaiting the committee's resolutions, which are expected to provide valuable guidance for future policy decisions in The Bahamas.

These actions demonstrate The Bahamas' commitment to advancing gender equality in the world of work. While progress has been made, ongoing efforts and sustained commitment are essential to achieving true gender parity and ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from economic growth and development. This is especially so, considering persisting income disparities (Figure 19). The average annual household income in the country is \$45,487; and the median is \$36,230³⁶. There are nominal differences between female and male headed households for annual incomes equal to or less than \$20,000. However, for income above the \$20,000 level, male-headed households have substantially higher annual incomes. In fact, the gender gap between the two household groups (male-headed and female headed) increases the higher the income grouping. The specific gaps are:

- 25.2% for the \$20,001 - \$40,000 income group
- 42.9% for the \$40,001 - \$60,000 income group
- 53.4% for the \$60,001 - \$80,000 income group
- 47.0% for the \$80,001 - \$100,000 income group
- 66.1% for the \$100,001 or more income group

These realities help to focus Government's priorities and efforts; and to reinforce the need for intensified action.

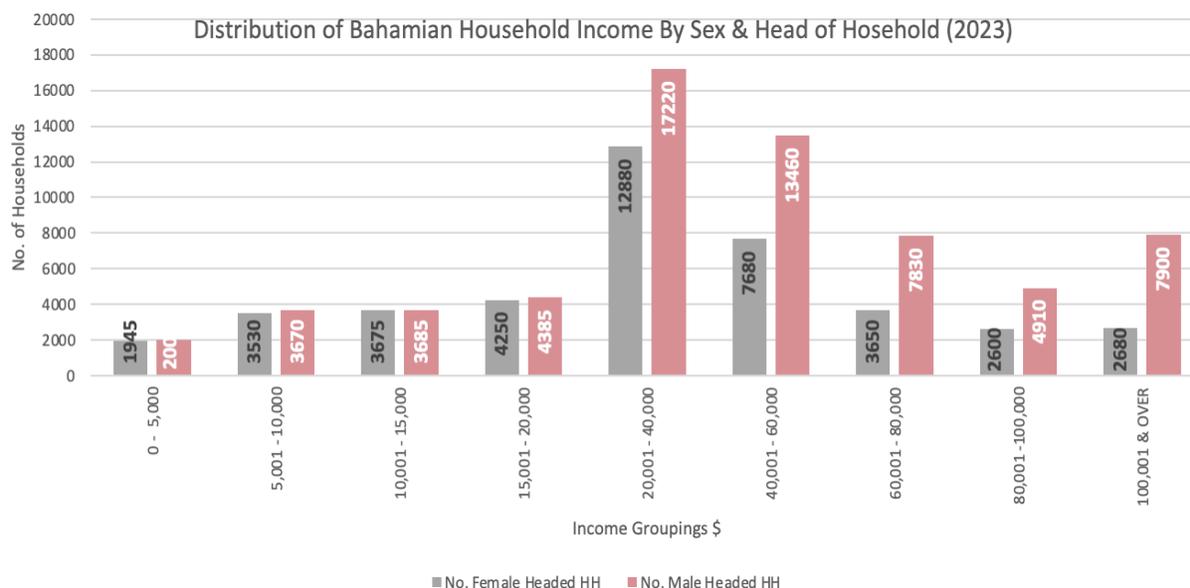


Figure 19: Income Distribution by Head-of-Household. Data Source, BNSI. Figure, Consultancy.

³⁶ National Labour Force Survey, BNSI (2023).

Gender-responsive Job Creation and Active Labour Market Policies

Recognizing the critical role of women in economic development, The Bahamas has introduced initiatives to support female entrepreneurs. Programmes providing access to finance, mentorship, and business development services have been established to help women start and grow their businesses, contributing to greater economic diversity and resilience. Relevant examples are:

- A farming and fishing programme has commenced in 2020 by Access Accelerator and the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine resources³⁷.
- For women in or interested in Agribusiness, tourism and/or the creative industries, a 6-week gender equitable financing programme training, development, mentorship and internship opportunities was organized, executed and funded through partnership between FAO and the University of The Bahamas.
- The Bahamian government also allocated \$5M for fishing and farming grants, a tangible financial resource for women contemplating careers in fishing or farming³⁸.
- Small Business Development Initiative (a collaboration between the Government, BTVI, the University of the Bahamas, and the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employee's Confederation, with support from the Organization of the American States) gave guidance to Bahamians, including women, on starting, expanding or seeking support for their own business³⁹

The country also launched several capacity-building initiatives aimed at equipping women with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in the workforce. These programmes focused on areas such as leadership development, entrepreneurship, and technical skills training, helping women to overcome barriers and advance in their careers. For example, The Bahamas has bolstered the capacity of institutions steering and promoting gender equality. The DFGA has been particularly active in advocating for women's rights and coordinating efforts to address gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

Additionally, a National Symposium on Skills Development was executed in 2022. It specifically considered the inclusion and equity of women and was attended by 150 cross-sector leaders. Local NGOs that serve women, such as Women's United, FOAM, and Princess Court, have

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/FinanceBAH/posts/farming-fishing-programme-kicks-offaccess-accelerator-ministry-of-agriculture-an/3502710173155857/>

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/FinanceBAH/posts/govt-allocates-5-million-for-fishing-farming-grants-and-funding-supportfrom-the-/3502822459811295/>

³⁹ <https://bahamasbudget.gov.bs/2018/our-priorities/social-progress-economic-development/>

organized upskilling programmes and job fairs to create viable pathways for women in vulnerable circumstances to find work placements.

Women and Disabilities in the World of Work

Prevailing law - Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunity) Act - requires that a ratio of differently abled to abled persons employed by an organization be at least 1 to 100 employed. Moreover, current law provides that no person with a disability, who is qualified, may not be discriminated against by the employer in terms of compensation, benefits, allowances, fringe benefits etc. and must be given equal access to opportunities for employment. Compliance with these two provisions have been slow.

The 52 weeks skills empowerment programme has existed for more than a decade. In 2021, for the first time, PwD were purposefully included in the 52-week, government-led and funded skills empowerment initiative. This initiative targets unemployed persons ages 19 to 30 years for hands-on skills building. Fifty (50) young persons with varying disabilities engaged; and thirty (30) of these were employed by Government agencies while twenty (20) were employed by a local communications company – another first. The majority of these were women and girls with disabilities.

The Act also addresses the training of PwDs in vocational skills leading to job opportunities. It is also required that every educational institution makes “reasonable accommodation” on behalf of the PwDs to remove barriers to learning. It is believed that the training, empowerment and employment of women and girls with disabilities will lead to greater independence, boost morale and provide them with self-sustaining opportunities.

The Commonwealth’s Women’s Affairs Ministerial Meeting which took place in August 2023 adopted Disability Inclusion across the Commonwealth as an outcome of the meeting, together with the empowerment of all women to end all forms of violence against women.

The Small Business Development Centre provides assistance through its access accelerator programme for the creation of entrepreneurs who may be persons with disabilities. The Bahamas Development bank has earmarked funds for women entrepreneurs for the funding of their projects, including those with Disabilities.

These national actions have been sealed by The Bahamas’ ratification of ILO Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons in November 2022. This Convention sharply focuses the country’s commitment to fostering equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Coupled to this, it emphasizes collaborative efforts among governmental bodies, employers, and workers’ organizations to facilitate vocational training, guidance, and sustainable employment for disabled individuals, thereby fostering supportive and inclusive work environments.

Sexual Harassment

The right to safe working environments, free from all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment are provided for in the Sexual Offences Act. Moreover, the Government of The Bahamas ratified the International Labour Convention C190 on Violence and Harassment in the Workplace in November 2022. This significant step extends protection to all individuals in the world of work, including employees, trainees, interns, apprentices, terminated workers, and volunteers, irrespective of their contractual status. Currently, The Bahamas is in the early stages of implementing a legislative framework to support Convention No. 190, ensuring comprehensive safeguards against violence and harassment in workplaces in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

One of the lowest scores for the Bahamas is on the WBL Index indicator measuring laws affecting women's safety. To improve on this safety indicator, the Bahamas may wish to consider putting in place legislation on domestic violence, introducing legislation on femicide, adopting comprehensive legislation on sexual harassment and introducing legislation on child marriage⁴⁰.

Strengthened Land Rights and Tenure Security

Scoring 55.0 out of 100.0, The Bahamas is lower than the global average (64.2) and lower than the Latin America & Caribbean regional average (69.1) on land rights and tenure security. When it comes to laws affecting women's property and inheritance and laws affecting the size of a woman's pension, The Bahamas obtains a perfect score (100.0 out of 100.0)⁴¹.

Currently under consultation in the country are the New Registered Land Bill (2024) and the New Land Adjudication Bill (2024)⁴², which is envisaged to address more robustly the issue of secured tenure.

As the legislation process moves, the Government is actively moving to fulfill its pledge to create meaningful pathways to homeownership. First, the Affordable Housing programme, which began [year], aims to put affordable housing in reach for many Bahamian families. As mentioned previously, nationally 42% of households in The Bahamas are headed by females. In one instance, the Government allocated \$20M to construct 200 new affordable homes. For women desiring other non-funded homeownership opportunities, the Government introduced fiscal policy measures to waive VAT duties on conveyance and mortgage instruments and are directly reducing the costs for first-time homeowners. Additionally, it raised the exemption for stamp duty on homes up to \$300,000 and offered VAT refunds on construction materials and services. Reducing VAT on property transfers and eliminating it on land transfers between joint

⁴⁰ <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2024/pilot/WBL24-2-0-Bahamas-the.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://wbl.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/wbl/2024/pilot/WBL24-2-0-Bahamas-the.pdf>

⁴² <https://bahamaslandreform.gov.bs/>

tenants is about respecting your heritage and valuing the land passed down through generations.

Second, the launch of the rent-to-own initiative (dubbed ‘A Place to Call Home’) in 2022 is envisioned to mitigate the upfront cost barrier to homeownership. The Central Bank has already introduced new guidelines for domestic banks and credit unions regarding residential mortgages. Reducing the minimum equity requirement and eliminating mortgage indemnity insurance for lower down payments is a significant step forward. We are creating a country where every Bahamian can get ahead.

Third, the Government allocated \$500,000 to fund a new women's shelter, to provide refuge for victims of violence. With a safe shelter provided, it may be easier for women to focus on work and their careers⁴³.

Overall, these actions highlight The Bahamas' commitment to advancing gender equality in the world of work. While progress has been made, ongoing efforts and sustained commitment are essential to achieving true gender parity and ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from economic growth and development.

Question 7 – Reducing Unpaid Care and Work-Life Balance

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?

The proportion of unpaid care and domestic workers in the Bahamian labour force is perennially low (less than 0.3% of the labour force or 415 persons in absolute terms), see Figure 20. Nonetheless, this category of workers still requires attention.

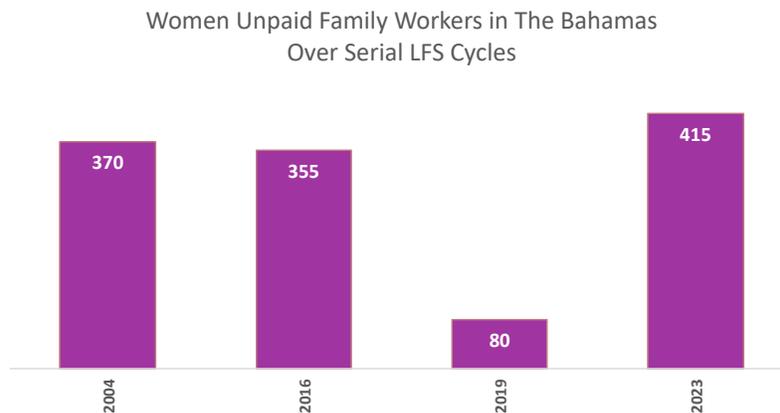


Figure 20: Unpaid Care Workers. Data source, BNSI. Figure, Consultancy.

⁴³ <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2022/jun/24/500000-womens-shelter/>

In the last 5 years there were no laws amended in The Bahamas to address issues related to unpaid care and domestic work. However, national endeavours on this issue are part of a broader commitment to fostering gender equality and supporting both unpaid and paid caregivers.

Noteworthy, during the COVID-19 pandemic, The Bahamas expanded its social support programmes, particularly those related to access to food and health. The Government launched the Food Distribution Task Force, a collective effort between the government and not-for-profit providers, with the primary beneficiaries of this programme being women.

More recently, policy considerations are underway for implementation of a care allowance for caregivers of persons with disabilities.

Reflection of Unpaid Care and Domestic in National Statistics

Care of children, older persons, the ill and the disabled is an important dimension of society. Measuring unpaid and domestic work, gives recognition to women's total contribution to work and economies. The Bahamas National Statistical Institute attended ILO training sessions in December, 2023 to learn of the new methodology for discreetly measuring the contribution of unpaid and domestic work. The Institute is actively refining its Labour Force Survey instrument to incorporate same.

In the interim, and in the absence of formal measurement mechanisms to capture this contribution in The Bahamas, a proxy may be those unemployed who characterized the reason for leaving last employment as 'personal reasons' or 'never worked' or 'other'. Together, these account for 10,140 of the unemployed labour force. Of this number, 6,085 (or 60% are women)⁴⁴.

Given the impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns and/or the subsequent unemployment, with more people are at home, it is suspected that care work responsibility in the home being multiplied⁴⁵.

Expanded and Affordable Childcare Services

Investment in accessible and affordable childcare services has been a key focus in The Bahamas. By providing reliable childcare options, the Government aims to reduce the burden of unpaid care work and enable parents, particularly mothers, to participate more fully in the labor market.

Annual fiscal budgets for the country continue to reflect allocations to Social Services for its Children and Family Services Division. This Division seeks to ensure that all children in The

⁴⁴ Bahamas National Statistical Institute, Labour Force Survey (May 2019).

⁴⁵ <https://caribbean.loopnews.com/content/un-women-covid-19-increases-burden-unpaid-care-work>

Commonwealth of The Bahamas have a physically safe environment, with emotional support and security necessary for healthy growth and development. Also, fiscal allocations are made to the Ministry of Education to fund the Private Pre-School Partnership which aims to increase the number of children ages 3 – 5 years accessing and benefiting from pre-school education. The Early Child Care Act (2004)⁴⁶ remains the principal law for the regulation and management of daycares and preschools.

Non-profit organizations (NPOs) operating children's homes, such as the Grand Bahama Children's Home and the Nazareth Children's Home receive subvention assistance from the Government. And, during 2021 – 2023 period many have prioritized staff training and professional development to upskill staff for better alignment with best practice standards in these settings.

Expanded Support for Older Persons and PwDs

People over 65 years of age accounted for 9.3% of the total Bahamian population, in 2023. This was 5% in 2010. Life expectancy at birth in 2023 was 74.5 years, lower than the average for the Region of the Americas, but 2.5 years higher than in 2000⁴⁷. Bahamians are living longer, as represented in Figure 21.

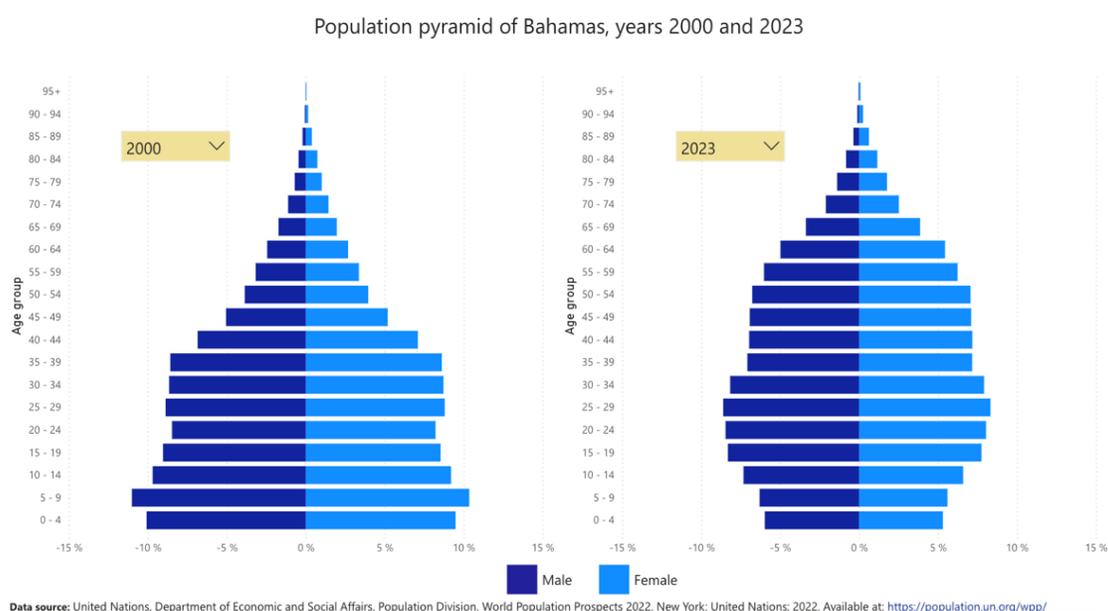


Figure 21: Bahamas' Population Pyramid

As people age, probability for illness onset, loss of function and dependency on relatives becomes greater. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) estimates a dependency ratio

⁴⁶ https://laws.bahamas.gov.bs/cms/images/LEGISLATION/PRINCIPAL/2004/2004-0001/2004-0001_2.pdf

⁴⁷ <https://hia.paho.org/en/countries-22/bahamas-country-profile>

for The Bahamas of 38.5 potentially passive people (those 65 years and older) per 100 potentially active people (those 15 to 64 years). This ratio was 53.6 in 2000.

To support healthy aging, the country has increased the number of registered and licensed Gerontologists by threefold in the last five years. Additionally, in recognition of the unique circumstances faced by older persons, adults over 50 receive additional benefits through the NHI mechanism to ensure healthy aging. The benefits that are over and above those in the Standard Benefits Package are:

- Regular screening for dementia, depression, alcohol misuse and elder abuse
- Management of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes

To support healthy aging among Bahamians, the Healthy Bahamas Coalition (a Cabinet approved national NCD Commission), works along with civil society actors to develop initiatives to support persons as they age. Some initiatives have included topics related to aging and nutrition; aging and physical activity; ageing and finance – to name a few. This Coalition is nominally funded by the Government. Also, information on healthy ageing is produced and published using varied platforms. Case in point, the Ministry of Health & Wellness ‘Ten Steps to Healthy Ageing’⁴⁸.

The Department of Social Services has extended its computer training and literacy courses, specifically geared towards older women (and men).

The country is in the very embryonic stages of developing a National Older Persons Policy.

Strengthened Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave

General Orders are the policies governing the public service and public officers in the country. General Orders provide for maternity leave. Maternity leave is twelve (12) weeks with full pay.

A pregnant officer with five (5) years service, or; more, may be granted half pay leave in addition to the maternity leave plus, the full pay vacation leave mentioned in General Order 1585, but not so that the total period away from work would exceed sixteen (16) weeks. General Order 1587 states that maternity leave *with-pay* will not be granted more than once in three (3) years nor will it normally be granted before an officer has served for one (1) year⁴⁹.

Paternity leave is not explicit in General Orders, and is usually subject to Bargaining Unit negotiations and Agreements. In Agreements where paternity leave is reflected, typically the officer becomes eligible for paternity leave after one year of continuous employment. Leave

⁴⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/bddua9vz>

⁴⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/379ys2w8>

with pay is for a maximum of ten (10) working days. Such disparity places greater burden on the post-natal mother and unevenly distributed responsibility for care of the newborn.

In June 2024, Minister Pia Glover-Rolle, Minister for the Public Service, led the Bahamian delegation to the 112th Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. At the conference, the primary objective was to explore essential policies for the care economy and to strengthen maternity and paternity leave. The Government of The Bahamas is awaiting the committee's resolutions, which are expected to assist in shaping future policies aimed at improving conditions for care workers and strengthening the care economy, including provisions related to maternity and paternity leave.

Initiatives to promote work-life balance have been introduced in the country, including policies that support parental leave and flexible working arrangements. These measures help ensure that both men and women can balance their professional and personal responsibilities, leading to a more equitable workplace environment.

Promoting Work-Life and Family Balance:

Citing the WBL Index (2024), The Bahamas has no legal framework that allows employees to request flexible work; nor is there a nationally published guideline on flexible work arrangements. Although national policies related to work-life balance need developing, private sector institutional policies may be more mature. These measures help employees balance their professional and personal responsibilities, fostering a more equitable workplace environment.

Question 8 – Reducing the Gender Digital Divide

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital-divide?

Over the past five years, The Bahamas has made significant strides in dismantling the gender digital divide. Recognizing the importance of digital equity to safeguard equitable access to education and workforce opportunities; and to bolster women and girls' confidence to thrive in a technology-driven world, various national initiatives have been undertaken to ensure women and girls have equitable access to digital technologies and opportunities.

These initiatives are part of a broader National Digitalization Strategy that aims to foster inclusivity and promote digital literacy and skills among women and girls.

Key actions have been in the following areas:

- Taken measures to remove the discriminatory barriers faced by women and girls to access, use and design digital tools (e.g. costs of devices and data, lack of skills, safety, restrictive social norms)
- Taken measures to support the creation and expansion of safe, affordable, accessible, relevant and inclusive public and private digital tools and services

- Taken measures to promote gender-responsive STEM education

The Bahamas is proud of these, and other strides in recent years; and is resolved not to rest on its past advancements, as there remains unfinished business in public policy measures to boost female participation in the digital sphere.

Measures to Remove Gender Digital-Divide Barriers

Availability of technology is not a guarantee of its accessibility. In the absence of sex-disaggregated national data, it is well established that women and girls across the world report less access, lower digital literacy and lower use of digital technologies than men do. This is supported by an IDB study (2022), which revealed that 62% of representatives of major institutions and entities in the digital ecosystem in Latin America and the Caribbean think the digital gender gap is a problem in their respective countries. The same proportion believe that women have little participation in digital transformation processes because of a lack of skills and competencies⁵⁰.

The digital divide (the gap between those who have access to and can meaningfully use digital technologies versus those who are systemically restricted from it) is the result of a number of barriers (age, income, geography), and often exacerbated by social norms such as gender or beliefs⁵¹. The Bahamas has been deliberate in lowering and removing these barriers.

To improve digital literacy among women and girls, several local non-profit organizations (NPOs) and educational institutions have offered programmes aimed at increasing digital literacy and capacity among women and girls. For example, at the primary and secondary school level, many private schools have integrated digital education into their curricula and hold events to engage girls in technology-related subjects from an early age. Similarly, post-secondary institutions, like University of The Bahamas and BTVI, offer courses designed to engage women and girls in digital education.

Whilst relatively lower levels of digital skills and agency compared to men are an impediment for women's engagement with digitized social protection systems, the top barrier to mobile use overall is affordability (GSMA, 2023)⁵². To improve affordability (cost) of data and devices, several government and private sector initiatives have been successfully executed between 2019 – 2024. These include:

⁵⁰ <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/latin-america-and-caribbean-need-reduce-gender-gap-digital-transformation>

⁵¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/digital-technology-key-improve-literacy-learning-girls-and-women>

⁵² https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/risks_and_benefits_of_digital_tools_from_a_gender_perspective_en.pdf

- The Elevate Campaign (BTC), bundles fixed and mobile services to provide a comprehensive, cost-effective solution for customers. Innovations such as the WhatsApp Bot, new contact centers, and solutions for small business customers enhance customer service.
- The Jump Initiative (BTC), launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, to provide approved families with subsidized broadband services, digital skills training, and laptops. This initiative targets families within BTC's fiber footprint who do not have internet access at home and have not been BTC customers for the past six (6) months. This initiative harmonizes with BTC's core social mission is to connect everyone to the internet to enable progress. We are committed to developing affordable internet plans and to bridge the digital divide for an inclusive digital society.
- For officers, women and men, employed in the public sector, the Department of Information Communication Technology (DICT) and the PSCHARD – arms of the Government – offer free training on common software applications and how to use digital devices.
- Strategic collaborations with international partners such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and many community and faith-based organizations collaborated to make digital education available across the archipelago. Training programmes were implemented to ensure that students had access to online learning resources and tools necessary for continuing their education amidst the crisis.

There has been expanded access to TVET courses at the secondary school level and extracurricular opportunities at the primary school level. These include ICTs, artificial intelligence, and robotics - to name a few. These efforts in education have been made to close gaps, recovery of learning and accelerate learning. Women and Girls have increased access to skills training in new and emerging fields such as FEMSTEMS Training and Technical Training conducted by BTVI and LJM Maritime Academy.

Measures to create and expand digital tools and services in society

With so much in the hands of women, from engineering households to managing family, careers and relationships, digital tools put in the hands of women the means to fulfill their roles and better their lives. Under this area, both the Government and private sector have made advances over the last 5 years. Namely, are the Government's My GateWay Initiative and the Central Bank's SandDollar Initiative.

The My GateWay is in line with the National Digitization Strategy with the purpose of facilitating the ease of doing business and the public's interface for necessary government functions. This digital platform features fifty online functionalities supporting business licensing, custom clearing, and online access to government services. The latter includes birth certificate, death certificate, marriage certificate, deed search, deeds and documents, traffic record, firearm licence, renewal, application for fingerprinting, police character reference (police

record), learner’s permit renewal, driver’s licence (renewal or replacement, and vehicle registration renewal & inspection et cetera.

The SandDollar Wallet was ideated and implemented in 2020 by the Central Bank of The Bahamas, and serves as the country’s first digital currency (Figure 22). This initiative primarily targets the younger population, including girls across the archipelago. Two of the four motivations for the central bank digital currency were:

1. To Provide non-discriminatory access to payment systems without regard for age, immigration or residency status;
2. To Achieve greater financial inclusion, cost-effectiveness, and provide greater access to financial services across all of The Bahamas;

This modernized payment modality, in addition to other digital payment modalities, help mitigate some risks and safety hazards inherent with cash.

Table 1. General SandDollar Statistics June 2023	
Description	Current
SandDollars in circulation	\$1,093,373.71
Number of approved digital wallet providers	9
Active digital wallet providers	7
Number of consumer wallets	106,147
Number of merchant wallets	1,608

Figure 22: SandDollar Performance. Data Source, The Central Bank of The Bahamas.

Measures promoting gender-responsive STEM education

Girls are less likely to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education paths, often due to societal stereotypes, lack of encouragement, and a perceived lack of role models. Efforts to engage girls in STEM from a young age, through initiatives like coding camps and mentorship programmes, have had wide adoption in The Bahamas and has shown positive results but need wider implementation.

The Bahamas will share four (4) STEM educational programmes expressly directed at women and girls.

- The Digital Skills Training, a private-public partnership as part of the JUMP programme (explained earlier). This training includes comprehensive digital skills training to

empower women and girls with the knowledge and skills required to navigate and utilize digital tools effectively.

- FEMSTEM Bahamas⁵³ is a youth-based nonprofit organization established in July 2019, with the objective to empower high school girls (ages 13 – 18) through early engagement and academic success in STEM, and incubating a talented and diverse STEM workforce thereby bridging the gender gap in STEM.
- The Providing Access to Continued Education (PACE) initiative offers training programmes to at-risk girls, helping them build digital skills that are essential for future employment opportunities.
- F.O.A.M has provided resources and training to enhance digital literacy among women who have been the victims of violence, ensuring they have the tools needed to navigate the digital world effectively.
- The Clearing Banks Association have launched the ‘Live Fast, Pay Digital’ campaign, aimed at promoting what is called ‘faster, safer, greener’ ways to pay and get paid, including the expanded use of digital platforms.

Non-Profit Organizations have supported efforts to reduce the digital divide. Namely, Equality Bahamas, R.I.S.E Bahamas, and Princess Court have increased digital advocacy related to crucial issues such as child protection and gender-based violence. By leveraging digital platforms, they raise awareness and provide resources to women and girls on these important topics.

Broadly, the Vision 2030: A Shared Vision for Education in the Commonwealth espouses that each student completing secondary school in The Bahamas should possess digital literacy, appreciate the role of technology and innovation in national development, display skills and competencies that reflect career and college readiness, communicate effectively, and collaborate willingly. Though not an active document, The Vision 2040: National Development Plan of The Bahamas has several objectives that support the development of STEM education, including the strengthening of STEM at all education levels and STEM scholarships and internship programmes to encourage girls and women to enroll in STEM subject areas and pursue STEM-related careers.

The country has also given deliberate consideration to digital tools for women and girls with disabilities. The Accessibility Bahamas App launched in 2022, was developed for PwD to access news and information, to register, lodge complaints and receive direct and early notification from NEMA. It is text-to-speech enabled for visually impaired persons with live captions for hearing-impaired persons. The App development was funded through a UNDP grant funding of \$50,000. The App also has geo-locating feature, which facilitates the rapid location of PwD in

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<https://www.femstembahamas.org/about#:~:text=This%20happens%20through%20year%2Dround,talented%20and%20diverse%20STEM%20workforce.>

emergencies. Over 100 PwD have downloaded the App. The My GateWay portal also feature text-to-speech and closed captioning for persons with hearing loss or impaired hearing.

Finally, mention is also made of the phased expansion of telehealth services throughout all islands.

Support for Digital Entrepreneurship

Organizations, like The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation (BCCEC), offer access to digital tools, mentorship, and business development services, helping women start and grow their own tech-based businesses.

Data Availability

Observationally, there is an expanding scope of opportunities within country focused on closing the digital divide. However, empirical, disaggregated data related to digital access and use is limited. The Government's Digitization initiative may serve as a tool to enhance data gathering for policy development.

B: POVERTY ERADICATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SERVICES

The critical areas linked to this sub-section of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work are:

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women and health
- Human rights of women
- The girl child

Question 9 – Impact of macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment on the BPfA implementation

In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?

Not quite six months after the disruptor of Hurricane Dorian which had devastating impacts on the education sector across the country, came the major disruptor of the COVID 19 pandemic. This pandemic reversed some of the progress made by The Bahamas on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. The country points to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) report, [Assessment of the Effects and Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in The Bahamas](#). The same report indicated an estimate of the cost of damages and losses of Hurricane Dorian and COVID 19 add up to BSD 13.1 billion, with losses in the education sector registered at USD48.2 million.

As The Bahamas began to emerge from the economic impact of the pandemic in 2022, inflationary pressures began to take root, driving up the already high cost of living. Regarding inflation, after peaking in at 7.1% in July 2022, it fell to 2.3% in July 2023. In that same year, the country started to show signs of rebounding. In its quarterly report (May 2023), the Central Bank of The Bahamas reported that the domestic economy maintained its growth momentum, although at a moderated pace, as the recovery converged closer to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels⁵⁴. Tourism output continued to register strong growth, bolstered by notable gains in both the high value-added air segment and sea traffic, given the persistent demand for travel in key source markets. Unemployment rates declined to 8.8% (May 2023) from the prior year, with labour force participation, particularly among men, remaining below pre-pandemic levels. Real GDP growth for The Bahamas was calculated at 14.4% (IDB, 2022).

In its rebounding phase, the country experienced increases in both revenue and expenditure by 14.5% and 6.7%, respectively (Figure 23).

⁵⁴ <https://www.centralbankbahamas.com/viewPDF/documents/2023-07-03-17-02-53-MEFD-May-2023.pdf>
(Central Bank of The Bahamas)

Budgetary Operations at a Glance First Nine Months of FY2022/2023

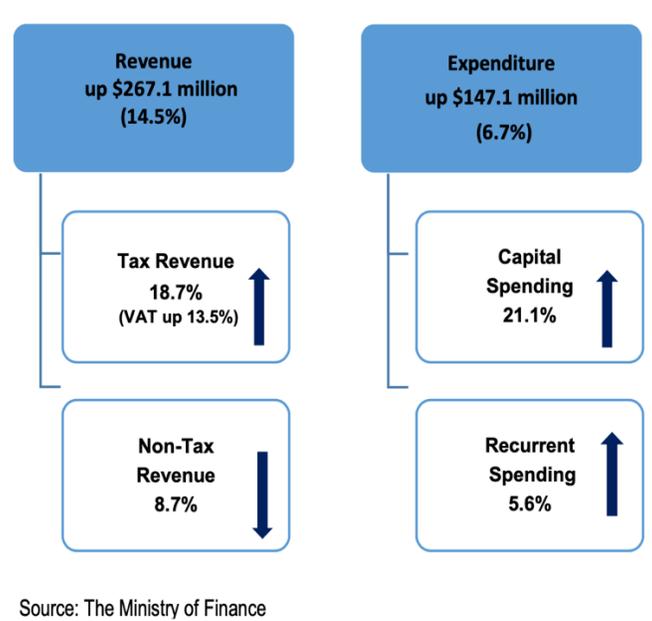


Figure 23: Macro-level View of Government's Fiscal Budget (2022/2023). Data Source, MoF.

While crediting the external factors for the changing tides in the national economy, credence is also given to the robust macroeconomic and fiscal economic policies, which also prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment. Insights are provided below on the mechanisms by which these policies have been shaped amid the challenges and the slow rebound.

- **Economic Resilience and Recovery:** The Bahamas has placed significant emphasis on economic recovery following the devastating effects of Hurricane Dorian and the ongoing disruptions caused by COVID-19. These events have underscored the importance of inclusive recovery strategies that address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women and other marginalized groups in society.
- **Fiscal Adjustments and Gender-Sensitive Budgeting:** The Bahamas has integrated gender-sensitive budgeting practices into its fiscal policies to ensure equitable resource allocation. This approach supports initiatives aimed at enhancing women's economic empowerment and social inclusion. For instance, legislative reforms, such as amendments to the Employment Act, have been enacted to safeguard women's rights in the workplace. These reforms are part of a broader strategy outlined in the National Gender Policy and the draft National Development Plan, which aim to advance gender equality across various sectors

Macroeconomic policies that specifically supported advanced BPfA were:

- **Expansion of Social Protection/ Support programmes:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Bahamas expanded social support programmes to provide essential assistance to

vulnerable populations, with a particular focus on women. Initiatives such as the Food Distribution Task Force were implemented to ensure food security, recognizing the disproportionate impact of economic shocks on women.

- **Healthcare and Childcare Support:** Investments in healthcare and childcare services have been prioritized to support working women, facilitating their ability to balance professional responsibilities with caregiving duties effectively.
- **Economic Diversification and Employment Initiatives:** To promote female entrepreneurship, the Government has introduced initiatives aimed at fostering female entrepreneurship, including access to financial resources, mentorship programmes, and business development services. These efforts seek to diversify the economy and create sustainable employment opportunities for women.
- **Gender-Sensitive Policy Frameworks:** Exemplified through the National Gender Policy and draft of National Development plan., which outline strategic objectives to advance gender equality across various sectors. This policy framework ensures that gender considerations are integrated into economic planning and development processes, promoting equal opportunities for women.
- **Legislative Reforms:** Including amendments to the Employment Act, have been enacted to safeguard women's rights in the workplace. These reforms are aimed at ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and combating gender-based discrimination.
- **Digital Inclusion and Education:** Digitization of Public Services is illustrative. The ongoing digitization of public services has been designed with gender considerations to enhance accessibility and efficiency. This approach ensures that women can equally benefit from digital advancements in accessing government services and information.
- **Educational Initiatives:** During the pandemic, collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Education and faith-based organizations expanded digital education initiatives across the archipelago. These initiatives aimed to provide girls and women with equitable access to online learning resources and opportunities for skills development.
- **Public Awareness and Advocacy:** Organizations like the Organization for Responsible Governance have been pivotal in advocating for transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility through public education campaigns. These initiatives underscore the importance of inclusive governance practices in benefiting women and vulnerable communities through fair resource allocation and effective service delivery.

Question 10 – Poverty eradication among women and girls

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

During the intervening years since the last Report, the Government has advanced meaningful fiscal policies to safeguard against poverty and to bolster social protection mechanisms.

Education is seen as a potent antidote to poverty. The Bahamas continues to provide subsidized education at the pre-school levels; as well as free public school education and tertiary education at the national University. These were expounded on in prior sections of the Report.

Data from The Bahamas Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows a welcomed decrease in the percentage of the female labour force with no high school (H.S.) diploma (from 9% to 6%) or with only a high school diploma (from 56% to 53%) over the period 2019 and 2023 (Figure 24). There is an increase however in the females in the work force with university degrees (from 36% to 39%). In addition to educational thrust, other actions relate to food security, cost of living, and expanded social protection programmes.

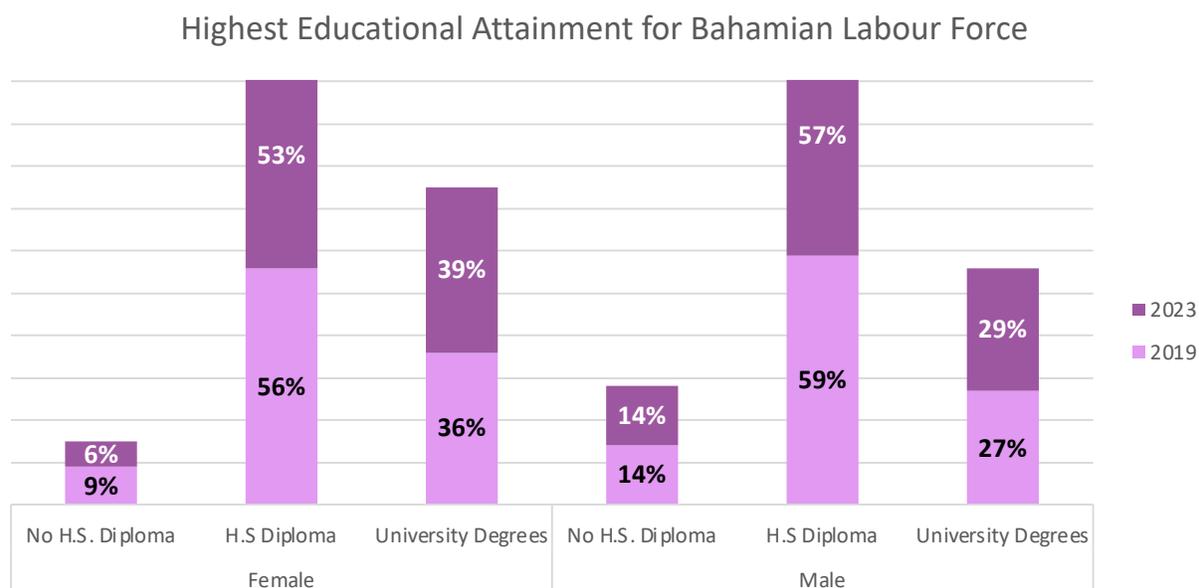


Figure 24: Highest Educational Attainment Among Workers Disaggregated by Sex. Data Source: LFS (2023). Figure: Consultancy

Public Policies on Poverty Eradication and Social Protection

In October 2022, two significant public policy measures were announced. First, minimum wage increased from \$210 per week to \$260 per week, with a foreshadowing to progress toward a livable wage in the country. Second, was expansion of the list of food and other items under price control. Accordingly, limits were applied on the wholesale and retail mark-up of everyday items like diapers, and food like chicken, eggs, bread, bananas, apples, oranges, broccoli, onions, and potatoes. In the first instance the limits to these items maintained for a six-month period, with the intent to review and evaluate the impact on businesses and consumers. Price-controlled mark-ups on pharmaceutical products were heightened for a 3-month period to provide additional relief to Bahamians⁵⁵. The price-controlled mark-ups ranged from 15% to

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https://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/wcm/connect/mof_content/internet/all+news+press+release/pm+davis+raises+minimum+wage%2C+outlines+wide-ranging+changes+in+first+national+address

18% on the wholesale side; and 35% to 40% on the retail side. This was seen as a move to further eliminate the economic burden on families.

The Apprenticeship Bill

The Government tabled the Apprenticeship Bill 2024 in the House of Assembly on 14th February 2024, marking a proactive move towards strengthening workforce development through structured apprenticeship programmes. The National Apprenticeship Programme (NAP) will have oversight for managing and implementing the programme. The NAP aims to forge collaborative partnerships between public institutions and private enterprises. Its primary objectives include establishing comprehensive training schemes that equip apprentices with practical, industry-specific skills. By focusing on the green, blue, and orange economies, this programme aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to clean energy (SDG 7) and industry innovation (SDG 9). In its totality, the NAP will enhance the capacity and skills of the labour market, thereby bolstering employability and facilitating access to quality jobs.

Moreover, the NAP is designed to complement and advance the objectives outlined in the Bahamas' 2nd Decent Work Country programme and the International Labour Organization's global efforts to promote productive employment and decent work conditions. Scheduled for formal launch in early 2025, the programme aims to generate significant employment opportunities while fostering a skilled workforce capable of driving sustainable economic practices. Continuous evaluation and monitoring will ensure the programme's effectiveness in achieving employment targets, enhancing skills, and contributing to long-term economic resilience and prosperity in The Bahamas.

National Training Agency (NTA)

The work of the NAP and NTA are complementary, as one of the NTA's commitment of the National Training Agency (NTA) is to assist young Bahamians who didn't complete or perform well in high school. Usually, these young people have minimal or no certifications and are unable to secure meaningful employment.

At the NTA, trainees are equipped with skills to acquire entry-level employment. The NTA has forged partnerships key stakeholders such as Approved Industry Experts and Training Providers and other international institutions, including City & Guilds to provide competency-based skills training.

Bahamas Development Bank (BDB)

Bahamas Development Bank has an ongoing commitment to fostering gender-inclusive economic growth across The Bahamas. The Bahamas Development Bank firmly believes in the transformative power of entrepreneurship and the critical role that women play in driving economic prosperity and innovation. They are dedicated to providing equitable access to

finance and resources for women entrepreneurs while ensuring that they have the support they need to succeed in the business world.

Once the \$30M AfroXM Bank funding is finalized, BDB intends to disburse the full \$30 million over 12 months to projects and entrepreneurial undertakings rooted in community impact. This funding is the largest tranche that the Bank would have received in the last 20 years. It reflects our unwavering commitment to promoting economic opportunities for all citizens and creating a more inclusive and equitable society with the support of The Government of The Bahamas.

In line with the Bank's commitment to gender equity, a new lending product designed specifically for women entrepreneurs was launched on International Women's Day 2024. This innovative product will provide loans to women at an incredibly low-interest rate, ranging between 0-2%. This initiative is a testament to our dedication to leveling the playing field and empowering women to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations without being hindered by financial barriers.

By offering preferential financing to women entrepreneurs, the Bank aims to address the unique challenges and barriers they face in accessing capital and resources. We recognize the immense potential of women-led businesses and the positive impact they can have on our economy. Through this new lending product, we are not only investing in the success of individual women entrepreneurs but also in the prosperity of our nation as a whole.

Partners of the Bank included the Joint SDG Fund and the UN agencies involved specifically the Food and Agricultural Organization and UN Women.

Non-profit organizations, such as the Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG), have played a crucial role in advocating for transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility. Through public education campaigns, these organizations emphasize the importance of inclusive governance practices that benefit women and vulnerable communities through fair resource allocation and effective service delivery.

Question 11 – Social Protection Actions for Women and Girls

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?

In this area, The Bahamas demonstrates strong, consistent and progressive actions to improve access to social protection for women and girls. These actions include but are not limited to:

- Introduced or strengthened cash transfers for families with children that prioritize women as recipients
- Introduced or strengthened social protection for women of working age
- Introduced or strengthened social protection for older women
- Improved access to social protection for other groups of marginalized women

ProMIS

ProMIS, formally RISE, is a government-based, automated management system programme targeted at helping households who have limited income and resources; and is predicated on preserving dignity as persons transition from dependence to independence (self-reliant). ProMIS falls under the remit of Department of Social Services (DoSS), whose budget allocation saw a 65% increase following the pandemic. ProMIS App launched in 2020 affords greater efficiencies, accountability and enhanced clientele management along with easing accessing.

ProMIS offers an array of assistance, including food and housing assistance to those in need. A compendium of assistance⁵⁶ offered can be found at <https://promis.gov.bs/service/financial-assistance/>. Attention is drawn to the food assistance programme which has embraced digital technology for assistance disbursements through digital wallets or Visa Prepaid cards which improves the user experience.

Household eligibility is determined by a standardized proxy-means testing (PMT), which is uniformly applied to ensure those most in need get the assistance needed. The vast majority of clientele benefiting from the ProMIS programme are vulnerable women (70% are women), representing 33,000 households in the country. The preliminary 2022 National Census data puts the total number of households at 118,221. This means that 28% of Bahamian households are requiring social protection. As a reminder, national data shows there is an increasing number of households headed by women.

National Insurance Benefits

The National Insurance Board (NIB) lays at the foundation of the country's social welfare system, providing critical support to Bahamians – males and females – in times of need. This function was pronounced during Dorian and the pandemic bringing much needed financial injections to families in need. Between 2019 and 2021, the government through NIB, provided income supplements and unemployment assistance to thousands of Bahamians totaling \$120m and NIB itself paid out unemployment benefits of \$131.5m⁵⁷.

In its 50 years of existence, NIB has protected the population, including employed and self-employed persons, by offering a wide range of social security benefits of three main types:

1. short-term (sickness, maternity, funeral, unemployment);
2. long-term (retirement, invalidity, survivor benefit); and
3. industrial (medical care, injury, disablement, death) benefits.

A review of performance on these benefits are depicted in the graph below⁵⁸. On observation, long-term benefits remained relatively consistent (even during the pandemic years); with benefits averaging 3,499 in claims and \$254m in expenditure (Figure 25). In 2020 short-term benefits rose precipitously above prior years to a peak of 58,582 with an accompanying

⁵⁶ <https://promis.gov.bs/services/>

⁵⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/ycx5k36f>

⁵⁸ https://www.nib-bahamas.com/_m1739/Publications

expenditure of \$129.8m – a likely consequence of the pandemic. A similar rationale might explain the decline in industrial claims as workplaces were closed, with the exception of essential service workers.

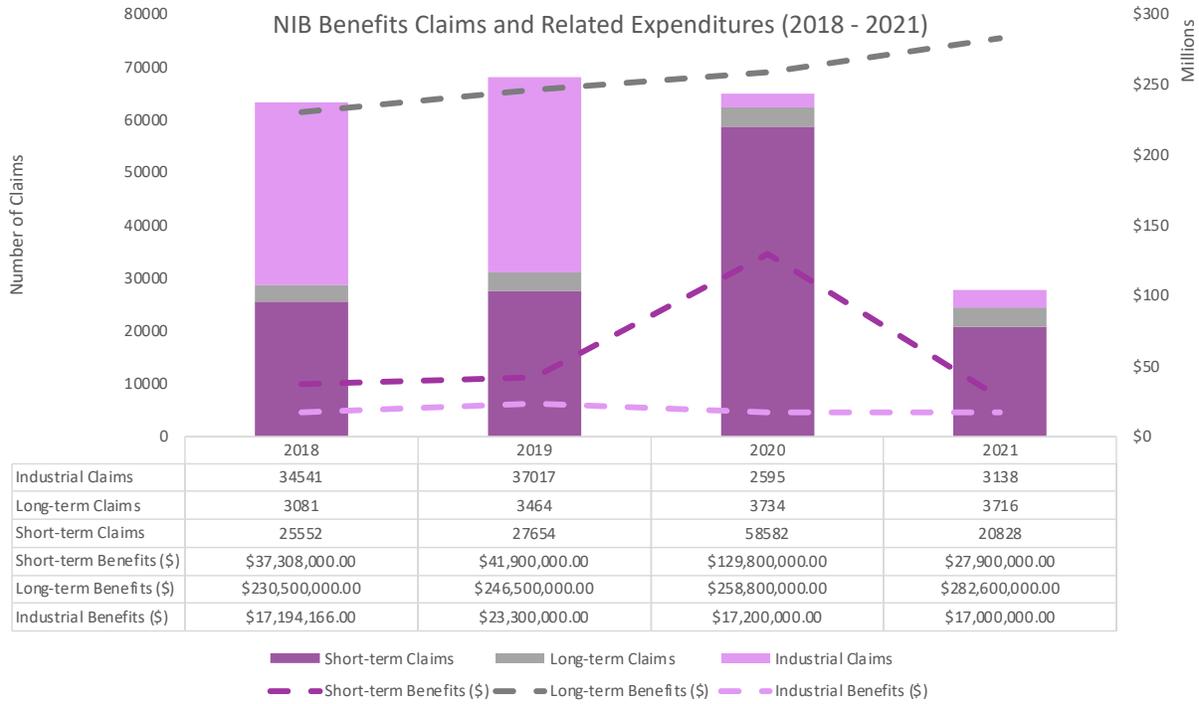


Figure 25: NIB Claims & Benefits. Data Source, NIB Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

Overall, long-term benefits account for the greatest expenditure (average, \$254.6m). Given that women generally out live men; and that the greater proportion of the population over 65 years is women, it is reasonable to assume that women account for the majority of the long-term benefit expenditures. Males accounted for 48.22% of the population and females 52.78%.

To protect the long-term sustainability of NIB, a policy decision effected first Monday of July 2024, resulted in an increase in NIB contribution by 1.5%, to be shared equally between the employer and the employee. Thereafter a 1.5% increase every two years from July 1, 2024 to July 1, 2044 was effected. Similarly, the same increase will be applied to self-employed persons and voluntarily insured persons.

Special notes:

- Unemployment benefit is calculated at 50% of the unemployed worker’s average weekly insurable income.
- Maternity benefit is calculated at 66.66% of average insured wages/income.
- Maternity grant is a one-time payment made to a woman whose pregnancy results in the birth of a live infant; it is paid for each live infant. To qualify she must have paid at least 50 contributions into National Insurance. If she has not paid the required number

of contributions it can still be paid if her husband meets the contribution condition for the award of the benefit (Figure 26).

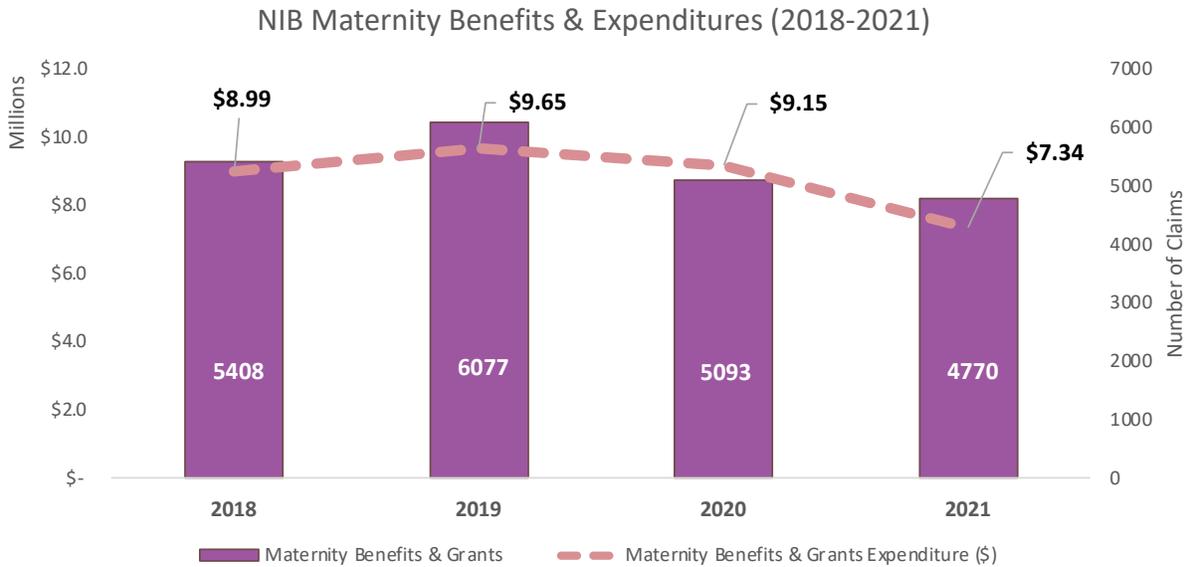


Figure 26: NIB Maternity Claims and Benefits. Data Source, NIB Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

Catastrophic Care

Roughly 25% of the Bahamian population has private health insurance. Mechanisms, therefore, to expand access to and ease the burden for women and girls needing life-saving medical interventions are critical. In 2022, the Government allocated \$10m for selective catastrophic healthcare in the country, which provides essential tertiary services, life-threatening catastrophic services to many Bahamians who would have not had the means otherwise. Selective catastrophic care foreshadows catastrophic healthcare insurance, to be managed by the NHI – which currently manages the SBP for primary care.

Trafficking in Persons

The Government of The Bahamas continues to provide individual protection to all persons identified as trafficked victims, including their dependents. The Government under the Trafficking in Persons Unit has a dedicated budget for rental, medical and social services assistance. Where necessary, the TIPS Unit works with the Royal Bahamas Police Force to provide protective services, if necessary.

It should be noted that if victims of foreign nationality prefer to return home assistance is given in partnership with their embassy and/or consulate in their respective country of origin. The TIPS Unit ensures continuity of care for survivors from identification through the judicial process and to repatriation to their home country, if applicable.

Question 12 – Actions to Improve the health of women and girls

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

Specific actions identified by the country were:

- Promoted women’s access to health services through expansion of universal health coverage
- Expanded specific health services for women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services, maternal health and HIV services
- Taken measures to support women’s mental health, including access to specialized services and counseling
- Developed gender-sensitive approaches to prevention and treatment of chronic and non-communicable disease
- Undertake gender-specific public awareness and health promotion campaigns

Improving the health of women and girls is not only a matter of social justice but also a smart investment in the future health, prosperity, and stability of all societies The Health of Women and Girls Determines the Health and Well-Being of Our Modern World (Davidson et al. 2011). Healthier women are more productive and can contribute more effectively to the economy. Access to healthcare and health education empowers women and girls by giving them control over their own bodies and health decisions. This contributes to gender equality and helps break the cycle of poverty.

Appreciating that women and girls have different needs, The Bahamas has undertaken several actions during the period under review. These relate updating population-based data on women and girls; maternal and reproductive health; gender-based violence and improved access to primary health care services.

Population-based surveys

The Bahamas used the WHO/PAHO validated STEPS methodology to update understanding on the health of adults in 2019 – its second cycle. This survey conducted on seven (7) islands revealed that women were more likely than men to have unhealthy weights and binge drink and contemplate suicide. It also showed that although more men smoked tobacco than women, the rate of increase in tobacco smoking prevalence was higher for women than men. This survey findings bolstered justification for the establishment of a Wellness Unit in the Ministry of Health and Wellness. This Unit was allocated \$1m in each of 2023/2024 budget and the 2024/2025.

In 2023, the country executed its fourth cycle of the Global School Health Survey and the Global Youth Tobacco Survey to give insights into various health behaviors and protective factors among students. The results are pending.

A comprehensive health equity study has also been prioritized by the country in its collaborative work with the Pan American Health Organization (as reflected in the 2024/2025 Biennial Work Plan). This study seeks to quantify the magnitude of gender inequality in the health sector among other variables.

Policies and Protocols to Support Women and Girls Health

The Bahamas is significantly advanced in the development of

- Legislation to prohibit the marketing and promotion of breastmilk substitutes and accessories in alignment with the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes;
- A National Breastfeeding Policy; and
- An Updated Maternal and Child Health Protocol

Management of Gender-based Violence in the health setting

Appreciation of the health sector's role in gender-based violence (GBV) has gained momentum in recent years in The Bahamas. To this end, stakeholder engagements have significantly advanced a draft GBV clinical protocol handbook, and the programmatic design for incorporating GBV clinics into primary care, along with developing GBV sensitivity training curriculum for key health care workers.

Infrastructure

The Government has secured an international loan facility to construct a 250-bed maternal and child hospital on the capital of New Providence. The construction cost is pegged at \$290m with construction to commence in 2025. This physical infrastructure endeavour is being accompanied by digital infrastructure transformation to support the 'One Patient. One Record' vision of the health system. The public health sector over the last three years, through an IDB facility loan, improvement to bandwidth, hardware, electronic medical records solutions and other components are significantly advanced.

Trafficking in Persons

The Government of The Bahamas continues to prioritize the health concerns of trafficked victims by providing comprehensive assistance to female trafficked victims and their dependents. The Government under the Trafficking in Persons Unit budget approximately \$84,000, of which, a portion is dedicated to rental assistance and other victim care protocols. This care is provided irrespective if the victim is in The Bahamas or their country of origin. Monies are also dedicated to medical and psychological services. The health sector has representation on the TIPS Taskforce.

Expansion of Specific Health Services for Women and Girls

The Bahamas continues to strengthen public healthcare services to ensure that all women and girls have access to essential healthcare, tailored to meet their current needs. Care is now delivered by an increased number of qualified professionals strategically placed across the

archipelago, improving access to trained personnel for our population. The comprehensive services offered at our facilities include primary healthcare, provided both publicly and privately by skilled professionals. These professionals are equipped to promote health, prevent disease, and deliver treatment and rehabilitation when needed, enabling individuals to maintain optimal well-being. Specific services provided to improve outcomes of women and girls include:

- **Health Education and Promotion:** Provided by physicians- Family Medicine, Obstetricians, Gynecologists and other Specialists, Nurse Practitioners, Community Health Nurses, Midwives and Registered Nurses who are available throughout the system to provide counselling in facilities, homes and during community events and campaigns giving information, influencing positive healthy lifestyle choices
- **Early Detection and Preventative Care:** Annual screenings offered free of charge to women who attend maternity and family planning services at public facilities including blood sampling, swabs and diagnostic imaging.
- **Pediatric Care:** Offered free of charge at all government health facilities, inclusive of immunizations for children, sick baby clinics where infants and children who are unwell see pediatrician and family medicine physicians and well-baby clinics, for assessments on milestone attainment, anticipatory guidance and immunization. Additionally, care is also provided in all government schools for Minor Ailments, Immunizations School Health Nurses also assist with presentations in the Family Life Curriculum which addresses Sexual and Reproductive Health.
- **Maternity Care:** Enhanced maternal health services including regular antenatal clinics and home visits for defaulters, safe hospital delivery practices, and postnatal home and clinic care. Additionally investigative procedures for early identification of conditions that may result in adverse outcomes for the mother and baby.
- **Family Planning Services:** A variety of contraceptive methods are provided free of charge throughout the country including oral, injectable, and sub-dermal implants which are now more readily accessible. Additionally, during these sessions women are encouraged to have their annual screenings which include testing for HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (Hepatitis B, Syphilis, Gonorrhea and Chlamydia), Hemoglobin levels as well as having a Pap Smear done.
- **Screening Programs for Cancer and Other Specified Conditions-** Offered free of charge in addition to regularly provided services Special campaigns are mounted to encourage screenings for Cervical Cancer, Breast Cancers as well as Prostate Cancer
- **Mobile Clinics-**Deployment of mobile clinics to remote and underserved areas to provide healthcare services.
- **HIV Services** have been integrated and augmented.
- **Women’s Mental Health Services:** Establishment of mental health services and counseling centers specifically for women, including support for postpartum depression. Services are provided as outpatients from the Community Counseling and Assessment Center and as inpatients at the Sandilands’ Rehabilitation Center. Additionally, various Hotlines have been established to provide 24 Hour Support to women experiencing crisis through the Women’s Crisis Center as well.

Note is taken of training for providers. Training healthcare providers for the provision of gender-responsive mental health services towards preserving resilience of women who are victims of Domestic Violence occurred in May 2024 involving the Suspected Child Abuses and Neglect Unit of DPH and the Domestic Violence Task Force Arm of the Royal Bahamas Police Force.

Gender-Specific Campaigns: Gender-specific public awareness campaigns on health issues affecting women and girls have been conducted. During November 2023, training activities were held under the theme, Accelerating Equity, Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls. It featured activities, workshops and documentaries aired on our national television and radio, ZNS. The conference is a strategy for We must take urgent action to promote more women in decision making positions. We must take urgent action to ensure that violence against women and girls ceases.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Many public schools throughout the government system host their Annual Boys and Girls National Prevention Seminars as well as Guidance Department Health Talks to address maladaptive behaviors seen in our communities and to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills that would foster positive outcomes in their personal, social and academic lives. Concerns noted and addressed include Puberty, hygiene, sexual promiscuity, Sexually Transmitted Infections, general health and wellness.

The Focus on Youth Programme (FOY) of the National HIV/AIDS Centre (NAC) developed a curriculum which is currently incorporated into all Grade 6 classes of government-based schools and includes modules on HIV transmission, HIV education and decision-making skills. The FOY Programme also promotes training for teachers on delivering these modules, in addition to basic HIV education. By expanding the curriculum to both boys and girls, the FOY programme seeks to ensure that all female participants are empowered to make healthy sexual decisions, and that male participants are educated in healthy relationship skills.

The Prevention Unit of the National AIDS Center also provides essential HIV and STI prevention education to the general population and persons at high risk of HIV infection. In particular, the unit provides training on stigma and discrimination to vulnerable women and girls, including those at correctional institutions and from migrant communities. The unit also has peer education workshops to raise awareness of HIV and STIs among teens to equip them with the skills and knowledge to educate their peers appropriately concerning HIV and STIs.

Gender Responsiveness Training: Regular training programs for health service providers on gender responsiveness to improve the quality of care for women and girls. In 2019, technical officers from the Department of Gender and Family Affairs, Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development, returned to New Providence after participating in a United Nations Symposium on 'Mainstreaming Gender in Water Resources Management for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Caribbean.'

Expanding Access for Marginalized Groups: Focused initiatives to improve healthcare access for marginalized groups, including rural women and girls, and those with disabilities. Services provided throughout the system has been strengthened with the additional training and deployment of midwives throughout our islands. They provide augmentation to physician staff compliment allowing more women to access specialized care in the communities where they live.

Addressing Challenges: An initial barrier was that of cost of services. While cost for the provision of services continues to rise, this barrier has been removed through high subsidies for public sector health care services with the provision of access to care for women and children without consideration of ability to pay.

Another barrier was that of lack of transportation to access services. This challenge has been minimized through the strategic placement of public health care services facilities within proximity where persons live and with the consideration of accessibility by means of public transportation.

The challenge of requiring care delivery at multiple facilities, and in some instances across multiple islands, is now being addressed through inclusion of essential services, as far as possible at one facility (on-stop-shop), and using information communication technology for enhanced connectivity, allowing the care provided to be more comprehensive and holistic.

Question 13 – Actions to Improve Education Outcomes

In the past five years, what action has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?

In 2023, The Bahamas celebrated 50 years of Independence. Over those 50 years there has been a continuous commitment by successive Governments of The Bahamas to the Education sector. This commitment is fueled by the belief that Education is a human right and as such, every person residing in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas has the right to a quality equitable education, even during challenging times. The educational system in the country is geared toward building academic, life skills and other competencies, such that the full potential of every boy and girl is realized in their positive societal contribution.

Legislative Framework for Improved Education Outcomes

This commitment is underpinned in legislation. The Education Act (1996) provides for compulsory education for primary through tertiary educational levels. Further, the Act states that free access to education is guaranteed for all residents ages 5 years to 16 years.

The country has taken steps to ground efforts for improved educational outcomes through a modernized legislative framework. The Government of The Bahamas, with the support of a

UNESCO has drafted an Education Bill (2021)⁵⁹ that, is committed to revising the current legislative framework that makes provisions for improving the delivery of quality, equitable education to prepare students in The Bahamas for national development and global competitiveness. The Draft bill, which still requires a round of public consultation and further input from Cabinet, provides for the extension of free and compulsory education to at least one year of pre-primary education and ensure 12 years of free education, as recommended in Education 2030-SDG4 (SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.2). The draft Bill 2021 also elaborates on the content of the national curriculum to align with labour market needs and strengthen the legal provisions regarding national standards in education⁶⁰.

During the reporting period, the country's commitment and deeply rooted beliefs were tested. Less than six months after the Hurricane Dorian disruptor (September 2019), which had devastating impacts on the education sector across the country, came the major disruptor of the COVID 19 pandemic which impacted the education globally. In the face of these tests, footprints of the national strides made in moving towards the SDG 4 targets had become faint. The school closures (first to recover from and rebuild from the deadly hurricane Dorian, and then to mitigate against the spread of the life changing COVID-19 virus), were compounded by the inability of students to attend the brick-and-mortar facilities where the delivery of education, normally took place. These had devastating effects, as thousands of students had seemingly dropped out of the arena of learning, despite the available instructional modalities – virtual which was later supplemented by face-to-face and hybrid as the transmission of the virus abated.

Financing for Improved Educational Outcomes

The Government of the Bahamas in the 2022/2023 National Budget allocated 11% of Public Recurrent Expenditure to Education. Coupled with the allocation to Capital Expenditure for Education, in the 2022/2023 fiscal year the allocations to Education amounted to 12% of the National Approved Public Expenditure. This is 3% shy of the UNESCO recommended minimum of 15% of Public Expenditure.

The Education 2030-SDG4 target is set for at least 4% of the Gross Domestic Product to ensure the sustainability of funding for education. The Bahamas is still not meeting that target, though we are not far behind with 3% of GDP allocated to expenditure on education.

National Gap Assessments & Curriculum Reform

The Bahamas reported its first positive COVID-19 case in March 2020, school closures soon followed. After over a year, face-to-face learning resumed in January 2022. As a priority action, the Ministry of Education commissioned a Renaissance Assessment to elucidate and quantify the gaps related to student learning outcomes for accelerating learning recovery. Three rounds of assessments were executed during the 2022-2023 academic year. One concerning finding

⁵⁹ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:b7304de2-6764-412b-8735-3f68cdfa0825>

⁶⁰ <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:b7304de2-6764-412b-8735-3f68cdfa0825>

from the reading diagnostic component was that 65% of public-school students across the archipelago had fallen below the 25th percentile in reading. The full picture emerging from the Renaissance Assessment triggered discreet steps for immediate transformation of the public education enterprise to address the myriad of challenges exacerbated by the impacts of Dorian and the COVID 19 Pandemic.

First, the assessment enabled tailored learning approaches to students based on the assessment classifications of ‘on-watch’, ‘require intervention’ or ‘require urgent intervention’. Second, curriculum reform to one that is more integrated and holistic. For example, a strengthened curriculum to yield higher literacy and numeracy competencies at the pre-primary level. Another example is the integration of arts, which purposefully connects concepts and skills across the arts and other subjects to foster an appreciation for global perspective and inclusivity; problem solving, design thinking, mind mapping and critical cultural thinking. The arts integration is in its pilot phase having been piloted in two public primary schools (Columbus Primary School and E.P. Roberts Primary School). Third, a fuller embrace of technology and expansion of the Learning Well resources to improve accessibility. Namely, the creation of several e-textbooks and the amassing of over 3,000 digital resources, which have either been created by Bahamian teachers or shared by educational partners from other jurisdictions.

Reforming the Bahamas High School Diploma

It is important to distinguish between equity and equality in education. Equality refers to treating all students the same. Equity is providing all students with what they need to succeed. While it is important to ensure that all students have equal access to a high quality education, the particular circumstances of some students may require additional support to ensure that they are able to succeed. Hence the reform of the Bahamas High School Diploma Program. The Bahamas High School Diploma program now allows students to meet qualifications via six pathway options. The qualifications include meeting national learning outcome standards, community service, attendance and punctuality, job readiness, all designed to ensure quality service is delivered to the learner and produces citizens that are self-actualized and prepared. This reform for students who have chosen the technical and vocational for their learning experiences, as well as students who require special education instruction and special services due to extraordinary or exceptional learning challenges or exceptional abilities and so on.

The Bahamas Education Sector Transformation (BEST) Project

The launch of The Bahamas Education Sector Transformation (BEST) Project. This project, financed through the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), seeks to enhance the education system in The Commonwealth of the Bahamas to make it more efficient, inclusive, gender-responsive, relevant and resilient for the quality education of all learners. Output 1 is the rehabilitation and construction of climate and disaster resilient and inclusive school facilities. Output 2 focuses on improved institutional capacity for effective operations, with training and professional development for 2000 Principals and Teachers under the CDB/CARICOM/OECS Let’s REAP initiative.

The Bahamas Poly Technic Accreditation & Training Hub (BPATH)

The Bahamas Polytechnic Accreditation and Training Hub or (BPATH), a new center of technical excellence, affords high school seniors opportunities to access professional credentials. The programme is flexible, meaning certifications can be earned independently, one at a time, or as a programme, combined to satisfy a professional certification or diploma pathway. It is envisaged that the institute will serve as a branch of Technical and Vocational Training, providing supplementary offerings to the existing high school curriculum, with the capacity to serve as a feeder pathway to both the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), other tertiary technical training facilities or directly into industry.

Training at BPATH will afford technical CTE students exit certifications, which are industry recognized, strategically positioning them to make positive economic contributions to our nation, and indeed the world. Additionally, it will assist with bridging learning gaps which have been exacerbated since the pandemic and the learning loss recognized by our Ministry. Finally, it will we have an opportunity to reduce the number of work permits required for technical areas.

Other Determinants of Educational Outcome

- *Safe School Campuses:* A safe school environment is also a determinant of educational outcomes. The Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training have partnered together in a strategy intended to provide a safe and secure learning environment for Public School Students while on campus. Some 60 School Resource Officers have been deployed to school campuses on five islands in the Bahamas. These specially trained police officers, having completed a 41-hour special course, are assisting in not only providing protection but are also informing the curriculum on campus as they join with teachers in teaching students to play musical instruments, they deliver presentations on issues that impact young people. They talk about guns, gangs, drugs, bullying and a host of other psychosocial issues.
- *Teacher Morale:* It is universally agreed that a key determinant in quality education delivery is the teacher. Children benefit most from skilled and passionate instructors. In recognition of this, the Honourable Minister of Education and Technical and Vocational Training appointed a Teacher Morale Committee to address a perceived decline in morale among Bahamian public-school teachers. This perception was particularly pronounced shortly after the COVID 19 pandemic. Literature indicates that various external factors negatively impact teacher morale. These include: low salary, poor working conditions, demanding workload, the extent to which teachers take on the role of the social worker, and difficult relations with students. Societal issues (e.g. cultural attitudes toward education and economic issues) could also adversely affect morale.

Although a polling of teachers in the Bahamian public education sector suggests a positive attitude toward their jobs, it is believed that morale can be improved with achievable initiatives. Based on recommendations from the Morale Committee, in the 2023-2024 school year, the Ministry of Education distributed letters of appreciation to every one of the 3,079 teachers in the public education system along with USD \$250

given to every one of those teachers for purchasing items needed for the education enterprise at the classroom level. Additionally, retention bonus scheme for educators has been added to the National Budget and announced in Parliament during the 2023-2024 Budget Debate by the Prime Minister. Additionally, he announced that teachers' salaries are to be increased by 15% in the coming fiscal year.

- *Research:* The Ministry of Education commissioned a research project with the University of The Bahamas to identify factors which influence learning outcomes to our school population. This research will assist the Ministry in shaping policy and creating targeted interventions.
- *Strategies and Policies to Improve Efficiency of the Education Enterprise:* The implementation of an education management information system (EMIS) and a learning management system (LMS) that enable the management of records as well as the teaching and learning process even during periods of crisis. These systems allow for online registration, attendance, assessment, feedback, communication, and collaboration among students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

The EMIS is a database that collects and analyzes data on the education sector, such as enrollment, dropout, performance, and budget. The LMS is a platform that delivers and supports online learning, such as courses, quizzes, assignments, and forums. The policy developed to guide the implementation of three instructional models ensure the continuation of learning in times of crisis. It allows for chronically ill, hospitalized, homeschooled, and students throughout the Family Islands that do not have access to a teacher on the ground for face-to-face instruction, and incarcerated school-aged students to be taught by the Ministry of Education's Virtual School. The Virtual School provides online courses, materials, and teachers that are aligned with the national curriculum and standards. (SDG Target 4.1)

Education & Disabilities

The Bahamas has continued improvements in the education of disabled women and girls by making the College of the Bahamas now the University of the Bahamas free for all full-time students. There is an office for Disability Affairs led by a person with a Disability at the University.

All girls are encouraged to excel in any field of their choice including STEM in the public and private school system. Special classrooms are available with lower student to teacher ratios to enable attention to those who need the one-on-one tuition, especially for those with learning disabilities. A Government assessment and intervention centre now exists at the Majorie Davis Centre. Inclusive education for all school-age children is offered. The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) has enrolled two blind students.

Equal Opportunity to education is the law of the land and is currently practiced by the Ministry of Education to accommodate all students and to ensure the no-one is left behind. Schools are

required to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities offering assistive and adaptive devices and access to a sign-language interpreter, when called for.

Question 14 – Economic Recovery Closing Gender Gaps

What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and /or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?

The Bahamas, like many other countries, has faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including economic disruptions that have affected women disproportionately. In 2023 an assessment of students in the public school system was conducted. Of the 40,000 students assessed, 44% needed interventions⁶¹. The Ministry of Education has doubled down on its commitment to execute targeted, personalized and sustained interventions will be implemented for students to help close the gaps. The Government is joined by various other organizations who have taken steps to address gender gaps as part of the economic recovery process. Some of the key initiatives are outlined below.

Secondary Education

The pandemic triggered consequential disruptions to teaching modalities and student learning. Particularly, there was a shift from in-person classroom instruction to the adoption of virtual instruction. Internet access disparities – more so in low income communities – along with other factors, led to thousands of students (girls and boys) not engaging with the virtual learning platform. The net result was significant learning loss⁶². A World Bank Report (June 2022) noted that prolonged school closures, poor mitigation effectiveness, and household-income shocks had the biggest impact on learning poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with a predicted 80% of children at the end-of-primary-school-age being unable to understand simple written text, up from around 50% pre-pandemic. One of the mitigation measures has been the implementation of after-school academic enrichment particularly to ensure seniors are able to satisfy the Bahamas High School Diploma requirements.

Additionally, national examinations fees were waived for students in 2020 and 2021. And, sensitive to the wide range of barriers to education, the Government showed intentionality in removing the uniform barrier by instituting for public school students a reprieve from the adhering to the uniform requirements as many households, were still in recovery from the pandemic and perhaps could not afford uniforms.

Proper nutrition, especially breakfast, has been shown to have a positive impact on learning. While inadequate nutrition is a confirmed barrier to optimal learning. Appreciating the economic hardships post-pandemic, the Government implementing a policy decision to provide breakfast to primary school students in the public school system across the country. The

⁶¹ https://www.thenassauguardian.com/home/ministry-targeting-students-affected-by-learning-loss/article_bc4fbbe2-5707-562b-b552-23fe0d30c3f8.html

⁶² <https://tinyurl.com/3ata66me>

initiative started as a pilot in five (5) schools in early 2024. There is a phased approach to expansion, and at present, eleven (11) primary schools are enrolled in the breakfast programme. By the close of the 2023/2024 academic year, a total of 3,209 students are participating, favouring males. In fact, of the eleven (11) schools, gender equality between boys and girls have only been achieved in three (3). On average, only 46.2% of participants in the breakfast programme are girls (Figure 27).

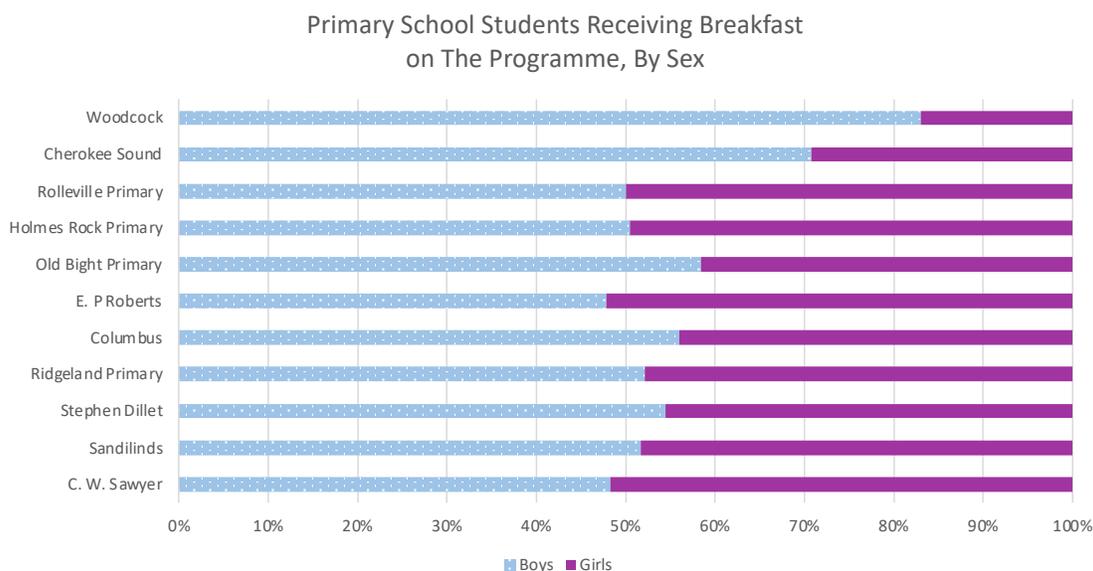


Figure 27: Public School Students on Breakfast Programme. Data Source, MoETvT. Figure, Consultancy

Tertiary Education

To encourage tertiary education at the University of The Bahamas, the Government-funded Tertiary Grant programme was launched in June 2019, which removes affordability as an access barrier to tertiary education for all who meet the eligibility admission criteria. In so doing, it paved a path for Bahamians, including more young women and girls to pursue higher education. A year earlier (June 2018), the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) became fully funded by the Government. Meaning enrollment at BTVI is 100% subvented by the Government and the student bears no tuition costs.

Support for Women-Owned Businesses

Support was evidenced through financial assistance and grants. The government and financial institutions have provided grants and low-interest loans to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with a particular focus on women-owned businesses. As well as training and development programmes have been implemented to provide business development training and resources for women entrepreneurs, helping them to adapt and thrive in the post-pandemic economy. This point was fully explored in the women in entrepreneurship section.

Job Creation and Employment Support

The Government through NTA offers reskilling and upskilling programmes tailored for women, particularly in sectors that are expected to grow, such as technology and healthcare. Also, there have

been efforts to create jobs in female-dominated sectors, such as tourism and hospitality, which were heavily impacted by the pandemic. These initiatives aim to ensure that women can regain employment and secure stable incomes.

Social Protection and Support Services

There was expansion of social safety nets (as demonstrated in Figure), including food assistance and unemployment benefits, to support families and women who have lost income due to the pandemic.

Social Protections for PwDs

Gaps in poverty, social protection are addressed by the policies of The Department of Social Services (DoSS) which provides the following specific services for PwDs, regardless of gender.

- Allowances for children with a disability under 16 years
- Temporary disability allowance for PwDs over the age of 16
- Adults receive disability benefits through National Insurance scheme
- Wheelchairs, glasses, hearing aids, prosthetic limbs, travel for medical reasons etc. are provided by the Disability Affairs Division of the Ministry of Social Services
- The acquisition of prosthetic devices, assistive or adaptive devices and medical intervention.
- Specialized training activities designed to improve the functioning of persons with disabilities with respect to their communication skills.
- The development among persons with disabilities of a positive self-image through the provision of counselling, orientation and mobility in order to strengthen their daily living capacity.
- Family care services geared towards developing the capability of families to respond to the needs of PwDs.
- Substitute family care services and facilities for abandoned, neglected, abused and unattached persons with disabilities who need an alternative form of care based on their individual needs.
- Family after care and follow-up services for the continued rehabilitation in a community-based setting of PwDs who are discharged from residential care or rehabilitation centres
- Day-care services for children with disabilities of school age.

All other services and support offered by the DoSS that are available to the able-bodied community are also available to PwDs.

In addition to the DoSS' role in social protection for PwDs, the National Insurance Board (NIB) also plays an important role. The NIB receives, reviews and disburses social safety net payments based on approval. Between 2018 to 2021, a total of 840 claims related to PwDs were approved, amounting to a total of \$107.7m in benefits awarded (Figure 28). These include the disablement grant, the invalidity benefit and invalidity assistance. The latter is awarded in instances where a person is deemed to require lifelong dependency on family members or caregivers.

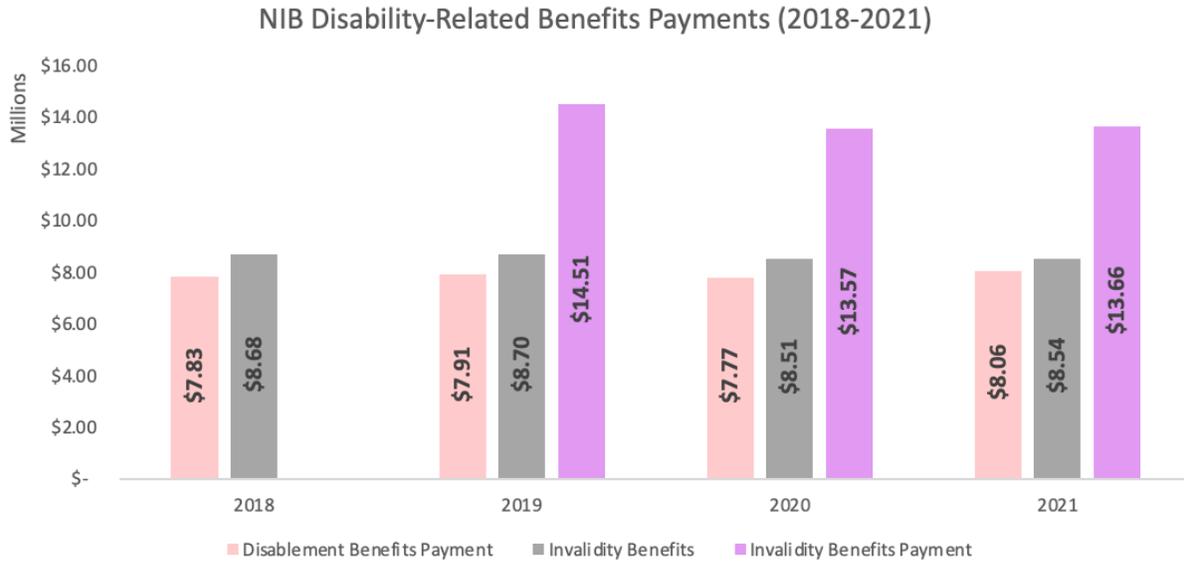


Figure 28: Disability Benefits. Data Source, NIB. Figure, Consultancy.

The Mental Health Act (2022) repeals and replaces the Mental Health Act of 1969. Its objective is to provide for the promotion, protection, and enforcement of the rights of persons diagnosed or exhibiting symptoms of mental illness as well as the establishment of a mental health services board and a mental health review tribunal. The Government raises this Act as a ‘zero tolerance’ policy to the abuse and mistreatment of persons with mental illness. The Act revolutionizes the country’s approach to mental illness and breaks down discriminatory walls.

C: FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES

The critical areas linked to this sub-section of freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes are:

- Violence against women
- Human rights of women
- Women in media
- The girl child

Question 15 – GBV forms and context/setting prioritized for action

Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence and which specific context or setting has your country prioritized for action?

Gender-based violence is securing greater traction in the Bahamian dialogue and policy considerations. To this end, the country has prioritized the following forms of GBV:

- Domestic violence committed by other family or household members
- Sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and workplaces
- Violence against women and girls facilitated by technology
- Gender-based violence in the media
- Trafficking in women and girls

Domestic Violence

The Government of The Bahamas in partnership with UN Women and the US Embassy launched the Gender Based Violence Programme. Ultimately the goal is to develop a National Gender-based Violence Strategy with feasible policies and mechanisms in partnership with civil organizations to better respond to and support the individual needs of victims, survivors and their families using the victim and survivor centered, and trauma and violence informed approaches.

The effort will serve to support the current efforts undertaken by the Royal Bahamas Police Force which established the Domestic Violence Unit in July 2021 and other services operated by civil society. Similarly, the intent is to use multi-faceted approaches to address the crosscutting underlined issues related to gender-based violence and explore new strategies to prevent and reduce such occurrences.

Trafficking in persons

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to eradicating trafficking in persons. The Trafficking In Persons (TIPS) Inter- Ministry Committee and the TIPS Task Force are two national coordinating bodies in direct partnership with non-government agencies that continue to meet monthly to ensure oversight of the enforcement of the Trafficking In Persons Act; delivery of services, as outlined in the plan to provide assistance to victims of TIPS and their accompanying dependent children; and the execution of TIPS operating procedures including

the implementation of TIPS strategic goals and objectives of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan.

Question 16 – Prioritized actions to address GBV

In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

The Bahamas country has selected the following specific actions:

- Introduced or strengthened violence against women laws, and their enforcement and implementation
- Introduced, updates or expanded national action plans on ending violence against women and girls
- Introduced or strengthened measures to increase women’s access to justice
- Introduced or strengthened services for survivors of violence
- Introduced or strengthened strategies and interventions to prevent violence against women

Trafficking in Persons

The Bahamas is tackling head-on human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, demonstrating serious and sustained efforts. According to the U.S. Department of State 2023 Trafficking-In-Persons Report for The Bahamas, the country is at Tier 1 – a status it has maintained since 2015⁶³. Meaning, it fully meets the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.

Recognizing the trans-border nature of this crime, and the vast reach of human trafficking rings, the country continues to foster and maintain effective and consistent bilateral, regional and global partnerships. The familiar reports of persons being lured to The Bahamas with the promise of a better life and better employment (usually in the domestic field), but on arrival to the country are coerced into prostitution and other illegal non-formal work.

Female migrants and children are among the vulnerable groups that are most at risk for sex and forced labour trafficking. The peak number of TIPS cases was observed in 2020 (Figure 29). On average, The Bahamas records ten (10) human trafficking cases per TIP year (April – December). Thus far in 2024, seven (7) adults and five (5) minors have been trafficked into The Bahamas⁶⁴.

⁶³ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bahamas>

⁶⁴ TIPS Officer appearing on Morning Blend, Guardian Talk Radio 26th July 2024.

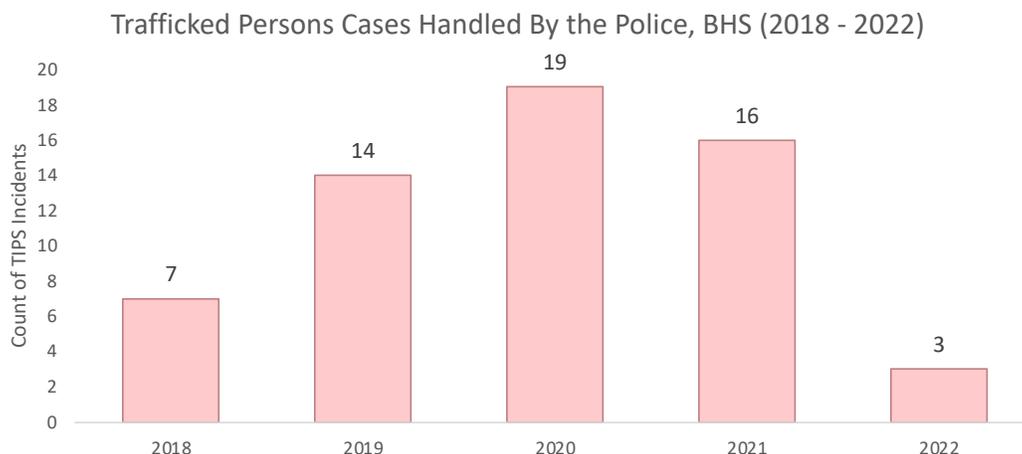


Figure 29: TIPS Cases. Data source, RBPF Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

Actions In Legislation and Policy

Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act (2008) remains the legal regime governing trafficking in persons (TIPS) in The Bahamas. It criminalizes trafficking persons, and prescribes strict penalties for all aspects of this crime, including withholding of travel documents and work permits; and contains the full range of protection for victims of trafficking, including exemption from customary immigration sanctions. In 2022, employing the legal underpinning The Bahamas convicted a female of sex trafficking two children, and one adult. Given the sensitivity and psychological fall-out that can accompany these cases, legislation was adopted to permit victims to testify remotely, even from overseas.

As an operational support to the legislation, the Government developed and approved an Anti-trafficking National Action Plan (2019 – 2023).

In 2024, the TIPS Committee developed and is seeking to pilot an assessment risk tool that can be utilized in health settings, detention centres, correctional facilities, and the like, to standardize an approach for surveilling for and detecting those who may be at risk of having been trafficked. Once the pilot phase is complete, widespread adoption will be prioritized.

Actions in Organizational Frameworks

The Inter-Ministerial Committee for TIPS has been established and functioning within the country for the last twelve (12) years and has remit for coordinating on policy matters. For 2019-2022, the TIP Inter-Ministry Committee trained a total of 3,399 persons⁶⁵ from government, non-government agencies and members of the general public. Ministries and departments receiving training were RBPF, Royal Bahamas Defence Force (RBDF), Department of Immigration (DOI), Bahamas Customs, Bahamas Department of Corrections, Department of

⁶⁵ National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Bahamas. HRC Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Forty-third session. A/HRC/WG.6/43/BHS/1

Labour, Department of Public Prosecution, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health & Wellness, Sandilands Rehabilitation Center, Ministry of Tourism, Department of Social Services, Port Department, and Ministry of National Security. The training curriculum for the uniformed branches to incorporate TIPS sensitization; and as of January 2022, all recruits in the RBDF, DOI and RBPF will be mandatorily exposed to the curriculum.

The TIPS Taskforce has been established since 2011, and serves as the operational arm for prevention, surveillance and victim assistance. These two national bodies have since been augmented with the establishment of:

- The Domestic Violence and Trafficking Sections in the Department of Social Services, is charged with supporting and providing social assistance to survivors of TIPS, including medical, counselling and shelter support.
- The Special Prosecutorial Unit on TIPS within the Office of the Attorney General, is charged with prosecuting cases.
- The TIPS Secretariat (2019), is charged with oversight of the administration of the TIPS Committee and Task Force; and is comprised of four full-time, seconded government officials.
- The TIPS Unit in the Royal Bahamas Police Force (2022), is charged with investigating suspected TIPS cases.

Funding Prioritized Actions

In 2023, the government funded anti-trafficking initiatives through the national anti-trafficking budget, in the Ministry of National Security. The Task Force had a dedicated budget of \$95,000, which was the same budget as in 2021 and 2020. The Secretariat of the Anti-Trafficking Committee received \$104,601 for victim care in the 2022-2023 budget, the same budget as 2021-2022. The government reported spending \$10,580 for awareness campaigns and general office supplies. Funding for trafficking-related work in other ministries came from the general budgets for those ministries or departments.

Government spending for the care of trafficking victims was reported at \$33,467 in 2023, compared with \$48,462 in 2022. Added to this, the Government also funds rent assistance, food assistance and other needs of TIPS victims, in the amount of approximately \$30,000 in 2022.⁶⁶

Sexual and Domestic Violence

Actions In Legislation and Policy

As shared in the last reporting period, the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act (1991, amended 2008) and the Domestic Violence Protection Order (2008) have been principal law for almost two decades. This Act addresses sexual and domestic abuse, including of wives and de facto wives, as well as sexual harassment.

⁶⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/bahamas>

There have been three mentionable legislative developments since the last reporting period. First, the Sexual Offenders Amendment Act, passed in 2014, but enacted (came into effect) in July 2019. Since its enactment, the BDoC's Registry Unit has remit for maintaining and updating the digitized sex offenders' register. The country emphasizes that the sex offenders registry is preventative and not punitive focused, serving as a system for monitoring and tracking sex offenders following their release into the community.

Second, is the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill (2022) which would repeal Section 3 of the current Sexual Offences Act to remove the words "who is not a spouse" from the definition of rape – with effect of criminalizing marital rape. The Government exposed the Bill to a series of open consultations with a wide range of stakeholders. The debates have shown strong proponents and equally strong opponents of the amendments. There is divided public views, and the Bill remains a draft. The Ministry of Social Services continues its consultation and education efforts on the amendment.

Third, the Protection Against Violence Act (2023). This Act represents the Government's resolute commitment to safeguard the rights of violence survivors; to address the pervasive issue of violence, particularly violence against women, and to focus on empowering women⁶⁷. One of the key provisions in the Act is the establishment of the Protection Against Violence Commission, which will execute coordinating and technical roles to strengthen the national response to violence while also ensuring the country's international and regional obligations for combating violence are advancing. This Act aligns The Bahamas with global best practices, ensuring that the nation fulfills international obligations under conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belem do Para). The Act also establishes a Fatality Review Team to address cases where violence results in death, to ensure justice for victims and their families.

The Bahamas has updated and expanded the National Action Plan on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. And, has developed a National Gender Equality and Equity Policy (2023). In the prior reporting period (2019), The Bahamas advised of the Strategic Plan to address GBV (2016). At this junction in the Plan's implementation there is opportunity to review the achievements, impact of and lessons learned.

Actions on Institutional Capacity Building

The Government supported several training and exposures, locally and abroad, during the reporting period – with the net effect of strengthening capacities to address GBV. Examples are:

- In 2020, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs in collaboration with the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN) executed a three-day workshop and a one-day symposium aimed at equipping trainers engaged in rehabilitating perpetrators with necessary skills and techniques to make positive in-roads in the lives of inmates at

⁶⁷ <https://opm.gov.bs/protection-against-violence-bill-2023-bahamas/>

BDoCs. A total of seventy-two (72) persons participated in the training, including thirty-four (34) government officers (15 men and 19 women), and thirty-eight (38) representatives from civil society and Faith-Based Organizations (11 men and 27 women).

- Enhanced professional development of over 400 BDoCs Correctional Officers
- Domestic Violence Taskforce Unit Officers (RBPF) participated in a knowledge exchange programme for one week in Kingston Jamaica; and two weeks in Toronto Canada.
- GBV sensitization sessions were conducted at nine (9) Police Station Divisions, and the Bahamas Department of Corrections Services. These sessions were facilitated by the Domestic Violence Taskforce Unit Officers (RBPF).
- Periodic training of targeted workers on GBV, including sex crimes against children. These targeted workers include Royal Bahamas Police and Defense Force officers, healthcare workers, Ministry of Tourism frontline staff, Department of Social Services staff and Civil Society representatives.
- In May 2024, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Bahamas and Italy, a 10-member contingent (6 females and 4 males) traveled to Italy for training focused on human rights, UN standards, leadership and management.
- In 2024 (April), UN Women launched a project to sensitize key stakeholders including the judiciary and police on GBV
- During the reporting period, the country strengthened measures to increase women's access to justice e.g. establishing special courts, training for the judiciary and police protection orders, redress and reparations, including for femicide cases.

Actions on Strengthening Health Sector Protocols

There have been intentional efforts to strengthen healthcare-specific protocols for addressing GBV in health settings, with defined referral pathways to and intersections with other essential services. Currently under development are the drafting of GBV clinical protocols, GBV clinical delivery model of care and GBV implementation plan. This is being led by the Ministry of Health & Wellness. The model will leverage telehealth technology, particularly in islands and in circumstances where a specific service resource may not be available on the island on which the victim resides.

Actions of Non-Profit Organization (NPO)

NPOs and civil society have a key role to play in addressing GBV, especially given they tend to be less encumbered by bureaucracy and possess significant galvanizing power. Families of all Murdered Victims (F.O.A.M.), operates a community centre and a temporary safe space for survivors of violence; and is currently staffed by 2 full-time employees and 6 volunteers.

The Bahamas Crisis Centre continues to be a beacon in The Bahamas for gender-based violence intervention. The Centre continues to offer counseling services to women, men and children. The Early Intervention for Children Exposed to Violence is one of the programmes available in partnership with the Department of Gender and Family Affairs.

The Zonta Club has an active programme of work on GBV. A hallmark has been its annual 16-Days of Activism on GBV. During this time, town hall sessions are hosted and co-facilitated by faith-based leaders and the leaders from Crisis Centre to address the role of the church and the partnership needed to speak with one voice. These activism days commenced in December 2021.

Pan American Development Fund and the US Embassy executed a GBV a 5-day community engagement session in March 2022 on the island of Abaco and drew on experiences from victims and at-risk women as well as primary and High School Presentations, Training sessions for Faith-based leaders. March 11th- 15th, 2022.

Question 17 – Strategies to prevent GBV

In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?

The country has selected the following specific actions/strategies:

- Working with women, men and couples to improve their skills in interpersonal communication, conflict management and shared decision-making.
- Empowering women and girls to promote their economic independence and access to resources and promote equitable relations within households, communities and society.
- Alleviating poverty through interventions targeted at women or the household.
- Raising public awareness to change attitudes and behaviours.

The Bahamas continues to advance a holistic approach to violence prevention, including GBV that targets all gender and all ages. The country has a National Gender Policy, which benefited from wide stakeholder consultation.

Reformative Strategies

Capacity Building Strategies

Making in-roads early to mitigate risk and engrain resilience factor for violence are supported in the literature. At the primary and secondary education levels, The Bahamas has strengthened educational curricula to include concepts on conflict resolution. Additionally, the professional development modules for teachers have been modernized to feature topics on gender equality and human rights training. The Government and teaching institutions promote safe, harassment free and inclusive educational environments for women and girls. There is also targeted work underway to increase awareness among boys and men of the causes, signs and impacts of violence against women and girls.

The DGFA has undertaken substantial work to educate the public on violence, including GBV. Highlighted are:

- The Men at Crossroads” radio show hosted in August 2020 to address GBV issues facing men. It attracted approximately five thousand (5,000) viewers and eight hundred and ninety (890) shares.
- The awareness sessions in 2021 on Gender-Based Violence in Emergency for Family Islands. Over 500 participants attended. This was done in collaboration with the Crises Centre.
- The GBV prevention exercises across many Family Islands, with a total of over 900 law enforcement officers and just over 500 community residents participated.
- The Department has been aggressive in its training of civil society, who have in turn propagated GBV awareness among their constituents. These include such groups as Kiwanis Club, Woman United, Zonta Club, International Development Bank (IDB), the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Anglican Church Women’s Conference and the Chapter of the Caribbean Institute of Woman in Leadership (CIWILIAN).
- The Men’s Desk established in 2018 in the DGFA continues its work in collaboration with other men’s organization, targeting men and boys to influence mindset shifts in patriarchal norms and more healthy norms towards their female counterparts.

Over the last five years all three Commissioners of Police included a gender perspective in their Policing Plans. The police force also developed an internal policy to expand officers’ knowledge and awareness of GBV, the execution of which has been supported by an international grant. As part of this initiative, over 500 officers have been trained.

Economic Empowerment Strategies

Economic empowerment is a known resilience (protective) factor in violence prevention. Given the Bahamas Development Bank’s (BDB) focus on sustainable financing, it has integrated a robust, proactive approach to gender equity, inclusive of gender measuring tools in scoring and assessment of application forms and has implemented a gender policy that focuses on mainstreaming gender into all aspects of its operations. In 2021, the BDB launched an Academy of Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) Microloan programme that provides loans of up to \$15,000 for women who have graduated from the 16-week AWE training programme. This compliments the business loans offered through SBDC.

Community Empowerment & Awareness Strategies

Supported by the IDB, in 2023 the DGFA implemented Family Island Coordinating Councils (FICC). To-date, seven (7) FICCs have been activated – on the islands of Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Ragged Island. The FICC’s objective is advocacy-driven focused on three areas:

- Strengthening laws on violence against women;
- Strengthening measures to increase women’s access to justice; and
- Strengthening strategies to prevent violence against women and girls.

The purpose of FICC is to mobilize the rural communities into active partnership to prevent GBV, through a victim/survivor centered approach and ensuring greater accountability on the part of perpetrators.

Citizen Security and Justice Programme Expansion

In the last reporting period, The Bahamas advised of the implementation of Citizen Security and Justice programme (CSJP) in 2016 through a \$20 million loan from the IDB. Ministry of National Security serves as the national led or implementing agency. To recap, the CSJP's aims to break down negative social and economic barriers in the most vulnerable communities and empower citizens to self-help and contribute to sustainable solutions. Its goals are achieved through four distinct components:

- Social Crime and Violence Prevention;
- Youth Employability and Employment;
- Justice; and
- Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

From 2016 the CSJP remains an integral player in the strategies to prevent violence, including GBV. The Grow-Your-Child programme, and off-shoot of CSJP, was launched in August 2023 and aimed at reconnecting female inmates with their children through 4-hour visitation sessions once per month.

Highlights of other CSJP work in this period are noted below.

1. Public awareness and community mobilization are a constant, vital and cross-cutting thread of CSJP work; and targets influencers such as parents, educators and community leaders.
2. Training of community leaders in any of the four modules of CSJP's Crime and Violence Prevention programme (conflict resolution and mediation; parenting; sexual assault prevention and gender-based violence). In the first cohort of leaders, nearly 400 new community members have been certified as CSJP curriculum facilitators – expanding the agents of change in reducing the nation's crime and violence problems.
3. Apart from community leaders, in October 2019, a dozen (12) professionals completed the train-the-trainer sessions.
4. Component 2 of the CSJP's programme of work speaks to job training. Enrollment into the CSJP job training opened in November 2019 and is free.
5. Activation of three (3) CSJP youth community centres in at-risk communities, with plans to expand operations in more communities. The existing and operational centres are located:
 - Fox Hill Youth and Community Centre
 - Quakoo Street Youth and Community Centre
 - Edmund Moxey Youth and Community Centre

The CSJP continues its rehabilitation work with BDoCs to equip offenders with the tools and skills necessary for disrupting the cycle of violence and/or criminal behaviour. This is achieved

through vocational training and remedial education as well as the impartation of conflict resolution skills. This programme also entails case management and monitoring to identify risks and needs, provide treatment of cases.

CSJP also has developed and published a number of curriculum, guidelines and handbooks related to GBV, healthy relationships and parenting⁶⁸.

National efforts on prevention do not solely focus on survivors of crime and the community, but also the perpetrators of crime. The rationale for this is solidly rooted in the risk mitigation to interrupt the transmission of violence, including GBV, and decrease the likelihood of re-offending. The inked memorandum of understanding between the Government and the Correctional Services of Canada in February 2019 draws on expertise and knowledge to assist with transforming BDoCs from a penal institution to a correctional facility.

The Bahamas National Youth Guard (BNYG)

The Bahamas National Youth Guard is a 27-month, government-led programme designed to equip young people with the tools needed to assist the nation, with the help of private and public agencies, during national emergencies, such as natural disasters. It endeavours to shape young heroes through rigorous search and rescue training. The budget allocation for the BNYG has grown from \$99,556 (2023/2024) to \$750,000 (2024/2025).

Enrollment criteria are willingness to serve the country, Bahamian citizenship and age 18 to 25 years. The training facility for this programme can simultaneously accommodate 32 males and 12 females. The first recruits were enlisted in 2022. In March 2023, 64 young persons graduated, becoming the first National Youth Guards.

Skills Acquisition Strategy

Education and skills acquisition are a top priority for BDoCs. In partnership with the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), BDoCs offers training to inmates in an array of disciplines including electrical installation, hair dressing, information technology, garment manufacturing and auto mechanics. The vocational training is reinforced by a 3-month work experience placement at the BDOCs compound. On successful course completion, participants receive certificates.

Other notable endeavours supporting offender reform and rehabilitation are the license plate initiative and the inmate enterprise initiative. The license plate initiative inmates produce vehicle license plates used by the public. The inmate enterprise initiative puts inmates' creative talent to use through the manufacturing of staff uniforms, paintings, handbags, junkanoo dolls, caps, jewelry and masks (during the pandemic). These served as a source of income for inmates.

⁶⁸ <https://www.csjpbahamas.gov.bs/publications/>

In addition to these skills, offenders also have access to moral, spiritual enrichment and counselling that can build character and social skills. In 2020, 2019 – 2020 about 25 sex offenders graduated from the spiritual enrichment programme. In 2023, a total of 27 men graduated from the spiritual enrichment programme.

Altogether, the reformatory strategies equip inmates with marketable skills, during their sentences, thereby improving their job prospects and/or stimulating entrepreneurial aspirations.

Question 18 – Actions mitigating technology-facilitated GBV

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (E.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?

The Bahamas has selected the following specific actions:

- Introduced or strengthened legislation and regulatory provisions
- Worked with technology providers to introduce or strengthen human rights -based design and development and deployment approaches to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence

The country draws attention to the Protection against Violence Act (2023). Specifically the interpretations, which define violence as any sort of violence including violence resulting from online harassment. This codification renders online harassment a criminal offense, punishable by law. More broadly, it is legal to harass anyone sexually, to stalk anyone, or to share intimate images of anyone without consent.

Given the national understanding that technology can deploy the global brain thrust, find cures for catastrophic illnesses, overcome economic inequity, and revolutionize the future, there is commitment to growing in this digital era – as evidenced in the National Digitization Strategy. The Bahamas fully embraces the potential offered by the digital age, but there is still some distance to go before the technological infrastructure and can be fully leveraged to prevent and respond to GBV.

Technology has assisted in the country's response to crime, with particular reference to CCTV cameras and drone technology. In 2019, the Government signed a \$5m contract with Proficient Business Services for the installation and monitoring of 507 closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance cameras, which were strategically deployed in vulnerable communities in New Providence. In the 2023/2024 budget the Minister of National Security announced plans to procure an additional 300 additional CCTV cameras. The Government is now embarking on the second phase of CCTV expansion, with the launch of FUSUS, an AI application that unifies and integrates intelligence into a single interface. This will afford the decentralization of real-time information from the crime centre to frontline officers, enabling timely and more accurate responding.

To specifically address the use of technology, the police force partnered with ZONTA to host several seminars to generate better awareness regarding online behavior. These have been augmented by the RBPF awareness campaigns directed at both survivors and perpetrators on to deter technology's use as a vehicle to abuse women (e.g. revenge porn and nude photos).

Related to cyber-crimes, The RBPF has reported a 36 percent increase in hacking and extortion in The Bahamas. Between January 1st and June 30th, 2023, there were 98 cyber-crime incidents reported to authorities, compared to the 105 matters reported during the same period in 2022 (Figure 30). To mitigate these crimes, the RBPF has partnered with the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for the Caribbean (ARIN-CARIB); and strengthened the capacity of the Financial Crime Investigations Branch among others.

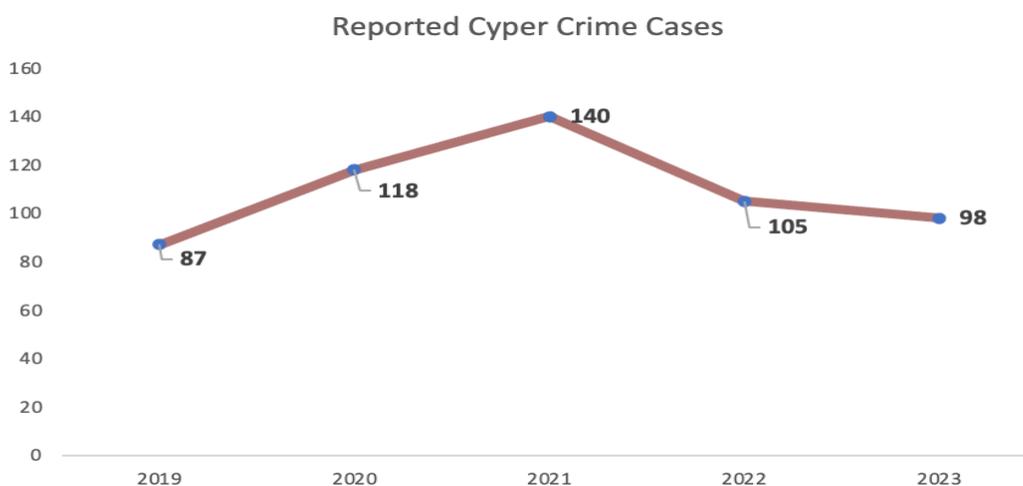


Figure 30: Cyber-Crime Statistics in The Bahamas. Data source, RBPF Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

Contrary to cyber-crimes, cyberbullying statistics do not exist for The Bahamas⁶⁹. Cyberbullying is the repeated and intentional harassment, intimidation and embarrassment of others using electronic devices, and is a serious issue impacting the mental health of adolescents based on published findings of global surveys and studies.

In the novel research on workplace bullying in The Bahamas, Fielding (2020) found that 22% of the workforce may suffer from severe workplace bullying. This is a relatively high figure and is a potential cause for concern. While no difference in the rate of bullying between male and female workers was identified, the underlying associations which appear to put males and females at risk of workplace bullying vary. For both males and females, exposure to negative behaviours at home and school were associated with elevated rates of workplace bullying.

⁶⁹ https://www.thenassaeguardian.com/opinion/editorials/we-should-focus-on-cyberbullying/article_7df32e5f-9552-52d3-b2e8-6114ab71d011.html

Question 19 – Resourcing women’s organizations engaged in GBV-related work
In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women’s organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?

There is GBV work and initiatives being undertaken across a number of government ministries. However, the capture of expenditure in the national budget book does not easily lend to identifying the specific quantum that all ministries have expended on addressing GBV and intend to expend in the 2024/2025 fiscal year.

As made clear throughout this document, the Ministry of Social Services, inclusive of the DGFA and the Department of Social Services, is pivotal player working to prevent and respond to GBV. According to the national budget for fiscal year 2024/2025, the Ministry together with the Department attracted 2.1% (or \$67.2m) of the overall national budget to give assistance train, do public education campaigns, furnish salaries of officers – to name a few. This allocation is almost a 50% increase (actual 47.8%) above the 2022/2023 allocation.

Through a government-led initiative, over 500 non-governmental organizations (NGO) were formally registered in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas in 2020. Given the unavailability of updated registered NGO data, it is unclear the degree to which the pandemic impacted NGO survival. Furthermore, not all registered NGOs play role in GBV prevention and response. And of those that do play a role, not all have GBV as its exclusive mandate.

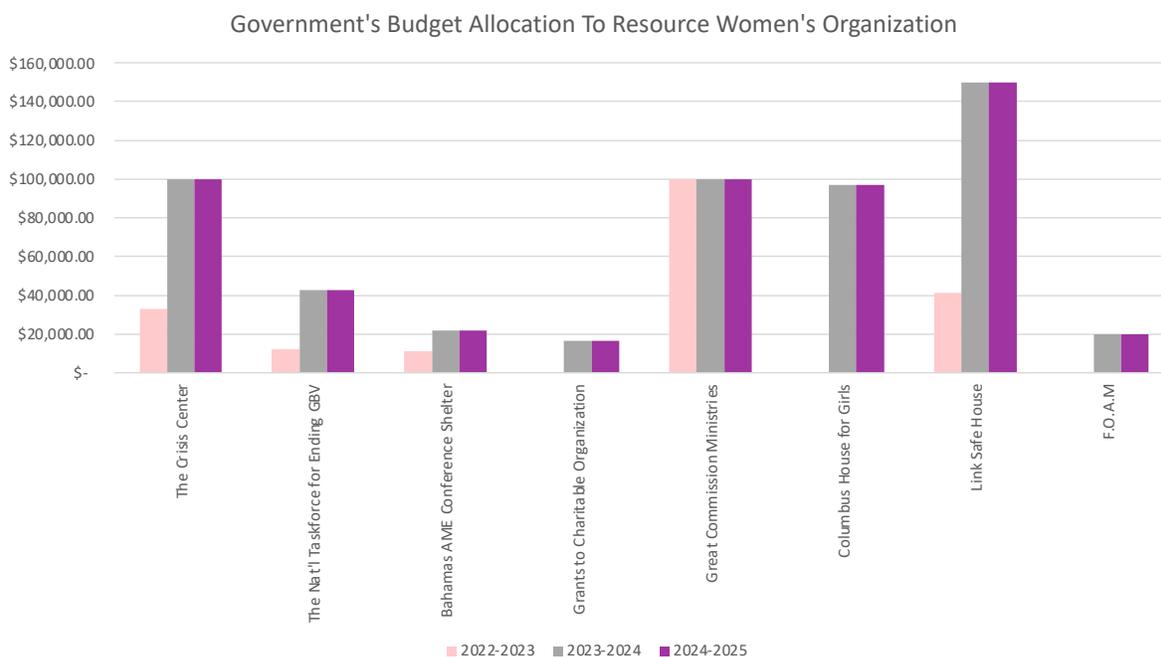


Figure 31: Government’s Allocation to Women-Related Organizations. Data source, GoB budgets. Figure, Consultancy.

Through the Ministry’s budget allocation several NGOs receive government financial assistance or subsidies. Overall, the level of this assistance has increased by 298% from the 2022/2023 fiscal year (\$263,55) to the 2024/2025 fiscal year (\$1.05m). Figure 31 shows the distribution across organizations engaged in preventing and responding to GBV. The top three organizations

attracting the highest allocations were The Crisis Centre, Great Commission and Links Safe House.

The Bahamas Red Cross (BRC) does play a role in GBV in emergency settings. The BRC was allocated \$500,000 in FY 2024/2025, compared to its \$66,000 allocation in prior years.

Question 20 – Actions to address portrayal of females in media

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media?

The country has selected three (3) specific actions:

- Provided training to media professionals to encourage the creation and use on non-stereotypical, balanced and diverse images of women and girls in the media.
- Promoted the participation and leadership of women in media.
- Established or strengthened consumer protection services to receive and review complaints about media content or gender-based bias in the media.

The Bahamas has established a Parliamentary Human Rights Committee (PHRC), the first of its kind in The Bahamas and the third in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The PHRC assesses and evaluates all matters relating to the protection and enforcement of human rights in The Bahamas; determines the degree of national compliance with regional and international obligations; make recommendations to guide legislative processes and hold public hearings on human rights-related issues.

The Utilities Regulation & Competition Authority (URCA) is the regulator of the electronic, communication (including broadcasting) and electricity sectors. Broadcasting is governed more specifically by URCA's ECS 06/2012 Code of Practice for content regulation, updated in August 2020. The Code applies to all licensed radio and television broadcasters setting practice parameters for audiovisual media services, whilst preserving the licensees' accountability and editorial control, including all locally produced programming. The Code establishes regulatory standards and boundaries across six (6) core content areas: harm and offence, protection of young persons, political broadcasts and political advertisements, advertising and sponsorship, news and factual programmes and access services. Sub-clause 4.1(1)(a)(v) in the Code identifies content that will be illegal and unsuitable for broadcast. An excerpt from the Code follows:

[content that] advocates or promotes hatred in any form (up to and including genocide) against, or vilifies, any person or identifiable group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, age, religion or physical or mental disability.

Clause 4.3 of the Code reads in its entirety:

- 1) Licensees shall ensure that their programming does not contain: (a) abusive or unreasonably discriminatory material or comment; or (b) the negative portrayal, degradation or exploitation of any person, based on matters of race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual preference, or physical or mental disability.
- 2) Negative portrayal can take many different forms, including (but not limited to) stereotyping, stigmatization and victimization, derision of myths, traditions or practices, degrading material, and exploitation.
- 3) Exceptions to the provisions of Clause 4.3(1) of this Code may be justifiable in the context of programmes with a legitimate historical, educational or news purpose provided that the inclusion of such content is as limited as possible within the context of the particular programme.

Clause 4.10 of the Code (Violence Against Women):

- 1) Licensees shall not broadcast programming material that sanctions, promotes or glamorizes any aspect of violence against women.
- 2) Licensees shall ensure that women are not depicted as victims of violence unless the violence is integral to the subject of the report. Licensees shall be particularly sensitive not to perpetuate the link between women in a sexual context and women as victims of violence.

Sub-clause 5(4)(4) offer parameters for the portrayal of girls and boys in the media.

As a final note on URCA, this regulator completed the one-year review process of its Consumer Protection Regulations in 2019.

The Consumer Protection Act of 2006 was repealed and replaced by the Consumer Protection Act (2023). The amended legislation makes provisions for the Consumer Protection Commission to receive and investigate consumer complaints against providers, educate consumers on their rights as consumers and resolve disputes between consumers and providers. Relevant to the question, the modernized Consumer Protection Act includes stringent provisions against misleading and deceptive conduct, harassment, and coercion.

Question 21 – Tailored actions on violence against the marginalized
In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?

The actions identified by the country are:

- Women living in remote and rural areas.
- Women with disabilities.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS.
- Girls, adolescents and younger women.

- Women in humanitarian settings.

Through funding from the UN Joint SDG Fund, the 'Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment programme aims to advance women's economic empowerment. The programme, which is implemented by UN Women in The Bahamas, is set within the context that GDP alone does not tell the full story of the vulnerabilities a country and its residents face. The programme therefore promotes using gender equality as an accelerator for economic empowerment. Gender lens investing and private-public partnerships are strategies being used to strengthen new and emerging industries in which women and youth are likely to be most involved and further advance their empowerment to build more equal societies.

Representative for UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean, Tonni Ann Brodber, shares that: "UN Women and Portland Private Equity, a Caribbean-based private equity and venture capital firm, have pioneered a partnership which hopes to bring in USD \$500m of gender smart risk capital to advance impact-driven investments for SMEs and medium-large companies in the Caribbean. This is what we hope, that through this programme women and youth entrepreneurs will be able to benefit from."

Since the start of the programme, UN Women has coordinated two capacity-building activities to promote the adoption of innovative financial tools by financiers in the Caribbean. From July 19-21, 2022, 20 fund managers from national development banks, private equity firms, commercial banks, and other financial institutions including participants from The Bahamas supported by the Joint SDG Fund, attended the first Gender Lens Investing workshop in the region. The workshop was hosted by UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean and partners, notably: Development Finance Institute Canada Inc (FinDev Canada), Portland Private Equity and Caribbean Alternative Investment Association (CARAIA).

On May 3, 2023, UNDP hosted a workshop with public sector experts on appropriate financing policies and instruments for gender equality and women's empowerment to develop a gender-sensitive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Toni-Tanille Kerr, a partner at Portland Private Equity, said "The paucity of capital is even more pronounced when we look at the limited amounts directed to companies focused on serving women and youth," Kerr said.

Through this partnership, The Bahamas will benefit from increased technical skills among youth and women in sustainable and micro business management, climate resilience, and the application of digital innovations for the development of Agro-food systems. This will be focused in Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma, and Andros and will feature the establishment of a Business Incubator and Accelerator for women and youth entrepreneurs to train and scale up on Resilience Building, Sustainable Tourism, and Creative Industries. The programme will also feature the development of networks and digital platforms to support coordination and cooperation among women-owned MSMEs (in the Agriculture, Tourism and Creative industries).

D: Participation, Accountability and Gender-Responsive Institutions

This sub-section covers the critical areas of:

- Women in power and decision-making
- Institutional mechanisms for the achievement of women
- Human rights of women
- Women in media
- The girl child

Question 22 – Women’s Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making

In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country taken to promote women’s participation in public life and decision-making?

Women’s equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Bahamas acceded to CEDAW in 1993.

According to CEDAW, a participation rate of 30-35 per cent is recommended in order to achieve a real impact on the content of political decisions. This recommended rate of participation refers to all aspects of political life, including in legislatures and in political leadership positions.

While some progress has been made in recent years to improve women’s political representation and participation, data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off. Signaling that there remains a pressing need to address shortcomings in this regard.

Globally, women’s representation in parliament has more than doubled, reaching 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020. Globally, women’s representation among cabinet ministers has quadrupled over the last 25 years, and in 2020, on average, one in five ministers (22%) was a woman. In the judiciary, 40% of judges were women in 2017, an increase over the proportion of 35% reported in 2008.

Figure 32 puts The Bahamas in comparison to the CEDAW recommendations and global benchmarks. Specifically, in The Bahamas women representation in parliament is lagging behind the regional and global averages. But far exceeds the global average for representation in the judiciary. While the proportion of women in the Senate saw a decline between the 2017 and 2021 general elections (43% to 25%, respectively), proportional representation in the Cabinet increased from 5% to 25%. Over the course of the independent Bahamas (1973 onward), 23% of all the Governor Generals have been women; and 78% of all Presidents of the Senate have been women.

In the 2017 general elections, 30% (or 39) of the total candidate pool⁷⁰ were women. Comparatively, there were 32% (or 72) women candidates⁷¹ in the 2021 general election⁷². Between these two electoral cycles, the proportion of women candidates rose modestly by 2%.

⁷⁰ Total number of candidates (men and women) for the 2017 general election was 171.

⁷¹ Total number of candidates (men and women) for the 2021 general election was 225.

⁷² Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group. The Commonwealth of The Bahamas General Elections, 16th September 2021. Commonwealth Secretariat.

Though modest, it marked a milestone for the country, recording the largest number of female candidates in any election since 1973.



Figure 32: Women's Participation in The Bahamas. Data sources, BIS and national publications. Figure, Consultancy.

Data in Figure 33 suggests that smaller political parties are more likely to have larger participation of women than larger, more established, parties.

	Party	Total no. of candidates	No. of women	Share of party total
1	Bahamian Way Forward Movement (BWF)	2	0	0%
2	Bahamas Constitution Party (BCP)	5	2	40%
3	Coalition of Independents (COI)	33	18	55%
4	Democratic National Alliance (DNA)	22	6	27%
5	Freedom National Movement (FNM)	39	7	18%
6	Grand Commonwealth Party (GCP)	20	11	55%
7	Kingdom Government Movement (KGM)	14	5	36%
8	Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)	39	7	18%
9	Righteous Government Movement (RGM)	5	2	40%
10	United Coalition Party (UCP)	15	10	67%
11	Faith That Moves Mountains Party (FTMMP)	2	0	0%
12	Independents	29	4	14%
	Total	225	72	

Figure 33: Women Candidacy in General Elections. Data source, Commonwealth Secretariat

The country has a longstanding relationship with the United States. Related to women's participation, the U.S. Embassy Public Diplomacy and Political sections in The Bahamas announced an open competition for not-for-profit, non-governmental, public international, and governmental organizations to submit applications for small grant opportunities to carry out a program aimed at increasing women's involvement in politics and, in turn, increasing support for democratic policies that support women's equal rights.

Characteristics of women parliamentarians are reflected in Figure 34.

Women's participation is felt in Bahamian society even beyond the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government. As an example, the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce (BCCEC) has become a substantially influential body in Bahamian society. As stated in the BCCEC's mission, it is the voice of the Bahamian business community, whose advocacy (in the interest of national development) directly impacts national policies and promotes good governance that drives growth and prosperity in our business environment. The current Executive BCCEC Board comprises ten (10) women and seven (7) men. Furthermore, the leading tertiary education institutions (UB and BTVI) have women at the helm as Presidents. For BTVI, this represents a first in the history for the institution.

For the progress that has been made over these five years in women's representation, key contributors have been in the area of capacity building, skills development and modeling.

- Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL): CIWiL has been instrumental in training and encouraging greater political leadership by women in The Bahamas. Their efforts focus on equipping women with the skills and confidence needed to pursue and excel in political roles.
- Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG): ORG has worked diligently to make policy development more accessible and inclusive. Through citizen engagement and education programmes like Freedom Schools and Active Citizens Bahamas, ORG has trained thousands of Bahamians across 10 islands about the systems of governance and the importance of civic participation. ORG has also trained hundreds of non-profit leaders, mostly women, in leadership, advocacy, communications, and fundraising, enhancing the viability and sustainability of their social missions. These trainings have the potential to spur interest in women participating more in public life.
- Women United: This organization provides a platform for women to learn and raise their voices on issues affecting them. By empowering women to speak out, Women United has significantly contributed to increasing women's participation in public discourse.
- Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation: The recent past chair of this influential body was a woman who advised at the national level on issues related to women entrepreneurs and the state of the private sector. This highlights the growing influence of women in key economic decision-making roles.
- High-Level Female Leadership: The current Governor-General and the Speaker of the House, both women, hold two of the most important roles in government. Their leadership serves as a powerful role models and inspiration for other women in the Bahamas.
- Equality Bahamas has consistently spoken out about the inequalities facing women in the Bahamas, advocating for policy changes and greater awareness of gender issues.

FEATURES OF SITTING WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS



Figure 34: Women in Parliament. Figure, Consultancy

In unpacking CIWiL (Bahamas Chapter) contribution to promoting women in leadership, some key initiatives are noteworthy:

- The 'Girl Stop Making Excuses' 5-part webinar Series in summer 2020. The webinar's objectives were to increase awareness opportunities in society for women to lead; to build capacity; and to address the barriers to women entering frontline Politics; and to showcase current and former female parliamentarians across The Bahamas and the Caribbean.
- The session on 'Women in Parliament' facilitated in collaboration with other NGOs during December, 2020. This session sensitized aspiring women political candidates to two resolutions: (1) Political Quotas/temporary Measures (2) Enactment of Gender Based Violence Legislation.
- Engaged in year-long and on-going public awareness campaigns through appearances on talk shows both TV and radio, press releases and news interviews highlighting and promoting women in leadership, from December 2019.
- The 'Women Parliamentary Caucus Retreat', 2-day retreat hosted in partnership with UN Women Parlamericas and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in November, 2022. The retreat deliverables were twofold – train at least 50 women on gender considerations in legislation and gender mainstreaming; and formation of a Steering Committee.

The Zonta Club of New Providence (1997, Bahamas) has been a steadfast advocator for the protection from and reduction of GBV and aimed at advocating for and empowering women

and girls. Its community initiatives are aimed at uplifting and improving the lives of women in The Bahamas. These included the Living Legends Ball, the Workforce Readiness programme, the Save-a-Life Campaign, Healthy Relationship Educational series, and Orange Ribbon 16 Days of Advocacy Awareness on Violence and Gender-based Violence webinars, as well as 'Say No Violence'⁷³.

Cable Bahamas Group of Companies (a telecommunications company) together with its corporate sponsor RBC, hosts the InspireHER Conference. This is an annual event focused on the empowerment, elevation, and enrichment of women across various industries, through enlightening discussions, powerful networking opportunities, and opportunities to build a supportive community that uplifts every woman.

Despite these and other efforts, structural inequalities persist, particularly concerning women's proportional representation in elected leadership. The continued work of these organizations and initiatives is crucial to overcoming the remaining barriers and ensuring that women have equal opportunities to contribute to public life and decision-making in The Bahamas.

In contemplating barriers to women in leadership in The Bahama, two points may be raised:

- The perpetuation of structural institutional barriers, such as cultural or historic hurdles which prevent or impede female participation and/or unhealthy gender norms.
- The intra-personal limiting beliefs (self-editing). Meaning, the duly skilled and prepared women, matching and often exceeding the qualification standards of male counterparts, have internalized, self-limiting beliefs that cause them to not engage in efforts to actively seek leadership roles.

Question 23 – Actions to Increase Decision-Making and Expression In the Media

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT).

The Bahamas has identified two (2) specific actions:

- Strengthened the provision of formal and technical vocational education and training in media and ICTs, including areas of management and leadership.
- Taken measures to enhance access, affordability and use of ICTs for women and girls (example free Wi-Fi hubs, community technology centres).

The major technical vocational education institution is BTVI. Between 2018 to 2023, BTVI has grown its menu of IT and media-related programmes. Precisely, from four (4) to seven (7) programmes – a 75% increase. Year-over-Year, with the exception of 2021, the absolute number of females graduating from these programmes have been growing – from a total of 14

⁷³ <https://ournews.bs/zonta-club-launches-say-no-to-violence-campaign/>

female graduates in 2019 to 21 female graduates in 2023. During these same years, females represented 45.5% of graduates from the media and IT-related programmes (Figure 35).

PROGRAMME	Female Graduates	Total Graduates	Proportion Female Graduates
IT Entry Level	14	40	35.0%
IT Mgmt	20	35	57.1%
IT Network Engineer	3	5	60.0%
IT Security Srver	1	1	0.0%
IT Software Engineer	1	3	33.3%
IT Support Specialist	1	2	50.0%
Media Technoloy (AAS)	5	6	83.3%
Media Technoloy (Cert)	6	12	50.0%
Total	51	104	45.5%
			AVERAGE

Figure 35: BTVI Graduates in IT and Media Fields. Data source, BTVI Annual Reports. Figure, Consultancy.

This in part can be attributed to the Government’s tuition grant to Bahamian students enrolled at BTVI. The grant covers registration fees, tuition, mandatory textbooks and certification exams. Application (\$25) and graduation (\$200) fees are not included.

Mention is made of GIST (Girls in Science and Technology), an initiative dedicated to encouraging Bahamian girls to pursue education and careers in science and technology. This program offers workshops, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to successful role models in STEM fields. GIST organizes science camps, field trips, and hands-on projects designed to spark interest in STEM among young girls. It also facilitates networking opportunities with female professionals in science and technology.

The government’s ParkConnect nationwide project launched August 2022 aimed to deliver free Wi-Fi in at least one park in every political constituency throughout the country. For the last general election, there were 39 constituencies. By the first quarter of 2023, almost 52 parks across [n] islands had been powered; and removing barriers that often exists to internet access due to income and other variables⁷⁴. According to the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, “This is not simply an investment in a park -- this is an investment in our people and in our future.”

⁷⁴ <https://ewnews.com/btc-continues-to-support-govts-free-wi-fi-initiative-in-public-parks>

Question 24 – Current National Women’s Machinery

Please describe your country’s current national women’s machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country has taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs serves as the country’s national women’s machinery. Established as a Women’s Desk in 1981, the focus was women, however since 2016, its mandate has expanded to promote programmes for women and men. The expansion of the Department ensures a comprehensive and inclusive approach to tackling social challenges while creating programmes to achieve equality between women and men. The normative programming framework of the Department includes:

- Gender-based violence prevention and intervention
- Women’s empowerment, including, economic, social and political empowerment
- Education, training and awareness raising
- Men’s empowerment
- Strong Families development

Location in Government

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs is prominently incorporated into the Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting in order to ensure its efficacy in providing the support required to carry out the Department’s mandate. It should be noted that the current Minister, the Honourable Myles K. LaRoda, M.P., Minister of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, was previously assigned to the Office of the Prime Minister, which indicates the level of priority for the portfolios housed within this vital Ministry. The Ministry also contains the Division of Family and Children’s Affairs, the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities along with other entities that provide support to the citizenry, particularly women and girls.

Vision

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs is envisioned as an efficient, effective government agency working in close collaboration with public and private sectors and civil society for the assurance of gender equality as a societal norm founded on an understanding of the similarities and respect for and valuing of the differences between women and men; as well as for the presence of strong and healthy family unit.

Mission

Through advocacy, awareness raising, capacity building, and policy development, empower women and girls so they could take their place as partners alongside men and boys in both the private and public spheres and across all sectors; work with key partners to strengthen policy and build institutional capacity to effectively; promote, respect, and protect rights, including the right to a life free from violence for all; Strengthen partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders to promote strong family units and healthy relationships, including in the best

interest of the child, and develop violence prevention and conflict resolution programmes for victims and perpetrators and improve services. The objectives of the Department include:

1. Sensitizing the public on issues arising out of the Gender Policy.
2. Promoting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and knowledge of gender and development.
3. Promoting health relations between men and women as advocates of gender equality.
4. Providing policy makers and other change agents in national development with reference guidelines for identifying and addressing gender concerns, which will inform public policy.
5. Training and providing technical assistance so as to strengthen the work agendas of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) & Community-Based (CBOs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) with gender perspectives.
6. Strengthening and developing partnerships with national, regional, and international organizations.
7. Conducting research and public education.
8. Managing the implementation of projects and programmes for gender equality results.
9. Ensuring gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies and plans at various levels of public administration and overseeing their applications.

Mandate

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs is mandated to promote gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women, men, girls, and boys throughout the country. The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation, and as such, the Department has the responsibility of duplicating its programmes in approximately thirty (30) inhabited islands. The population of The Bahamas, which is approximately 400,000 is largely concentrated on two islands, namely New Providence and Grand Bahama. The Department is further responsible to ensure that a gender perspective is included in all government policies, programmes and projects.

Proposed Organizational Structure and Institutional Capacity

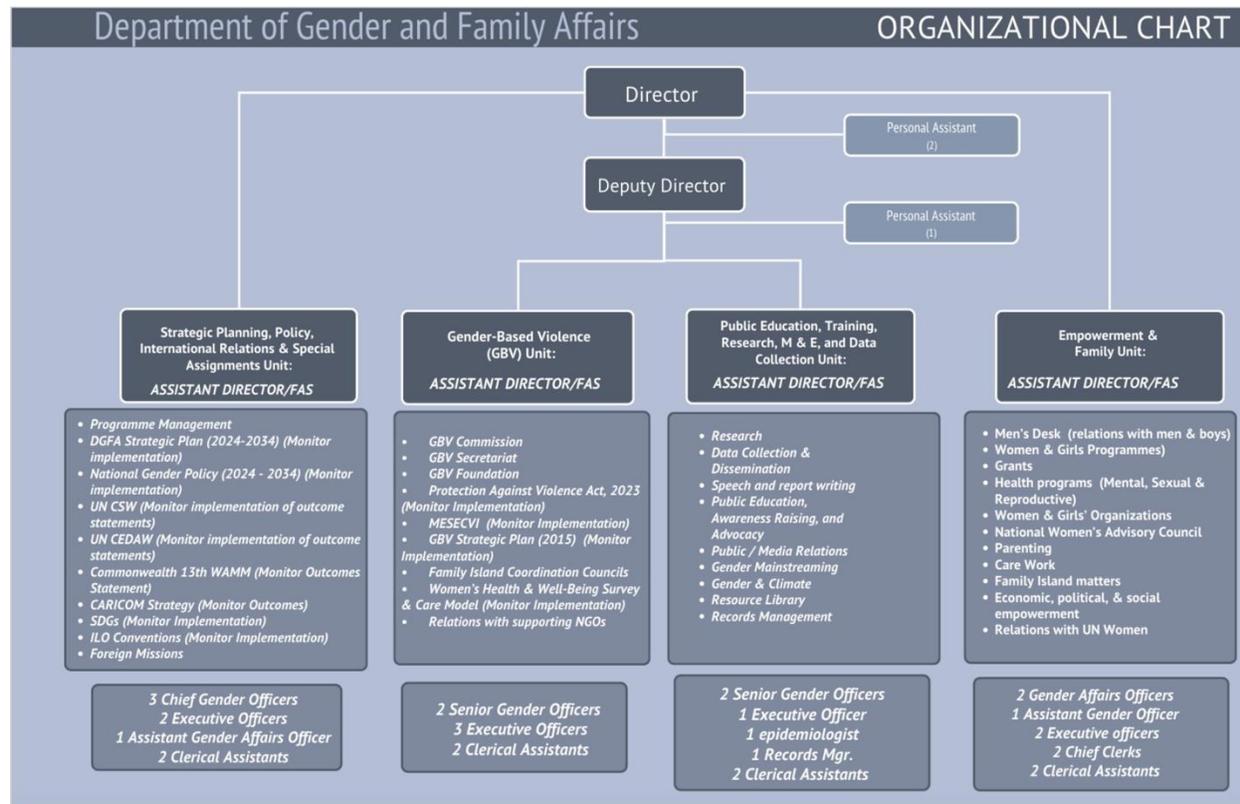


Figure 36: Proposed New DGFA Organizational Structure and Institutional Capacity

The proposed new structure of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs will be headed by a Director, with a Deputy Director and complimented by both technical and administrative staff (Figure 36). The staff compliment of the National Women's machinery has not changed significantly over the years. For the period 2017-2018, the Department had nine (9) officers and for the period 2022-2023, there were (9) officers attached to the Department, one of whom served as the Men's Desk Coordinator. While the current technical officers have graduate degrees in various disciplines, certification in gender and development studies is minimal. Officers have received training, however in Gender-Based Violence and human rights matters. Institutional strengthening in gender, development and human rights studies are critical, in order to adequately fulfil its mandate. Currently, officers of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs include a Gender-Based Violence Expert, Education and Curriculum Officer, a Men's Desk Coordinator, a Programme Officer, and support staff.

Budget

Gender-budgeting has not been operationalized. The early practice of performance-based budgeting represents progression from the traditional line item budgeting. The budget for the Department of Gender and Family Affairs was increased from \$100,000 during the 2016-2017 fiscal period to \$350,000. This annual budget allocation was maintained up to the fiscal year 2021/2022. In the following fiscal year (2022/2023), \$250,000 was allocated; and saw a slight

downward adjustment in FY 2023/2024 to \$227,700. This level has been maintained for the current fiscal year (2024/2025).

DGFA Programming

The Department's Strategic Plan, and the National Gender Equality and Equity Policy serve as its operational programming roadmap. Throughout its growth, the Department continues to uphold the programming principles of comprehensiveness dignity, equality and inclusivity in tackling social challenges. The normative programming framework of the DGFA includes:

- Gender-based violence prevention and intervention.
- Advocacy for women in decision-making.
- Economic empowerment.
- Education, training and awareness raising.

Cognizant of the need to update and finalize the National Gender Equality and Equity Policy, a series of collaborative stakeholder dialogues were executed, engaging residents in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco and Eleuthera. These series were held from September to October 2023. The current Policy iteration, fashioned to reflect the rich dialogue and input, is deemed final and await formal adoption. The Policy leverages its seven (7) goals to advance women, empower women and accelerate gender mainstreaming.

Moreover, the Policy aligns with the Government's signatory commitment to several regional and international conventions –These instruments include: the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its optional protocols, Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

In addition the Government, through its gender machinery (the DGFA), promotes dialogue in the national ecosystem as well as with various international treaty bodies. Key to these dialogues is the financial provision for national representation at meetings, conferences and workshops. Related to the national ecosystem, DGFA is represented on the national steering Committee for disasters lead by the Ministry of Disaster Risk Management (formerly DRA and NEMA). In this role, the DGFA elevates gender as a cross-cutting; and advocates for gender dimension considerations in formulating plans, strategies, programmes and policies on national emergency matters.

The MoDRM maintains relationship with Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), a regional inter-governmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean Community. Note is made that the strengthened relationship between DGFA and the Department of Environmental Planning and Protection, which has manifested critical partnerships for advancing gender-responsive climate actions.

Institutional Capacity

The human resources of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs include a Gender-Based Violence Expert, Educational and Curriculum Officer, and a Men's Desk Coordinator, which experience in leadership in correctional/rehabilitative facilitation. The Men's Desk which was established within the Department in 2018, complements and supports the programmes, projects and initiatives for women and girls. Officers of the Department have achieved relevant certification in human rights, gender and development and gender-based violence courses. In July, 2023 an officer from the Department of Gender and Family Affairs participated in The International Law Enforcement Agency training on Gender Based Violence, sponsored by the US. Embassy. Another officer will undergo a similar training in July of 2024.

Law Reform Process

In February 2022, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs received support from UN Women to conduct a Discriminatory Law Reform Forum. The overall purpose of the Forum was to establish consensus on the legislative changes necessary to ensure gender equality for all in The Bahamas. The objectives of the Forum were to eliminate discriminatory laws, ensure that The Bahamas complies with international conventions for gender equality, provide awareness and education to the public on their rights, and prepare an informed, engaged and activated citizenry on the issue of discriminatory laws.

Engagement with Civil Society Sector

The Department of Gender and Family Affairs maintains a relationship with the Civil Society Sector, through trainings and advocacy initiatives. Small grants are provided to non-governmental and faith-based organizations to facilitate their work in support of victims/survivors of violence, provision of shelters and counseling services and empowerment. In 2021, the Department partnered with the Zonta Clubs of Nassau and New Providence to engage the legislative branch of government to observe the '16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence' campaign. Among other activities, special sittings in Parliament for representatives from women organizations were broadcasted live to reach the entire nation, were held during which the Speakers of the House of Assembly, the Women's Affairs Minister and other parliamentarians (from both political parties) brought public awareness to the issue of violence in The Bahamas and highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts to eradicate Gender-Based Violence. On Women in Leadership and Decision Making, the Department of Gender and Family Affairs supported the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership Bahamas Chapter (CIWiL) in a five-part Webinar series on, 'Strategies to Attract and Prepare Women for Political Leadership'. Serving and former parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, from the Caribbean region and across the political divides, presented in the series. Over 20,000 persons viewed the sessions, which were accessible on Facebook Live.

Research

The Ministry of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting is responsible for shelter management in The Bahamas. The Department of Gender and Family Affairs in collaboration with the UNFPA conducted focus group sessions in shelters in New Providence following the passage of Hurricane Dorian in November 2019. These focus groups were asked to assess the

needs and concerns of women and girls living in shelters. Results from the focus groups informed the Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) strategy and recommendations were presented to gender-based violence partners. Also, a referral pathway for Gender-based violence was created. It is available in both English and Creole.

Another catastrophic and unprecedented event, the COVID-9 pandemic, necessitated that the DGFA find alternative methods of gathering data.

In 2020, the Department partnered with the University of The Bahamas to administer a national online survey, 'Family Safety Survey - COVID-19 Bahamas'. It gathered information about family safety and the prevalence of domestic violence during COVID 19. Over seven hundred (700) responses were received. Initial findings from that survey were that domestic violence was up 2%. The Bahamas Crisis Centre also reported a 30% uptick in domestic violence related calls. To address this uptick, the Department, in partnership with stakeholders, including Government and Non-government agencies, created anti-gender-based violence messages on social media and for printed distribution.

Question 25 – Mechanisms and Tools for Mainstreaming GBV

In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors?

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to gender mainstreaming in all sectors of society. The Government prescribes to the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) with subsequent resolutions (2008-2015). A relationship exists between the national safety and security sector and the Government of the United States.

On the national level, gender mainstreaming is highlighted in the National Development Plan. The Plan notes that gender mainstreaming will ensure that the “perceptions, experience, knowledge and interests of women, as well as men, bear on policymaking, planning and decision-making.” The Plan features gender sensitive strategies and action steps to address the needs and efforts of women and men so that all policies and development strategies positively impact everyone including, family well-being and reduce inequality. The plan also notes the need for social protection to ensure that all vulnerable groups in the country have access to adequate safety and security.

Ministry of Social Services: The Ministry through the DGFA, promotes gender equality in the safety and security sector, the Ministry with responsibility for the same has sought to actively pursue opportunities to ensure equal representation of women in inter-ministerial coordination activities (respective task forces), policies to ensure women have access to training opportunities, women’s organizations are brought together to address gender specific areas of concern such as domestic violence, trafficking, etc., promotion of females officers to discuss gender specific crimes and job equality. Specific initiatives include awareness raising and human rights training for the Family Island Coordination Councils. The DGFA proposes the

Economic Empowerment programme, which is articulated in the National Gender Equality and Equity Policy and concentrated on the empowerment of single mothers.

Ministry of National Security: This Ministry continues to promote gender equality as there are no restrictions to female participation in safety and security training both nationally and internationally. There are also several females which are Ministerial focal points on national and regional safety and security matters. The Ministry currently has female focal points on the following:

- Trafficking in Persons Secretariat.
- Caribbean Firearms Roadmap.
- Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).
- Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA).
- National Emergency Management Agency Task Force (NEMA).
- Bahamas Wildlife Enforcement Network (BahWEN).

Sustainable Development Goals Unit: The Office of the Prime Minister established the Sustainable Development Goals Unit, which coordinates efforts to achieve the 17 Goals. This Unit comprises government and non-government agencies, including the DGFA. The Unit is currently pursuing two programmes mapped to SDG 5 “*Promote Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls*”. The DGFA has partnered with the Unit, Office of the Prime Minister to advance the MSDCF. The DGFA has launched Family Island Coordination Councils (FICC) in seven Family Islands Districts to focus on community-based partnership in preventing gender-based violence in the communities. The role of Councils in other Family Islands are currently being planned. The Economic Empowerment of Women, proposed by the DGFA sits within the MSDCF to make progress on SDG Goal 1, eradicating poverty.

Bahamas Development Bank (BDB) (March 2024): Has an ongoing commitment to fostering gender-inclusive economic growth across The Bahamas. The Bank believes in the transformative power of entrepreneurship and the critical role that women play in driving economic prosperity and innovation. This foundational philosophy drives the Bank’s dedication to providing equitable access to finance and resources for women entrepreneurs while ensuring that they have the support they need to succeed in the business world.

With funding from the Afrexim Bank, BDB intends to make available funds over 12 months to projects and entrepreneurial undertakings rooted in community impact. This funding is the largest tranche that the BDB would have received in the last 20 years. It reflects our unwavering commitment to promoting economic opportunities for all citizens and creating a more inclusive and equitable society with the support of The Government of The Bahamas.

The BDB launched a new lending product designed specifically for women entrepreneurs. This innovative product will provide loans to women at an incredibly low-interest rate, ranging between 0% to 2%. This initiative is a testament of the BDB's dedication to leveling the playing field and empowering women to achieve their entrepreneurial aspirations without being hindered by financial barriers. By offering preferential financing to women entrepreneurs, it aims to address the unique challenges and barriers they face in accessing capital and resources.

Ministry of Health & Wellness: This Ministry is currently in the programmatic design phase for introducing GBV services and clinics in the primary care setting. Phased implementation is slated to commence in 2025.

Train the Trainer Workshop (April 2024): Three offices of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs participated in a 2-day Caribbean Sheroes Train the Trainer Workshop in April 2024. The Workshop was organized in partnership with UNESCO, University of the West Indies and the Ministry of Youth.

The burden of violence against women and girls in the Caribbean region is growing, with a significant percentage of women and girls impacted. For example, nearly 40% of women across the Caribbean experience violence at the hands of their partners (UN Women, 2019). The underlying traditional social norms that shape and perpetuate power structures still permeate all layers of society, leading to different forms of inequalities throughout political, economic, and social systems. Power dynamics need to be addressed to eradicate violence against women and girls.

To address these power structures and often intersecting variables, in 2021 UNESCO together with the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Regional Coordinating Office (IGDS-RCO) at the University of the West Indies (UWI), launched the Caribbean Sheroes Initiative. This Initiative aims to develop capacity, produce knowledge, and enhance the skills of young people to promote gender equality within the Caribbean sub-region.

UNESCO in partnership with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in the Bahamas and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Regional Coordinating Office at the University of the West Indies, organized a two-day (2) interactive and face-to-face Train-the-Trainers Workshop on Gender Equality, Advocacy and Development in The Bahamas.

The workshop aimed to ensure a scalable and sustainable implementation model for the country. Workshop objectives were to: Engage in critical discussions and learn from case studies to deepen understanding and application of concepts linked to gender equality, development, and advocacy; Equip trainees with the knowledge and tools necessary to conduct trainings for youth on gender equality; Strengthen skills to effectively mainstream gender issues and perspectives in youth-centered projects and/or programmes; Obtain mentorship, guidance and coaching to enhance pedagogical skills and delivery.

Question 26 – Presence of a national Human Right Institution

Is there a national human rights institution in your country, what measures have been taken to address violations of women’s rights and to promote gender equality?

The Bahamas does not have a human rights institution. However, its commitment to upholding the human rights of its citizens, and residents is solidly anchored in the Constitution. The Ombudsman Bill was tabled in 2023 with reference to Chapter 3 of the Bahamas Constitution and passed in January 2024 passed with an objective to ensure the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and International human rights. The Act was amended to include reference to the Paris Principles. The Law has not yet been enacted.

Equally important is the on-going robust national dialogue on the importance of human rights and the corresponding international instruments. While challenges remain in the process to harmonize the national legislation and international obligations, efforts to facilitate the implementation continue. The country commitment to human rights is further demonstrated through:

- Its election to the Human Rights Council for the term 2019-2021, becoming the first Member State of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to the body. The country’s membership provided the unique opportunity to demonstrate the country’s commitment to human rights while bringing increased diversity to the international discourse on global human rights issues such as women, and girls.
- Ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment CAT in May 2018, becoming the seventh Caribbean State to do so.
- A dedicated Department of Gender and Family Affairs within the Ministry of Social Services. Further, the Children and Family Services Unit of the Ministry of Social Services has the power to investigate abuses directed at women, children, and persons with disabilities.
- An Ambassador to the Organization of American States, Her Excellency Gezel Farrington. In early 2024, Her Excellency Gezel Farrington was appointed as the Ambassador of Human Rights, succeeding Mr. Damien Gomez, KC. In this capacity, Ambassador Farrington is dedicated to promoting and safeguarding human rights both domestically and internationally. Her responsibilities include diplomatic engagement with various stakeholders and providing education and insights to policymakers on critical human rights issues.
- In July 2024, Ambassador Farrington embarked on a familiarization tour with the Human Rights and Human Security Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This tour included visits to several rehabilitation and correctional facilities across New Providence Island. These visits underscore her commitment to understanding and improving human rights

conditions within these institutions. The tour encompassed key facilities, including the Bahamas Department of Corrections (BDOCS), Carmichael Road Detention Centre, Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, The Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls, and The Simpson Penn Centre for Boys. During her visit, Ambassador Farrington engaged in initial meetings with senior staff members at these facilities. These interactions provided her with valuable insights into the operations, challenges, and achievements of each institution, with the goal of identifying areas that require improvement and support.

International Human rights organizations generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing reports their findings on human rights issues. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views. Access to real-time data continues to be a challenge.

The Constitution protects the rights of all, regardless of gender. Women are free from economic discrimination within public service, and the law provides for equal pay for equal work. Women enjoy the same economic legal status and rights for women as for men. Enforcement in the private sector requires strengthening⁷⁵.

Over the past five years, several Bahamian non-profit organizations have championed and advanced women's rights and gender equality across the archipelago. Human Rights Bahamas, the D'Marco Foundation, The Crisis Centre, Women United, R.I.S.E Bahamas, FOAM (Family of All Murder Victims) and Equality Bahamas have been at the forefront of this important work. Here are some of their key initiatives and achievements:

1. The Bahamas Crisis Centre:
 - Support for Survivors of Violence. The Centre operates a free and confidential hotline which offers free and comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence, including counseling, shelter, and legal assistance. They work closely with local communities to create safe environments for women and children, ensuring they receive the care and protection they need to rebuild their lives.
2. Human Rights Bahamas:
 - Advocacy and Legal Support. Human Rights Bahamas has been a strong advocate for women's rights, providing legal support and representation for women facing discrimination and gender-based violence. They have worked tirelessly to ensure that women's rights are protected under the law and that justice is accessible to all women.
 - Public Awareness. Human Rights Bahamas is engaged in numerous public campaigns to raise awareness about women's rights issues, educating the public on the importance of gender equality and the need to combat gender-based violence

⁷⁵ National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, Bahamas. HRC Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Forty-third session. A/HRC/WG.6/43/BHS/1

3. The D'Marco Foundation:

- Community Outreach programmes: The D'Marco Foundation has implemented various community outreach programmes aimed at empowering women. These programmes focus on education, vocational training, and health services, providing women with the resources and support needed to improve their lives and achieve economic independence.
- Support for Survivors of Violence: The foundation offers comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence, including counseling, shelter, and legal assistance. They work closely with local communities to create safe environments for women and children.

4. R.I.S.E Bahamas:

- Advocacy on Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Rise Bahamas has been a staunch advocate for the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence. They have organized rallies, social media campaigns, and community workshops to raise awareness about GBV and promote policies that protect women and children.
- Child Protection Initiatives: Recognizing the interconnectedness of women's rights and child protection, Rise Bahamas has also focused on safeguarding children from abuse and exploitation, ensuring a holistic approach to gender equality.

5. Equality Bahamas:

- Policy Advocacy and Reform: Equality Bahamas has been at the forefront of advocating for policy reforms that promote gender equality. They have lobbied for changes in legislation to address issues such as workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and equal pay.
- Public Education and Engagement: Through workshops, seminars, and public forums, Equality Bahamas educates the public about gender issues and the importance of equality. They encourage community participation and foster a culture of respect and inclusion.

Together, these organizations have created a robust and powerful network of support for women in the Bahamas. Their combined efforts have led to increased awareness, legal protections, and community support for women's rights and gender equality.

E: PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

The critical areas linked to this sub-section of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work are:

- Women in armed conflict
- Human rights of women
- The girl child

Question 27 – Actions To Build, Promote and Sustain Peace

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

The country has identified three actions:

- Adopted and/or implemented a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
- Used communication strategies, including social media, to increase awareness of the women, peace and security agenda.
- Increased budgetary allocations for the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

Reduction in crime and violence, and the promotion of peace remains a priority of the Government of The Bahamas. The National Development Plan (Vision 2040) articulates the Government's roadmap to address safety and security. Stated objectives in Vision 2040 related to peace and security are:

- To foster a law-abiding society in which rules are respected and communities can thrive (Goal 3).
- To foster a more efficient, methodical, fair and effective administration of justice through coordinated actions by the police, courts and corrections (Goal 4).

In 2022 The Bahamas Royal Police Department established a Domestic Violence Unit to facilitate the eradication of domestic violence within communities. The Unit is headed by Assistant Superintendent of Police Kendra Wallace-Whyms, the Unit endeavours to support victims regardless of gender, develop strong community relations, provide education, advocacy, crisis intervention, safety building and bystander Intervention.

In 2023/2024 over fifty sensitization campaigns on domestic violence were conducted throughout varied community settings:

- 15 sessions at Police Stations
- 7 sessions at local churches
- 15 sessions with Civic Organizations
- 9 sessions with local schools
- 3 series of 'The Whole Woman: Love me to live and not love me to death'
- 4 series of 'Men Speak'

A Protection of Violence Act was passed in 2023 makes provisions for a protection Against Violence Commission “which shall adhere to regional and international binding principles including that women shall enjoy civil and political rights equally.

In April 2024, a new programme was launched aimed at enhancing the response to victims and survivors of violence and youth crime in The Bahamas by UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) - Caribbean, and the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Section within the U.S. Embassy in Nassau.

The “Vulnerable Population Response for Bahamas Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Agencies Program” is a three-year initiative which will be implemented in collaboration with a wide range of justice stakeholders locally. The program is designed to prioritize access to justice for marginalized populations, enhance redress and support mechanisms for survivors and victims of violence, and provide long-term rehabilitation support for perpetrators. The programme will also support the enhanced capacity of law enforcement and criminal justice agencies in The Bahamas and implement sustainable solutions for enhanced peace and security. The three-part programme seeks to address these issues through:

- i. An assessment of the current government and Civil Society Organizations’ (CSO) violence prevention and response systems and victim/survivor support mechanisms.
- ii. The creation and implementation of harmonized judicial and law enforcement response protocols and training.
- iii. Strategic Violence Prevention and Response Interventions, including working with perpetrators towards addressing GBV and youth crime, which are continued threats to security and safety

The Ministry of Social Services, Information & Broadcasting's, Department of Gender & Family Affairs, launched its 3rd Gender-Based Violence Prevention Family Island Coordination Council (FICC) at St. Andrews Anglican Church Community Centre, George Town, Exuma, October 27, 2023. Council Members were inducted from Exuma and Ragged Island.

The council is geared towards mobilizing stakeholders into active partnership to engage their community to prevent gender-based violence. The Council Members included community members from various government and non-government agencies, including law enforcement, pastors, health, education, Kiwanis, and advocates.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force maintains internal security. The Royal Bahamas Defence Force is primarily responsible for external security but also provides security at the Carmichael Road Detention Centre (for migrants) and performs some domestic security functions, such as guarding embassies. These Government entities (MNS, RBPF and RBDF) concerned with security

and peace have together seen an increase of 7.1% in budget allocation - from \$204m (FY 2022/2023) to \$219m (FY 2024/2025) – Figure 37.

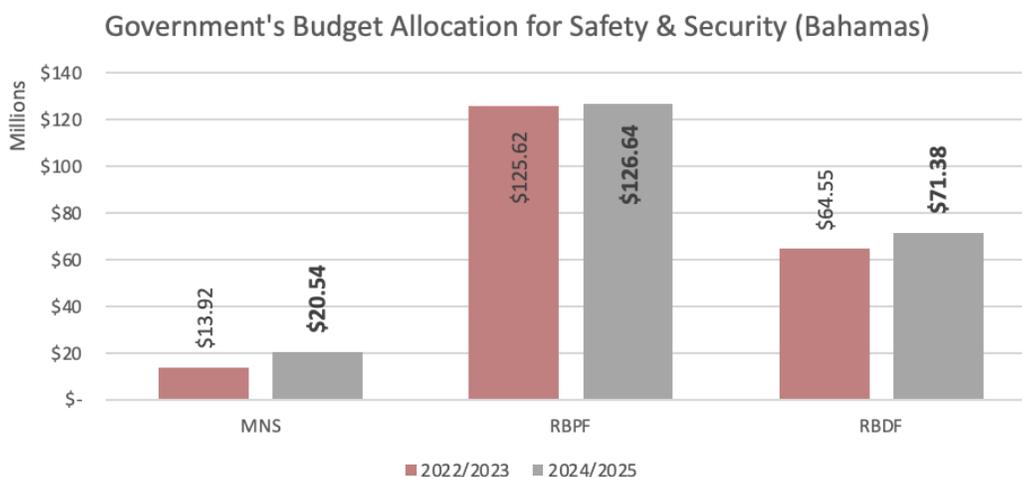


Figure 37: GoB Budget Allocation for Safety and Security. Data source, national budgets. Figure, Consultancy.

In 2019, the Citizen Security and Justice programme, facilitated by the MNS in collaboration with RBPF and the Department of Rehabilitative Welfare Services and various training and educational institutions and civic groups, conducted training for hundreds of community residents were trained in 2019 in how to identify, address and find resolution to challenges relating to GBV, conflict, parenting and sexual assault. The sessions were free for the public.

The Government continues to appreciate the global issues around women, peace and security. As such, it has engaged its gender machinery into active partnership with international technical experts such as UN Women, MESECVI, UNHCR and CEDAW representatives for technical support in the advancement of best practices in advancing this agenda. There is full consultation and participation from health providers, law enforcement, the National Reporting Committee (NRCM), Faith-Based Organizations, CSOs and NGOs that assist with advocacy, food, shelter and as peacemakers.

Question 28 - Actions to increase women’s leadership, representation and participation in conflict prevention, peace-building and humanitarian efforts

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?

The country has identified three actions:

- Promoted and supported women’s meaningful participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements at all levels

- Promoted equal participation of women in humanitarian and crisis response activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level
- Adopted gender-responsive approaches to the prevention and resolution of armed or other conflict

Specific to women’s meaningful participation in peace processes, the country flags Marion Bethel, a prominent lawyer, who serves on CEDAW. Additionally, in 2022, Ms. Jewel G.L. Major Assistant Director of Legal Affairs, within the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, and Coordinator of the National Reporting Cooperation Mechanism (Human Rights), was elected to the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee. In so doing, she became the first representative from The Bahamas and from the Caribbean Community to serve on this Committee. Ms. Major serves on the Committee as a member of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Lastly, mention is made of Assistant Superintendent of Police Kendra Wallace-Whyns, heads the RBPF Domestic Violence Unit.

Specific to equal participation of women in humanitarian and crisis response, the country notes the leading contributions of Gayle Outten-Moncur, Deputy Director of the then National Emergency Management Agency (formerly); Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis, the national consultant advisor to the Government during the pandemic; Dr. Pearl McMillan, the Chief Medical Officer; and Dr. Nikkiah Forbes, Infectious Disease Consultant – all played invaluable roles in the country’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently a female is the lead representative for the safety and security sector in the Disaster Risk Management Authority of The Bahamas. In partnership with the Ministry of Social Services, the safety and security officers execute shelter management based on their training. It should be noted that this training provides sensitization on vulnerable populations such as the elderly and women and meeting their needs such as providing dignity kits. The protocols for humanitarian assistance are a part of the country’s overall Disaster Risk Management Response and Recovery Policy.

In times of national crises and disasters, the ultimate decision-making arm is the Cabinet, which is comprised of 24% (or 7) women. Supportive government machinery to the Cabinet is the *Disaster Risk Management Act (2022)* establishes the Disaster Risk Management Authority (DRMA) which replaced and assumed all responsibilities of the former DRA and NEMA. It also provides for the development of a comprehensive policy framework to guide the new disaster risk management regime. At the national level, the DRMA is responsible for developing the National Disaster Risk Management Plan and the National Disaster Emergency Plan. By this new Act, the Disaster Preparedness and Response Act, 2006 and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority Act 2019 were repealed. The DRA when it existed was led by a Board of Directors and Executive Team. Of the 10-member Board, four (4) were females. Of the 5-member Executive Team, three (3) were females⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ <https://www.dra.gov.bs/our-leadership/>

The RBPF plays a pivotal role in conflict prevention and peace-building. There are currently two (2) women represented on the 15-person Executive Leadership Team of the RBPF. The team serves as the decision-making and strategic planning organ of that organization. Over the past five (5) years, representation of women on this Team has seen growth.

The role of Industrial Unions is to improve conditions for workers in ways that promote individual, family, and community well-being (Hagedorn et al., 2016)⁷⁷. Thus, they address issues that extend beyond the workplace, such as peace, justice, and quality of life (Baker, Stock & Velazquez, 2011)⁷⁸. In The Bahamas, there are three (3) umbrella unions (the TUC, NCTUB and the BNATUC), under which are several professional unions. Of the three umbrella unions, women have and currently serve in leadership.

Question 29 - Actions to enhance accountability for humanitarian violations

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?

The Bahamas has identified four (4) specific actions:

- implemented legal and policy reform to redress and prevent violations of the right of women and girls
- Strengthened institutional capacities
- Increased access of conflict-affected, refugee or displaced women to violence prevention and protection services
- Taken measures to combat illicit arms trafficking

In support of the above, the country directs attention to prior mentions of the Ombudsman Act; as well as the Protection Against Violence Act (2023), which establishes a framework to provide victims with education as well as for the creation of a Violence Commission to receive complaints.

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to protecting all citizens and visitors within its borders, irrespective of legal status. The TIPS Unit works continuously and collaboratively with law-enforcement personnel, healthcare providers, labour inspectors to monitor and conduct screening exercises to identify suspected victims of trafficking. Once such cases have been identified, the Unit works with victims from identification to through to the justice (court) system and beyond, if needed. To increase awareness on the topic and signs of trafficking

⁷⁷ Hagedorn J, Paras CA, Greenwich H, Hagopian A. The Role of Labor Unions in Creating Working Conditions That Promote Public Health. *Am J Public Health*. 2016 Jun;106(6):989-95. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303138. Epub 2016 Apr 14. PMID: 27077343; PMCID: PMC4880255.

⁷⁸ Robin Baker , Laura Stock , and Valeria Velazquez. *The Roles of Labor Unions* (2011). Occupational and Environmental Health 6th Edition.

persons, the Unit is engaged in training with law enforcement, healthcare professionals and members of the judiciary to improve victim care, recovery and justice.

Youth Parliament

The Bahamas Government annually hosts the Bahamas Youth Parliament, providing young people with the opportunity to participate in and receive training on parliamentary procedures and policies. This initiative promotes active youth engagement and participation in governance.

Question 30 - Actions to eliminate discrimination and violations of rights of girls

In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

The Bahamas has identified four (4) specific actions:

- Strengthened girls' access to quality education, skills development and training
- Implemented policies and programmes to eliminate violence against girls
- Implemented policies and programmes to eliminate child labour, and to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work undertaken by girl children
- Promoted girls' awareness and participation in social, economic and political life

Labour

In 2001, The Bahamas ratified both ILO Conventions No. 138 on the Minimum Age Convention and No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, leading to the implementation of legislation and programmes to meet convention requirements. In 2017, reaffirming its dedication, The Bahamas pledged to end child labour by 2025 at the 4th Global Conference on World Day Against Child Labour. Subsequently, with technical assistance from the ILO and the Caribbean Secretariat, at the 5th Global Conference in 2019 The Bahamas drafted its Child Labour Policy, which was formally adopted in 2021, and aims to prevent, prohibit, and eradicate child labour.

In 2022, The Department of Labour, in collaboration with the National Tripartite Council, hosted a labour symposium marking the ratification of ILO Conventions No. 159 and No. 190. Post-symposium, the country commenced implementation of its the National Child Labour Policy.

Responding to ILO recommendations for Member States to establish a National Steering Committee (NSC) for policy coordination, The Department of Labour advocated for the creation of the National Steering Committee on Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour. In 2023, the government approved the establishment of this committee, which is currently in the planning stage of implementation. Once operational, the NSC will oversee and coordinate national efforts outlined in the Child Labour Policy, aiming to effectively combat child labour across The Bahamas.

Education Access

The education system in The Bahamas is characterized by universal access and free public education for boys and girls. The Ministry of Education has introduced a programme to evaluate the levels of the learning loss per child, firstly to determine the extent of the problem, and then to place each student on an accelerated, tailored programme. MoETvT has also launched a number of initiatives, throughout the education cycle, to better equip the Bahamian people to participate in the digital and technological innovations of our age.

Additionally, it has launched a new curriculum in a variety of subjects, including:

- A new Computer Studies curriculum where it is intended to introduce students in grades 7 – 9 to coding and the development of software.
- A new Primary level Mathematics curriculum has received its first update since 2010. Along with developments in the Primary Science Curriculum, these innovations are based on the fundamental principle of gender equality and equal access to learning for all.

For a long time, enrollment rates of men and women at BTVI indicated that there has been a disparity in enrollment in favor of men. However, there has been a positive shift as the rate of enrollment for women is gradually increasing. To date, 59% of the student population at BTVI is female. Nonetheless, there is a need to increase female enrollment in non-traditional technical programmes.

Health

Focused attention has been given to tackling inequities in health outcomes due to malnutrition, early childbearing (e.g. anemia) and exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases

The National HIV/AIDS Centre (NAC) has recognized that HIV and STIs significantly impact the quality of life for thousands of persons living in The Bahamas. Quality of life among persons living with HIV and STIs is also impacted by other societal-based factors.

To this end, the NAC has instituted measures to mitigate the negative effects of factors such as poverty and lack of transportation to improve access to healthcare for all people living with, and at risk for HIV and STIs. The NAC provides formula free of cost to all HIV positive women who have delivered infants if they are unable to obtain substitution feeding, based on supply. The Bahamas AIDS Foundation also provides free meals to people living with and affected by HIV, including economically vulnerable women and girls.

Access to antiretrovirals (ART) has also been improved through the decentralization of the NAC pharmacy, which now allows for access of ART at multiple sites in the country. HIV and STI care were integrated into National Health Insurance to improve medical coverage of persons affected by these diseases, and the NAC has provided additional training and updated guidelines for physicians in the private sector to accommodate persons who are unable or

unwilling to seek care at the National HIV/AIDS Centre or Grand Bahama Health Services. Finally, Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Programme, originally rolled out in 2016, has been expanded to include access at private facilities with the aim of decreasing HIV transmission among persons at high risk of infection.

The Adolescent Health Care Center continues to support “at risk” adolescents and their families. Services provided include quality, free sexual and reproductive health services inclusive of provision of free contraceptives, and antenatal, and postnatal care. Antenatal and postnatal healthcare, as well as counselling services is also provided. During these encounters, lab investigations inclusive of tests for Sexually Transmitted Infections (HIV, Hepatitis B, Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia) are available. Conditions identified are addressed early at no cost to the client.

Awareness Promotion and Youth Empowerment

A number of actions have been undertaken in this area during the reporting period, through a wide cross section of actors in society. These include:

1. The Cooperative Youth Entrepreneur Empowerment Seminar (YEES), a Ministry of Agriculture initiative seeking to increase entrepreneurs offering proper guidance, training, funding and mentorship for success. In this Initiative, exhibition where twenty-nine (29) young women and men participant to create and exhibit an array of craft and food preservative products.
2. In 2018, the Office of the First Spouse of the Prime Minister conducted an impactful school and community educational programme, targeted at junior high school adolescent girls to encourage the girls to delay pregnancy, complete high school, attend tertiary education and become productive citizens in society. The programme was launched in commemoration of the United Nations International Day of the Girl Child where the girls also received information on gender-based violence.
3. Since 2000, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, in collaboration with the House of Assembly, executes annual Youth Parliament sessions. The purpose of Youth Parliament is to expose Bahamian youth (ages 16 to 25 years) to parliamentary procedures as well as current issues, affecting youth development. Young persons are selected, trained and make presentations in the House of Assembly in two sessions. In 2022, these presentations were on mental health and GBV⁷⁹. Youth Parliament affords the young person the opportunity to voice their concerns, offer solutions, raise a level of consciousness in our society and bring to the fore the positive contribution made by youth to the economic, social and cultural development of the nation. This experience can be motivating and course-defining for many teens. In the October 2023 session of the Youth Parliament, 14 of 39 participants were females.
4. STRAW (Strengthening, Transforming, Restoring, Affirming Young Women) Incorporated Center for Young Women© is a non-profit community-based learning facility which has

⁷⁹ <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2022/may/10/youth-parliament-activities-return-after-covid-hia/>

been providing safe, positive and structured mentoring, advocacy and intervention programmes for adolescent girls, teen girls and young women in The Bahamas since March 2004. Its Executive Director and Founder is Ms. Therenia A. Cunningham.

5. The Bahamas Crisis Centre is a registered, non-profit organization that provides services to people who are the victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The Centre has been operational since 1982, founded by Dr. Sandra Dean-Patterson. The Centre extends its reach through radio shows, newspaper articles, workshops, school talks, and presentations to churches and civic organizations – to name a few.
6. Bahamas Girl Guide Association was founded in 1915 in the country, but has been a consistent interwoven element in Bahamian society since 1946. Since that time, it has been inspiring young girls, preparing them to lead respectful, civil, meaningful lives as empowered women growing in service to colleagues, peers, families and nation.
7. The Bahamas Debutante Foundation was launched in 1997 by Cristina Johnson, a veteran educator, is a non-profit organization, is a mentoring programme that 'aims to help young ladies make the transition from adolescence to young adulthood with poise and grace. More than 1,500 Bahamian grade 12 young ladies have benefitted since its inception. Debutantes need grade point averages (GPA) of 3.00 or above and are active in their schools and communities.
8. Governor General Youth Award (GGYA) is an exciting self-development programme available to all young people throughout The Bahamas. The programme aims to equip youth with life skills to make a difference to themselves, their communities and their country. During the period under review, the percentage of girls increased to 51% of the total GGYA membership.
9. Families of All Murdered Victims(FOAM) is a grass root, community, non-profit organization FOAM seeking to help the children who parent / parents were murdered. Established by Khandi Gibson in 2012 and is committed to helping bridge the gap between law enforcement and the public with families and young children who have lost loved ones to violence. F.O.A.M's primary objective is to create linkages to and direct resources for professional counseling, financial assistance, food, clothing, shelter, job placements, care packages, meals and school supplies to surviving children and families of murdered relatives.
10. The Dignified Girl Project (DGP) has a mission to promote menstrual equity and to educate and empower adolescent girls by equipping them with the knowledge and tools to manage their menstrual hygiene. Phillippa Dean, DGP founder's "My Period, My Pride" seeks to educate girls on period management and period hygiene, to embrace their period, and to destigmatize period-shaming. Since its inception, (DGP) has helped thousands of girls and women, through their distribution of menstrual products, and undergarments, and established 20 distribution partners. Recently DGP addressed an unspoken concern, or "hidden barrier" to education with the launch of a free sanitary napkin machine initiative. DGP outfitted 16 schools – 14 on New Providence, including one special needs school, and two schools in the Family Islands with machines.
11. FEMSTEM (Bahamas) is a youth-based nonprofit, female empowering organization founded in July 2019, and aims to provide high school girls with the fundamentals for self-growth, access to opportunities and career development - specifically in science,

technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) fields. Founded by Mrs. Thyrona Ginton. FEMSTEM offers year-round initiatives and programmes exposing girls between the ages of 13-18 to the opportunities in STEM.

Biological Resource

In 2019 The Biological Resources and Traditional Knowledge Act was passed to conserve and provide a framework for protecting valuable resources, particularly those used in the crafts trade, such as sponges, coral, silvertop palm, and cascarilla bark oil. The Bahamas has a predominantly female led and elderly artisan community which depend on such resources. The Bahamas, a signatory to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization under the Convention on Biological Diversity, supports the international agreement's goal of fair and equitable benefit-sharing from genetic resources. This act aims to preserve these resources and enable local communities to benefit from them. This Act would also work in conjunction with the Declaration of Protected Tree 2021 which is intended to protect not only ecologically significant trees/plants but those of cultural and biological significance.

F: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION

The critical areas linked to this sub-section of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work are:

- Human rights of women
- Women and the environment
- The girl child

Question 31 - Actions to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies **In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?**

The Bahamas identified four (4) specific actions:

- Supported women’s participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management and governance
- Increased women’s access to and control over land, water, energy, and other natural resources
- Promoted the education of women and girls in science, engineering and technology and other disciplines
- Taken steps to ensure that women benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy

The Government of The Bahamas understands that its natural resources and environment are integral to the identity, viability and economy of The Bahamas. Admittedly, more can be done to enforce, monitor and protect biodiverse areas throughout the archipelago.

The Government’s Blueprint for Change foreshadowed the creation of a Marine Wildlife Protection Division within the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. In fulfillment of this policy mandate, the Ministry of National Security established the Bahamas Wildlife Enforcement Network (BahWEN), a wildlife enforcement agency with a thrust on policing environmental and natural resources in the country. The BahWEN Steering Committee is led by a female officer with expertise and a budget has been allocated for operational expenditure. In the short to medium term, the BahWEN is to be statutorily established via a proposed Bill. As a prelude to the Bill, draft regulations for BahWEN are being developed.

The country has also been bold in its stance on the national, regional and international stage related to climate change’s threat to sustainability and for championing greater accountability on the part of those most exacting the heaviest burden. Although actions to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies are vast, insights will be given on key flagship efforts.

Related to women’s participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management and governance, in March 2023 the Government and the Commonwealth Secretariat jointly hosted the side event “Gender Equality and Climate Change – Commonwealth perspectives” with the purpose of elevating public policy discourse on climate

change and its impacts on the most vulnerable among populations — women and girls as well as persons with disabilities.

Also, women have held and continue to hold key positions within the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, which is responsible for shaping and implementing environmental policies in The Bahamas. For instance, past or current female ministers or senior officials have played critical roles in advocating for and developing policies related to climate change, conservation, and natural resource management. Most recently, key roles are held by Dr. Rhianna Neely, Director at the Department of the Environment. Another key role held by a woman in this area is Mrs. Rochelle W. Newbold, Special Advisor on Climate Change & Environmental Matters in the Office of the Prime Minister.

In the realm of international relations, women have been instrumental in advancing The Bahamas' interests by ensuring that critical, responsible, and inclusive environmental issues are addressed in international instruments, resolutions, and other forums. Several strategic diplomatic positions are currently held by distinguished Bahamian women, including:

- H.E. Patricia Hermanns, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva.
- H.E. Paulette Bethel, Ambassador to the People's Republic of China.
- H.E. Cheryl Bazard, KC, Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union.
- H.E. Leslia Miller-Brice, Non-Resident High Commissioner to CARICOM.
- H.E. Gezel Farrington, Ambassador for Human Rights.

Related to increasing women's access to and control over land, water, energy and other natural resources, three points are highlighted:

- **Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience:** The Bahamian government has focused on gender-sensitive disaster risk management, recognizing the importance of including women in these efforts. For example, during Hurricane Irma, the evacuation of southern islands considered the significant population of older women. Gender and family sensitive shelters were established, and various training programs in disaster preparedness and shelter management were conducted to ensure that women are equipped and included in resilience-building activities ([BID Blog](#)).
- **Natural Resource Management:** Efforts have been made to empower women in natural resource management. Initiatives include improving women's access to land, water, and energy resources, crucial for their roles in household and community sustenance. The government, along with international partners, has worked on policy reforms to ensure gender considerations are integrated into environmental governance and resource management ([UN Women](#)).
- **Mangrove Restoration Projects:** The Waterkeepers Bahamas project, supported by the Bahamas Protected Areas Fund (BPAF), involved community members, including women, in mangrove restoration. This initiative provided training in sustainable

practices and raised awareness of the ecological importance of mangroves. The project saw the successful replanting of over 30,000 mangrove propagules, enhancing the local ecosystem and providing women with opportunities to engage in environmental stewardship ([Caribbean Biodiversity Fund](#)).

- **Gender Specific Agriculture development:** Integrated Land Management Project with Ministry of Agricultural and Global Environmental Fund to enhance climate-resilient food production across productive agricultural landscapes through sound integrated landscape management and land degradation neutrality approaches in The Bahamas which has an outcome of gender sensitive business investment plans.

Related to women's and girls' participation in STEM disciplines, the country has been bold in its stance on the national, regional and international stage related to climate change's threat to sustainability and greater accountability on the part of those most exacting the heaviest burden. Although actions to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies are vast, insights will be given on key flagship efforts.

Regarding measures to ensure women can benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy, the country flags that the tourism industry accounts for the majority of employment and women form 51% of the employee base. Through the Small Business Development Center, women entrepreneurs have increased access to tools and development programmes that assist them in business portfolio diversification and building climate resilience in their business. The government has also supported The Bahamas Development Bank to increase its offerings to provide support to women-led businesses in the Green and Blue Economy, to access loans at concessionary rates.

These actions collectively evidence The Bahamas' commitment to enhancing women's roles in managing and benefiting from natural resources, contributing to greater gender equality and sustainable development.

Bahamas National Trust (BNT)

The vision of the BNT is to have a comprehensive network of effectively managed Bahamian national parks and protected areas that is recognized as a powerful force for global biodiversity conservation which is supported and enjoyed by the public. A woman holds the Executive Director position of the BNT. And, of its 9-member executive team, six (6) are women.

Climate Change Youth Ambassadors

The country has been intentional to elevate the youth voice in climate change, through Climate Change Youth Ambassadors, which sits at the highest level in the country, at the Office of the Prime Minister Climate Change & Environmental Advisory Unit (C2EAU). Annually, one male and one female between 18 and 25 years old is selected from a pool of applicants to lead the establishment of a platform to advance climate change matters and spearhead engagement with Bahamian youth and key stakeholders across The Bahamas, the Caribbean region, and

internationally. Successful candidates represent The Bahamas in local and international fora, including COP and shall identify and organize projects and programmes that can be implemented in the country to support the advancement of climate action.

University of The Bahamas (UB)

UB introduced the "Small Island Sustainability: Environmental and Ecosystems Management & Marine Science" Bachelor's programme to develop leaders in the environmental and climate space. This programme strongly emphasizes training women and girls in Environmental Sciences, Climate Science, and Sustainability. Over the past decade, this programme has successfully developed practitioners and leaders in climate and related fields, offering development opportunities and scholarships for young women.

Question 32 - Actions to integrate gender perspectives into disaster and climate resilience policies

In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?

The Sexual Offences Act (1991) nor the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act (2008) have explicit provisions focused on protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in disaster settings and situations. Similarly, environmental legislation enacted within the reporting period is silent on gender perspectives for women and girls. The law review process however is sufficiently agile and responsive to allow for strengthening of the legislation.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the country has exerted efforts to modernize considerations on gender perspectives in national policy, through the Protection Against Violence Act which was tabled and passed in 2023. The existing National Resilient Recovery Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan does reference gender responsiveness as a cross-cutting theme for the five goals of the policy. Furthermore, there have been no international or human rights assessments flagging that national legislation functions as discriminatory in enforcement; or causes an undue burden on any sector of the law-abiding public.

Note is made of the Disaster Risk Management Act (2022) and the National Disaster Risk Management Policy with its National Disaster Emergency Plan. There is acknowledgement that these instruments and frameworks do have room for greater integration of gender perspectives.

With respect to environmental conservation and protection, women in The Bahamas have enjoyed leading roles which opens opportunities to influence policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience that are gender sensitive. Currently, and for a long time before, women have led environmental NGOs and

comprised the majority of the technical expertise as noted in question 31. In government, women lead in the environmental health services, environmental planning and protection, forestry and in protected areas management. To build technical capacity among the ranks of women in government, agencies have been strategic with the enrollment of technical officers into programmes to build skills in project management, environmental impact assessments, monitoring and emergency response.

In the face of climate change, women and girls remain a priority group. In terms of access to resources for rebuilding and reconstruction post-Dorian and Post Covid-19 Pandemic, there were significant barriers for women and girls. First, there were fewer options for women, in terms of employment on return to their homes and communities. One key informant noted that while men could easily be employed in the construction sector and utilize their own skills to rebuild their homes, women were much less equipped in this regard.

In The Bahamas, women make up a significant portion of the workforce in the tourism sector. Approximately 60% of tourism employees in The Bahamas are women ([Bahamas Government](#)) ([UN Women Data Hub](#)). This indicates that a substantial number of Bahamian women were impacted when the Tourism industry either collapsed or came to a temporary standstill in Abaco and Grand Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian and across the Bahamas during COVID. In these circumstances, women were less able to recover from the financial losses brought on by these crises. Men were also more likely to own property and had better access to credit.

In The Bahamas, there are large groups of migrants and citizens living in unregulated housing communities. These communities have little access to reliable electricity and clean, potable water. These communities are more vulnerable to the impacts of heavy rains and storms, due to poor construction and lack of infrastructure. Various initiatives are ongoing to address these unregulated communities to ensure residents transition with dignity into regulated and safe housing.

During the country's response to Hurricane Dorian, the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) (2019) did cite concerns at seven (7) of the government-operated shelters. IFRC noted that these shelters were not compliant with the Sphere Standards, which are the most widely used humanitarian guidelines for gender responsive shelter planning and management. The IFRC-cited deficiencies:

- Open space sleeping arrangements and a lack of safe spaces for women and girls to access toilet and bathing facilities, which could increase the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Lack of adequate access to sexual and reproductive health services, including adequate access to obstetric and new-born care, access to contraception and safe abortion care, clinical management of rape, and treatment and referral for sexually transmitted infections.
- Lack of privacy for health consultations.

- No child protection checks performed for shelter volunteers, despite the presence of social workers in all emergency shelters in New Providence. This situation increased the risk of SGBV for children interacting with shelter volunteers. Further, there was a lack of adequate counselling and specialized services to support the psychosocial well-being of the displaced children⁵⁷.

The severity of Hurricane Dorian taught The Bahamas many lessons that led to changes. PSAs about including axes, hammers and life jackets in your hurricane preparedness kit have been disseminated. The government has made available assistance to single parents to prepare their homes once a storm is pending. Shelter managers have been equipped with additional knowledge on the needs of women and children in shelters, to ensure safety and overall wellbeing. Information on the local impact of climate change has been shared and women targeted, to increase their knowledge and capacity to respond. Finally, various grants have been awarded to women-led organizations through the GEF Small Islands Grant programme to build capacity among women and girls to adapt and respond to climate change appropriately and to build resilience in the aftermath of storms and to severe weather.



SECTION FOUR

NATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS &
PROCESSES



SECTION FOUR: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

Question 33 - Insight to the National Strategy for Gender Equality

Please describe your country’s national strategy or action plan for gender equality, including its name, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the targets under SDGs.

The Bahamas’ National Development Plan (Vision 2040), was drafted in 2017 in part as an agreed vision for the country’s development; and in part as an accountability mechanism for progressing on and achieving its international and regional obligations.

A selection of the international conventions and treaties ratified by The Bahamas is depicted in Figure 38.



Figure 38: Ratified Conventions and Treaties of The Bahamas. Data Source, DGFA. Figure, Consultancy.

Regionally, The Bahamas as a member of CARICOM is committed to fulfilling its mandate of inter alia improved standards of living for all. The goals of CARICOM include: gender equality and promotion of social justice in development, which underpins the focus areas of education, health, poverty and the economy. As a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), The Bahamas supports its initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and the prevention, punishment, and eradication of Violence Against Women (VAW) as a signatory to the inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.

The Bahamas has also, through adoption of varied UN resolutions, agreed to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. The Bahamas also adopted notable resolutions related to women and gender equality at the World Health Assembly. Namely,

- Women's Health resolution – WHA49.25 (1996), recognizes that importance of women's health beyond reproductive health and challenged Member States to ensure focused attention given to women's health throughout the life course.
- Strategy for Integrated Gender Analysis and Action into the Work of WHO – WHA60.25 (2007).
- Strengthening the Role of the Health System in Addressing Violence, in particular Against Women and girls, and against children – WHA67.15 (2014), calls for health systems to be strengthened to better respond to a prevent violence against women and girls through integrated services that address the physical, mental, and social health impacts of violence.
- Social Determinants of Health – WHA74.12 (2021), recognizes that gender inequality is a significant social determinant that affects health equity.

During the 56th Session of the Human Rights Council, The Bahamas:

- Co-sponsored resolution A/HRC/56/L.25/Rev.1. Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls; and
- Co-sponsored resolution A/HRC/56/L.26. Menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality.

One significant resolution is the "Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system" (E/2021/L.20), which was adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council. This resolution emphasizes the need for systematic gender mainstreaming across all UN policies and programs, ensuring that gender equality is a core consideration in all areas of the UN's work.

Furthermore, The Bahamas has shown commitment to gender equality through its participation in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). During its sixty-fifth session, the CSW adopted conclusions focusing on strengthening legal and policy frameworks to prevent violence against women and promoting gender-responsive institutional reforms. These efforts align with The Bahamas' broader commitment to advancing gender equality both domestically and within the international community.

Additionally, The Bahamas has supported initiatives like the **Caribbean SHEROES program**, which aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls across the region.

The Caribbean Sheroes Academy's interactive sessions aimed at enhancing advocacy skills, nurturing gender-inclusive projects, and championing the United Nations' Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), unfolded on April 9 and 10, 2024, in New Providence, Bahamas. The two-day session represented a collaboration between the UNESCO Office of the Caribbean, the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture in The Bahamas, and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies - Regional Coordinating Office. [Caribbean SHEROES Advances Gender Equality in The Bahamas UNESCO](https://press.un.org/en/2021/ecosoc7050.doc.htm)<https://press.un.org/en/2021/ecosoc7050.doc.htm>

To ensure alignment with these obligations, Vision 2040's outcomes specifically reference strategies that speak to Gender Equality. This framework has yet to be formalized but is being reviewed for update and adoption.

The operational principles of gender equality sit within the Ministry of Social Services and are now framed by its draft National Gender Equity and Equality Policy, which was initially developed in 2011.

Although still a draft, the Gender Policy (2023 - 2033) is a vital tool for the implementation of gender equality. The Gender Policy lays a framework to address differences between women and men to which unequal value is ascribed, by eliminating all structural and attitudinal barriers within government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. The Policy is centred on seven (7) goals and strategies with timelines.

The guiding principles of the gender policy include:

- Gender Equality and Social Justice.
- Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.
- Evidence-based Development; and
- Results-based Implementation and Collaborative Implementation.

The Gender Policy is poised to promote actions to address the inequalities and inequities that exist between males and females in The Bahamas. In 2023, the DGFA received support from the Caribbean Development Bank to update the draft. It was a widely consultative process, with 25 consultation sessions held across sectors that extended beyond the nation's capital and into selected Family Islands. It is currently under Ministry review and will be put forward for Cabinet approval. The DGFA continues its advocacy for resource mobilization to develop an Implementation Action Plan to accompany the Gender Policy.

Question 34 - Tracking the national budget for gender equality

Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.

Currently, The Bahamas does not have a mechanism in place to track gender responsive budgeting. To support this in the future, training has been offered across different stakeholder groupings.

A first step to this end was a facilitated session by DGFA and UN Women in 2022 with Bahamian Parliamentarians to heighten sensitivities to topics such as equity, gender-responsive budgeting, understanding gender and gender equality, among other topics. In 2023, The Bahamas had representation at a sub-regional training on gender responsive budgeting workshop in Trinidad and Tobago facilitated by UN Women Caribbean. The Bahamas will continue to work towards achieving a strengthened mechanism to track gender responsive budgeting.

Question 35 - Mechanisms for Stakeholder Engagement on the BPfA

What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The SDG Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister is a statutory entity with a mandate to facilitate, implement and monitor the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The SDG Unit has formalized commitments from government and non-government stakeholders in the execution of its duties. Its mission is accomplished:

- i. through systematic collaboration, advocacy, capacity building, and policy development, facilitation, implementation and integration of the SDGs in our national development efforts.
- ii. by working with civil society, academia, the private sector and other government partners to strengthen policy and build institutional capacity to effectively promote and implement the SDGs.
- iii. by developing and leverage national, regional and international partners to increase the provision of technical assistance regarding the implementation of the SDGs.
- iv. by serving as a coordinating body for training, implementation and execution of the government's vision for sustainable development goals in The Bahamas.
- v. Ensuring the alignment of all prioritized projects within the sustainable development strategy.
- vi. seeking new opportunities for implementation of the government's objectives to oversee the execution of the SDGs strategies.
- vii. serving as a technical resource for the Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the execution of the Sustainable strategies and their general strategic planning, policy and programme formulation. (source: SDGs. Un.org/).

The National Reporting Cooperation Mechanism (NRCM) also serves as a formal mechanism to serve in this initiative for The Bahamas.

The Bahamas acknowledges that there continues to be technical, financial and legal challenges in its ability to meet its reporting obligations, due mainly to the difficulty and delays in obtaining data from national institutions, the high cost in time and resources and the lack of technical capacity in producing such reports.

While we still have a lot of ground to make up in this regard, the fact that we are taking our reporting obligations seriously is evidenced by the establishment of the NRCM in June 2015. The NRCM was established to:

- design a master framework for the scheduling, preparation and submission of the required reports for each treaty.
- design a procedure for the delegation of recommendations forwarded by the Treaty Committees.
- formulate a strategy for the implementation of the recommendations accepted to all responsible agencies.
- determine and develop a monitoring device for the recommendations implemented and.
- keep abreast with any human right violations occurring or that may be perceived to be occurring.

The NRCM is led by the Office of the Attorney-General. The NRCM is comprised of representatives from approximately nine different government agencies and two persons from Civil Society organisations. All of the persons around the table have been appointed by the Permanent Secretaries within their ministries or on the recommendation of respected civil society organisations. The approach used to formulate this body was very strategic. A number of training sessions were held, geared towards the education, engagement and empowerment of the NRCM members.

Question 36 - Process for stakeholder contributions

Please describe how stakeholders have contributed to the preparation of the present national report.

In preparation of the 30th Anniversary Report, consultations were held with government, non-government agencies, and civil society along with the private sector, and international partners to inform collective and comprehensive views of the country's progress since the last reporting period. The methodology also included publicly available document sourcing, key stakeholder interviews, and data gathering from multiple national and international sources.

Government officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Security, Health and Wellness, Labour and the Public Service, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Education, Technical and Vocational Training, Bahamas National Statistical Institute, National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Office of the Prime Minister provided offline responses to relevant questions within their purview. Similarly, non-government agencies, civil society and the private sector including Civil Society Bahamas, the Organization for Responsible Governance, Caribbean Institute of Women in Leadership (Bahamas Chapter) provided written responses upon request. Independent Human Rights Activist groups and specialists in various disciplines also provided valuable guidance and insights.

Question 37 - Timeline for implementing recommendations

Please describe your country's action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women.

Currently, there is no national action plan with timelines for implementing the CEDAW recommendations. Notwithstanding, since the country's constructive dialogue with the CEDAW Committee in October, 2018, several recommendations have been actioned. Case in point, subsequent to the CEDAW Committee recommendation, a series of capacity building and exposure opportunities continue to be made available to the DGFA's personnel. Appreciating the interconnectedness of gender equality and women's rights to other sectors, training exposures have been extended beyond the DGFA to incorporate other ministries that work in this space.

In July 2023 and 2024 two officers from the DGFA as well as officers from the Royal Bahamas police Force, The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services, along with the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture attended a five-day GBV and domestic violence training at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador.

The training course which was organized by the United States Embassy, focused on intervention strategies on gender-based violence, including challenges with current models and to explore pathways for improvements. Specific topics covered in the course included:

- Introduction to the role of the Prosecutor's Office in violence against women
- Evolution of the care model for violence against women
- International legal framework
- Behaviors and needs of the victims of domestic violence in Justice Systems
- Psycho-social framework of Domestic Violence
- Femicide – overall and specific conceptual framework
- Prosecutorial means to effect protective measures
- Discussion of jurisprudence in domestic violence crimes

In April, 2024, four officers from the DGFA participated in a two-day Training of Trainers Workshop organized by UNESCO in partnership with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture and the Institution for Gender and Development Studies, Regional Coordinating Office at the University of the West Indies. The workshop focused on the framework of the Caribbean Sheroes Institute to ensure its methodology is replicated and sustained in The Bahamas.

Objectives of the workshop included:

- Engaging in critical discussions and learn from case studies to deepen understanding and application of concepts linked to gender equality, development, and advocacy;
- Equipping trainees with the knowledge and tools necessary to conduct trainings for youth on gender equality;

- Strengthen skills to effectively mainstream gender issues and perspectives in youth-centered projects and programmes; and
- Obtain mentorship guidance and coaching to enhance pedagogical skills and delivery.



SECTION FIVE

DATA AND
STATISTICS



SECTION FIVE: DATA AND STATISTICS

Question 38 – Areas of Most Progress

What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress in the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

The country has selected the following:

- Promulgated laws, regulations.
- Conducted surveys to produce national baseline information on specialized topics (disability).
- Other.

In 2021, the Government of The Bahamas repealed the Statistics Act, 1973; to establish the Bahamas National Statistical Institute (BNSI) and The Bahamas National Statistical Institute Board; to make provision for a national statistical system. This system facilitates the establishment of standards for collecting, compiling, analyzing and publishing official statistics and for related purposes. The BNSI seeks to incorporate gender statistics in its work. Development Goals Unit which monitors the implementation of the SDGs.

The Common Country Analysis (CCA), 2023 update noted that the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2040 (explicitly aligned with the SDGs) has not been officially adopted. However there has been a promising development in this regard as the Governor General noted in the 2023 Speech from the Throne that the government national development plan, which aims to cover a 50-year period will be developed and encompass, inter alia, all the administration's proposed steps towards securing greater economic security and growth. Coupled with the introduction of this new NPD will be a Bahamas National Development Plan Bill which is expected to be introduced during this legislative period.

Furthermore, in keeping with key LNOB expectations to include those who are marginalized, under-represented or otherwise left out of national development processes, the administration announced the introduction of a new Local Government Bill to “make local government in the Family Islands more effective and invest in critical Family Island infrastructure”.

During 2021, the Government of The Bahamas presented its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the High -Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York. The previous CCA also highlighted that progress towards each of the SDG indicators, as tracked by the United Nations, only provides a partial picture of country-level SDG progress. However, the 2023 Sustainable Development Report (SDR) provides some insight into progress but lacks the detail and precision that a central SDG data tracking or monitoring entity/mechanism could provide.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Immigration are currently working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the Migration Governance Index (MGI). The MGIs aim is to help governments, upon request, take stock of their migration policies and strategies to identify good practices and areas with potential for further development. The

MGIs open dialogues with governments and other relevant stakeholders to identify priorities on the way forward. With a focus on government ownership of the process, the MGIs offer support at the national and local levels to gradually improve migration management systems, which takes into consideration aspects of gender. Through this process, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted an initial Workshop with senior Government stakeholders from: Immigration; Social Services; Education; Health; Disaster Risk Management; and the Department of Statistics. Most recently, on 13 June, 2024 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-hosted a Joint Technical Meeting with the IOM to review the first draft of the MGI. As a result, it was determined that data collection on migrants is an area of strength and an area for further development. The final consultation for the MGI is scheduled to be held in September, 2024.

On the international front, The Bahamas recently demonstrated its commitment to equality by endorsing the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) in February 2022. The MSDCF is the United Nations instrument for planning and implementation of its development activities towards the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda. The MSDCF outcomes cover all SDGs, recognizing their interconnected nature. Equality is part of the second priority area. By signing the MSDCF, The Bahamas Government committed to designing and adopting laws and policies to eliminate discrimination, address structural inequalities, ensure the advancement of those at risk of being left furthest behind and to use relevant data and information towards this end.

Question 39 – Future Priorities for Strengthening Statistics

Over the next five years, what are your country's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics?

The Government of The Bahamas is committed to strengthening gender statistics by investing in capacity building to ensure the availability of high-fidelity, high-quality data. The Bahamas National Statistical Institute (BNSI) serves as the official statistical system in the country. Staff of the BNSI engage in on-going capacity building. Related to women's equality, and within the reporting period (September 2023), BNSI was exposed to Gender Statistics and Indicators training along with staff from the Department of Gender and Family Affairs. This training course was organized by UN ECLAC and hosted in Trinidad and Tobago.

In March 2024, officers from the Department of Gender and Family Affairs joined other stakeholders in a 3-day capacity building workshop for environment and climate change statistics and indicators organized by BNSI in collaboration with CARICOM. The workshop's agenda had special focus on monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Strategic Plan of the Community, gender analysis and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. The workshop was purposed to garner input to deliver a compendium for tracking progress on all climate and environmental-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the country based on the targets, indicators, and collected data.

The Project also aims to reinforce the capacity of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to produce Environment and Climate Change statistics consistent with regional and international standards. Specifically, the Project focuses on strengthening the data sources to enable the production of environment and Climate Change statistics as outlined in the Global Set on Climate Change Statistics and Indicators and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among others.

The Framework for the Development on Environment Statistics, developed in 2013 is a flexible, multi-purpose conceptual and statistical framework that provides an organizing structure to guide the collection and compilation of environment statistics at the national level, bringing together data from the various relevant subject areas and sources into a multipurpose database or information system.

Its main objectives are to:

- Provide a comprehensive set of descriptive statistics on the state of the environment and the human activities that affect the environment;
- Provide the necessary environmental data for developing indicators for different policy purposes; and
- Support the development of environmental-economic accounts.

Tools, including the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) have been developed to measure the state and progress of their environment statistics. The completion of the ESSAT should be an organic part of a national consultation on the state of environment statistics and on a strategic plan for the development of environment statistics. Accurate statistics on climate change drivers, impacts, vulnerability, mitigation and adaptation are of critical importance to support global environmental policies, foremost on climate change and ocean acidification abatement; likewise, for regional and nationally relevant policies.

Climate change remains one of the most important challenges facing every country, disrupting national economies, affecting lives, and costing people, and communities today and in the future. The Bahamas, like many Small Island Developing States are experiencing the growing impacts of climate change, which include rising sea levels.

Question 40 – Nationally Prioritized Gender-Specific SDG Indicators

What gender-specific SDG indicators have your country prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs?

Specific indicators prioritized in Goal 5 include: 5.1.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.3.1.

Monitoring of these indicators will take place through the implementation of the Gender Equality and Equity Policy (currently draft), and the Women’s Health and Well-Being Survey, among others. The preliminary findings of the latter were publicly presented recently. The establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister strengthens accountability for action on and monitoring of the SDG indicators.

On the international front, The Bahamas recently demonstrated its commitment to equality by endorsing the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) in February 2022. The MSDCF is the United Nations instrument for planning and implementation of its development activities towards the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda. The MSDCF outcomes cross-cuts all SDGs. In practical terms this endorsement, committed the Government committed to designing and adopting laws and policies to eliminate discrimination, address structural inequalities, ensure the advancement of those at risk of being left furthest behind and to use relevant data and information towards this end.

The Common Country Analysis (CCA), 2023 update report highlighted that the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2040 (explicitly aligned with the SDGs) has not been officially adopted since its formulation in 2016. In the 2023 Speech from the Throne articulated that the Plan, which aims to cover a 50-year period, will be developed upon and encompass, inter alia, all the administration's proposed steps towards securing greater economic security and growth. Coupled with the introduction of this new NPD will be a Bahamas National Development Plan Bill which is expected to be introduced during this legislative period.

Furthermore, in keeping with key LNOB expectations to include those who are marginalized, underrepresented, or otherwise left out of national development processes, the Government announced the introduction of a new Local Government Bill to “make local government in the Family Islands more effective and invest in critical Family Island infrastructure”. During 2021, the Government of The Bahamas presented its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the High -Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York. The previous CCA also highlighted that progress towards each of the SDG indicators, as tracked by the United Nations, only provides a partial picture of country-level SDG progress. However, the 2023 Sustainable Development Report (SDR) provides some insight into progress but lacks the detail and precision that a central SDG data tracking or monitoring entity/mechanism could provide.

Question 41 - Routine Data Disaggregation

Which data disaggregation is routinely provided by major surveys in your country⁸⁰?

Where information systems are present and mature, data disaggregation available from routinely executed national surveys include:

Demographic variables (e.g. sex, age, nationality, and marital status)

Geographic variables

Socio-economic status (e.g. education, employment status and income)

Additionally, there are discreet data solutions within the health sector, and the RBPF that captures data with some focus on gender, providing valuable insights into a wide range of issues affecting women in the country.

⁸⁰ Major surveys are routinely executed by the Bahamas National Statistical Institute.



SECTION SIX

CONCLUSION
AND NEXT STEPS

CONCLUSION

One signature mark of the national preparatory process for the 30th Anniversary Report has been its collaborative approach with government, non-government organizations, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. This approach engendered a sense of camaraderie and ownership of the document. The sharing of responsibility between the various agencies assisted with the dismantling of silos and a commitment to completing the work.

As the country looks to the future of gender equality, it is encouraged. This encouragement stems for a number of significant Government initiatives such as the impending construction a new specialty hospital in New Providence and a new hospital in Grand Bahama; as well as a strengthened public health ecosystem with broadened mental health and wellness initiatives. Its optimism is further rooted in the nation's aggressive movements to implement the second phase of National Health Insurance with the introduction of catastrophic health care; the work of the SBDC and the augmented role of the DGFA. All of these – and more – have accrued to closing the gender equality gap.

More remains to be done. Achieving fully women's equality requires ongoing effort and adaptation to new challenges. The Bahamas is resoundingly committed to this. With the DGFA at the epicentre, The Bahamas has prioritized four (4) areas over the next five years for realizing more meaningful gains. First, scaling-up capacities and resources for implementing and monitoring The National Gender Equality and Equity Policy Action Plan Framework, the roadmap for synergizing action. Second, heightening advocacy actions for raising awareness, influencing policies and mobilizing communities to create systematic change to dismantle women's inequality. Third, strengthening relationships and linkages with community of partners for maximizing impact, inclusive of establishing a coordinating inter-agency committee. This will necessitate corporate and civil society engagements, international collaborations and involving future generations. Fourth, improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data to better understand the challenges women face and to track progress in closing gender gaps. Also, to enhance capacity to regularly assess the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives and adjust policies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

It is envisioned that in the next reporting period The Bahamas would have co-ideated a more gender equal society that promotes and protects the rights and opportunities of women across all sectors.



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