

SEVEN THINGS FOR IMMIGRANTS TO KNOW IN TIME OF DISASTER

Presented by:



NORTH CAROLINA
JUSTICE CENTER

1. IMMIGRANTS AND MIXED-STATUS FAMILIES MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR FEMA BENEFITS

FEMA is the federal government agency that gives both immediate assistance after a disaster and provides cash benefits for longer-term relief. ALL people, with or without immigration status, are eligible for the short-term, non-cash benefits provided by FEMA – shelter, food, and evacuation, for example.

SOME immigrants, who have certain qualifying lawful statuses, are eligible to receive cash assistance from FEMA. Also, if one person, even a minor child, in the household, has lawful status and a social security number, the family can apply for and receive FEMA benefits. FEMA does not share information about your immigration status with immigration authorities.

More specific information about immigrant eligibility for FEMA assistance is found at www.ncjustice.org/publications/resources-for-natural-disasters, and can also be found at www.fema.gov/press-release/20210318/fact-sheet-citizenship-status-and-eligibility-disaster-assistance-faq in multiple languages.

2. RECEIVING DISASTER BENEFITS HAS NO IMPACT ON AN IMMIGRATION APPLICATION

Applying for or receiving disaster-related benefits has NO impact on your immigration status, and never has under any policy in the last few decades. Immigrants who are eligible can use all of the following with NO impact on their immigration status:

- Immediate assistance (temporary shelters, food, evacuation) whether it comes from FEMA, non-profits, or local government
- FEMA cash assistance (Individuals and Households program), if eligible.
- D-SNAP (disaster food stamps)
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance, if eligible.

Read more at the flyers at www.ncjustice.org/public-charge, with versions in seven languages.

This video in English: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sEoOkXDDXY&t=96s and Spanish: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD7Qp9PH3KQ&t=2s specifically discusses that immigrants can receive disaster relief benefits with no impact on their immigration status.

3. ICE IS NOT CONDUCTING IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT IN DISASTER AREAS

Sometimes federal agents, including those from ICE or CBP (border patrol) are present in disaster areas assisting other federal agencies. ICE considers the areas where disaster relief and recovery are ongoing to be “protected areas” and is not conducting immigration enforcement activities to the greatest extent possible in those areas. People should feel safe accessing shelters and other disaster relief resources without fear of immigration enforcement. You should not be asked about your immigration status while accessing immediate emergency relief (shelters, food distribution) and do not have to answer questions about it to access those resources.

Information on this here in multiple languages: www.dhs.gov/news/2024/09/25/dhs-statement-safety-and-enforcement-during-hurricane-helene

Find more help at www.legalaidnc.org/helene

4. IMMIGRANTS CAN ACCESS EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE

If you are in need of emergency medical assistance, all immigrants, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for emergency medical care to treat serious or life-threatening conditions.

Information on Immigrant Access to Health Insurance is found here in English: www.ncjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NC-Health-Insurance-Eligibility-for-Immigrants_ENG-1.pdf and Spanish: www.ncjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NC-Health-Insurance-Eligibility-for-Immigrants_SPAN-1.pdf

5. ALL IMMIGRANTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR DISASTER SNAP (FOOD STAMP) BENEFITS

As of October 3, 2024, the state of North Carolina had not yet announced the availability of “D-SNAP” which are food stamps/nutrition assistance available to people who are impacted by disasters. Typically, those disaster food stamps are available to ALL persons, with or without lawful immigration status. Stay tuned to learn whether or not this program will be launched in North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

6. SOME IMMIGRANTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR DISASTER UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

All immigrants who are lawfully present, authorized to work, and have a social security number, may be eligible to apply for regular unemployment benefits if they lost their jobs due to a disaster and are eligible/available to work elsewhere. This includes a wide group of immigrants including green card holders, refugees, asylees, TPS holders, DACA holders, student visa holders, asylum applicants with work authorization, and more. “Regular” unemployment benefits don’t apply to every situation where a person’s work was interrupted by a disaster, but the program can still assist many who have lost their jobs due to a natural disaster. For more on applying to regular unemployment insurance, visit www.des.nc.gov/individuals/apply-ui

A narrower group of lawfully-present immigrants including green card holders, refugees, asylees, trafficking victims, certain victims of domestic violence and people with humanitarian parole for more than one year are eligible for more generous benefits called “Disaster Unemployment Benefits.” These benefits are given to people who, due to a disaster, have lost their jobs, their work is temporarily interrupted, they are physically unable to get to their work, can’t work due to injury caused by a disaster, or they are a contractor whose jobs have been cancelled or impacted by the disaster. These benefits can last for a longer time period than “regular” unemployment benefits. For more on applying for Disaster Unemployment Assistance in NC after Helene, visit www.des.nc.gov/dua

7. YOU CAN RECOVER IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS IF THEY ARE LOST IN THE DISASTER

You can find information on how to replace or recover your immigration documents lost due to natural disaster here: www.uscis.gov/newsroom/immigration-relief-in-emergencies-or-unforeseen-circumstances