



St Eustatius

post-hurricane
Irma assessment

Child protection sector

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ACRONYMS

| | |
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| ASC | After School Care program |
| BES | Bonaire, St Eustatius, Saba |
| CoG | Court of Guardianship |
| COPI | Command at the Place of Incident |
| CCRIF | Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Facility |
| CYF | Center for Youth and Family |
| DMC | Disaster Management Committee |
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| EBT | Eilandelijk Beleidsteam |
| ECE | Expertise Center in Education |
| GBV | Gender based violence |
| GVP | Gwendolyn van Putten Secondary School |
| IAP | Information and Advice Point |
| IASC | Interagency Standing Committee |
| IND | Immigration and Naturalisation Office |
| MHC | Mental Health Caribbean |
| MHPSS | Mental health and psychosocial support |
| MYF | Mega D Youth Foundation |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| OCW | Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science |
| PES | Public Entity Saba |
| RCN | Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland |
| SSP | School Safety Plan |
| Stenapa | St. Eustatius National Parks |
| SZW | Netherlands Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VWS | Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports |
| Winair | Windward Islands Airways |

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BACKGROUND

Immediately before and after Hurricane Irma's direct hit on the island nation of Sint Maarten an unknown number of adults and children fled for safety to other Caribbean nations, and as far away as the United States and the Netherlands. Many of these evacuations were undertaken in chaotic conditions with little time for preparation. Adequate registration systems and regular border control mechanisms were not always in place to track the movements, including those of many children without their parents or other legal guardians.

A lack of reliable registration data and/or flight or ship logs has left a gap in the understanding of the impact of Irma, and the subsequent Hurricane Maria's impact on displacement from Sint Maarten, rendering meaningful protection needs assessments difficult. Given the wide-scale impacts of the disasters in the region and initial challenges in humanitarian movement and communication, it is difficult track displaced persons for monitoring and support. This is a particular concern with regards to children who have, or are believed to have evacuated without their parents or guardians and for whom authorities have little formal documentation about their destinations and contact information.

Movement between the islands to facilitate access to improved educational, employment and health opportunities through reliance on family and community networks is an established tradition in the Caribbean. It has been also used in natural disasters as a mechanism to protect vulnerable family members, including those with fragile health conditions, as well as children.

UNICEF recognizes that these mechanisms can afford culturally appropriate and viable protection to potentially vulnerable children. UNICEF is however also worried about the protection risks that can be posed with unregulated movement of children across borders, particularly when communication is already a challenge.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The governments of Sint Maarten, the Dutch Kingdom, and the Public Entities of St. Eustatius and Saba have expressed concern about the location and status of Sint Maarten residents, particularly children, who evacuated as a result of the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. On 15 September 2017, the Acting Governor of St. Eustatius, Julian A.C. Woodley, made a formal request to the UNICEF Netherlands National Committee to provide support to children who were evacuated to St. Eustatius (hereon referred to as Statia) and are being cared for in Statian host families.¹ It was reported that most children, and adults who came to the island, had relatives here who had agreed to host them.

UNICEF agreed to assess the need for support to these children from St Maarten, as well as make a rapid assessment of potential needs of Statian children post-disaster in view of their rights to protection and well-being. This report provides an overview of initial findings.

This post disaster needs assessment was conducted on the island from October 10th to 13th by two UNICEF staff members, Marlies Filbri – Programme manager Caribbean and Malia Robinson - child protection in emergencies advisor. The assessment consisted of discussions with relevant stakeholders and visits to facilities.

Below an overview is presented of the situation of the children from Sint Maarten currently hosted by families in Statia based on a rapid assessment. It is not a definitive account. Some challenges in collecting information should be noted, namely:

- No information (such as registration lists) were available to the assessment team in Sint Maarten prior to traveling to Statia. Data in general is lacking regarding many aspects of the emergency and emergency response in St Maarten.
- Detailed registration of the evacuees (adult and children) were made in St Maarten (2 life coaches of Sint Eustatius were present and cooperated with IND and KMar to register those who got on the planes) and Sint Eustatius but only for those who arrived in the organized evacuation on Winair, though different versions of the lists were shown to the assessment team rendering it difficult to ascertain the final numbers (these are verified below as best as possible based on triangulation of information from informants)
- Stakeholders in Statia had varying levels of involvement at different times in the process; thus informants' accounts were not always in accordance with each other.
- Due to school holidays the UNICEF assessment team did not have direct access with children or adults from Sint Maarten in any way that allowed for collecting first hand information.²
- All but one day that the team was in Statia was school holiday so contact with school personnel and opportunities to observe students in schools was very limited.

¹ Another request was also made by the Governor of Saba.

² The only contact made was observation of four very young children (ages 1 – 4) who were attending the Buzzy Bee day care center during the time in which the team made a site visit led by the center Director.

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

- i. Request from the Public Entity of Statia (see above)
- i. UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action3 (as relevant – see below)

| Child Protection - Priority Core Commitments and Benchmarks | |
|--|--|
| <p>Commitment 1: Effective leadership is established for both the child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) cluster areas of responsibility, with links to other cluster/sector coordination mechanisms on critical inter-sectoral issues. Support is provided for the establishment of a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) coordination mechanism.</p> | <p>Benchmark 1: Both child protection and GBV coordination mechanisms provide guidance to all partners on common standards, strategies and approaches, ensuring that all critical child protection/GBV gaps and vulnerabilities are identified; information is provided on roles, responsibilities and accountability to ensure that all gaps are addressed without duplication. MHPSS coordination mechanisms are established, with linkages to relevant clusters.</p> |
| <p>Commitment 3: Key child protection mechanisms are strengthened in emergency-affected areas.</p> | <p>Benchmark 3: A plan is in place for preventing and responding to major child protection risks, building on existing systems; safe environments are established for the most vulnerable children.</p> |
| <p>Commitment 4: Separation of children from families is prevented and addressed, and family-based care is promoted.</p> | <p>Benchmark 4: All separated and unaccompanied children are identified and are in family-based care or an appropriate alternative.</p> |
| <p>Commitment 5: Violence, exploitation and abuse of children and women, including GBV, are prevented and addressed.</p> | <p>Benchmark 5: Affected communities are mobilized to prevent and address violence, exploitation and abuse of children and women; existing systems to respond to the needs of GBV survivors are improved.</p> |
| <p>Commitment 6: Psychosocial support is provided to children and their caregivers.</p> | <p>Benchmark 6: All child protection programs integrate psychosocial support in their work, in line with the IASC MHPSS guidelines.</p> |

3 https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CCC_042010.pdf

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Evacuation from Sint Maarten to Statia

According to informants, residents of Statia with family in Sint Maarten became extremely concerned about the well-being of their relatives and family friends in the immediate aftermath of Irma. Media accounts of the extensive destruction to homes and other infrastructure on the island, and particularly the reports of looting and violence were distressing to watch. For at least a couple of days there was essentially no communication with persons on the island, which heightened fears and concerns.

There were different perspectives on whom took the initiative for an air evacuation of persons from, or with family from Statia from Sint Maarten. The island council seemed to have been in the lead. Information was disseminated rapidly on social media (Face Book and What's App), and possibly on radio (this was not confirmed). The details of the organization of the evacuation were not been made clear to the team, but one Face Book post dated 11 September announced to the general public that the Statia government was organizing transport from Sint Maarten for "natives of St. Eustatius or residents over in Sint Maarten" who wanted to evacuate. The post also refers to individual efforts that were underway with a request that they work with the government to make it one effort.

It is reported that communication was very difficult with persons in Sint Maarten at that time so coordination with family members was challenging. At least one informant on Statia reported that they placed Sint Maarten-based family members' names on the lists and hoped their messages got through to them. The airport was closed due to heavy damage and a strict curfew was in effect throughout the island.

Most child protection and education stakeholders interviewed in Sint Eustatius reported not having prior knowledge of the evacuations. It is reported that a day or two prior to the evacuation school principals on the island were asked what capacity each school had to absorb additional students and provide those figures.

Information gathered confirms that a total of five Winair evacuation flights and one boat brought 109 persons from Sint Maarten to Statia – 81 children <18 years and the rest adults (more details below). The flights arrived on the 13th of September. The boat arrived at the 18th of September. Two Life Coaches from Sint Eustatius (the care workers who were given the responsibility of following up on the children and adults) flew to Sint Maarten to register the children and adults going back to Sint Eustatius and flew back with the last flight from St Maarten to St Eustatius. There was a list with names of people who would be evacuated but not everybody showed up. As soon as a flight filled up it left to St Eustatius. It was reported that these flights were provided at no cost to the evacuees.

There is consensus that the flight departures happened with very little preparation. It is reported that many children had a matter of hours or less before they knew they were being evacuated, and parents were making rapid and very difficult decisions. A number of persons evacuated had little belongings to bring with them due to the effects of the hurricane and due to the short notice and fact that some were already displaced from their own homes in safer shelter. One informant stated that there was at least one family in Statia that was not aware a family member was evacuated until they were informed that they had arrived.

Other Evacuations to Statia

The assessment team inquired if there were other children or adults evacuated from Sint Maarten who had arrived in Statia by commercial boats, such as fishing boats, as was reported on Saba. All informants stated this was not the case in Statia. It was reported that in cooperation with KNMAR some people with ties to Statia came aboard the Coast Guard vessel and that those persons were registered with the immigration authorities. There was no report of unaccompanied children in these transports. There was a report of persons arriving by boat from St. Kitts, but no reported registration. They had to go through the normal immigration processes.

Status of the evacuated children

According to the Court of Guardianship (CoG), 60 children arrived without their parents and 21 arrived with a mother or father. There was considerable difference in informant reports regarding the legal procedures guiding the evacuation process. Though one informant indicated that all of the children arrived in Statia with documents from Sint Maarten, the final determination of the assessment is that children did not arrive with signed parental permission regarding temporary custody (Power of Attorney). It was reported that in coordination with IND one child did not have a passport (only a birth certificate), and two children were from the French side of Saint Martin, complicating the immigration issue further.

Staff of the CoG reported that in the morning before the flights arrived some life coaches came to the office to inquire about the legal implications of a large number of children coming to Statia from Sint Maarten without their parents, (e.g. needing temporary guardianship). According to the Court of Guardianship staff this was the first they heard of the evacuation. The staff stated that they gave brief Power of Attorney forms to the life coaches to give to the children and families to fill out with legal custody details. The director of the Court of Guardianship was in direct phone contact with Mr. Clyde van Putten, a representative from the Island Council who assured to take all responsibility for the first three months. Those present at the airport reported that there was no contact with any children or adults coming off the airplanes. The tarmac was cordoned off and all passengers were directed into the airport building immediately. From there they were boarded onto buses and transported to the Department of Social Services office building (Community Care Center) for registration and medical check ups.

At the Center life coaches, immigration officials and doctors were present to undertake a detailed registration process for the children and adults. Immigration officials would normally screen persons before crossing a border but were conducting the screening after the fact. Life coaches took detailed information including birthdates, sex, age, custody note (for children), address and phone of caregiver on Statia, planned length of stay on Statia, and school preference. Doctors were on-site determining if children and adults had medical insurance coverage, as well as attending to basic care if needed (e.g. for injuries sustained on Sint Maarten). No difference was made between those with or without medical insurance.

Legal Protection Concerns Arising from Evacuation

Within immigration law in Sint Maarten there are procedures for children to travel across the border with required documentation containing information about destination, contact, custody and other protection information. It was reported in the Sint Maarten child protection assessment that prior to and immediately after Hurricane Irma the normal procedures were not always followed and there was a large movement of adults and children out of the country to various destinations without adequate registration/documentation. A lack of an inter-country or regional information sharing systems makes it even more difficult to track population movement in such circumstances. Child protection organizations such as UNICEF recognize that unregulated movement through porous borders can increase the likelihood of trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation.

In the case of the children evacuated to Statia there is agreement that once on Statia there was a concerted effort to protect the children and adults evacuated and collect pertinent information in a timely fashion. Relevant authorities ran background checks as quickly as possible on adults arriving to Statia, as well as host family members to ensure that none had criminal histories that might endanger children.

For those children who arrived in Statia without their parents/guardians, a number of questions arose that informants reported were not clearly answered immediately. The CoG explained that the caregivers of all children here without their parents/guardians would need a Temporary Power of Attorney (Victims of Hurricane Irma) signed by the children's parents/guardians for the children to live here for three months. The office has been distributing the forms, but does not know how many are being used. It has made an arrangement with the CoG in Sint Maarten for parents there to sign the documents in that office, which will then send the forms to the CoG in Statia to give to the host families. Parents have been completing the forms but statistics on how many documents have been provided were not available at the time of writing. As some children indicated they may stay six months or longer, they would then need their caregivers in Statia to be awarded Temporary Guardianship. This would normally be needed to register children with the Census Office in Statia, and there are additional challenges in unregistering them in Sint Maarten as records were destroyed. Guardianship would also be required to register children for health insurance coverage. In preparation for a possible single application for Temporary Guardianship for all the children planning to remain for the longer term in Statia the CoG did run background checks on families to begin preparing for a faster process, if necessary.⁴

Support to Sint Maarten Children

Immediately after the evacuation to Statia a meeting of all stakeholders was called on the island to quickly put into place a concerted support plan for the children. The life coaches would be undertaking assessments of the host families to determine the appropriateness of the home environment and the family capacities to host additional children and/or adults, along with what additional supports they may need. The Center for Youth and Family (CYF) offered support from its two Social Workers for this process. Mental Health Caribbean (MHC) availed its services for any persons requiring mental health services. The CoG would continue to address the legal questions but had some structural restrictions in its mandate (normally requiring referral from CYF to pick up cases). School placements were quickly organized for all of the children, including those of day care age (more on this below).

The RCN made available some short-term economic supports to residents made vulnerable by the hurricanes, including those displaced to Statia from Sint Maarten, Saba and Bonaire. Benefits in particular for evacuees from Sint Maarten include:

- A benefit for children under 18, who have been evacuated from St. Maarten (to Saba, St. Eustatius or Bonaire) who will stay there for an extended period of time and have the Dutch nationality (e.g. child support, school uniforms). Some schools offered the uniforms themselves. Access to this benefit is dependent on the financial situation.

⁴ The CoG reported that the Public Entity Community Care Services said that it had obtained guardianship of the children, through a decision by the Public Entity, but it was not clear how that would be possible.

- General assistance to be made available to adult inhabitants of St. Maarten (who came temporarily to Bonaire, St. Eustatius or Saba) and have the Dutch nationality; dependent on their financial situation

The St. Eustatius Red Cross has proposed providing a food package for host families for a period of two months but this has not been implemented.

It was reported that at this meeting a suggestion was made by the Public Entity to support host families in building additional rooms in their houses to accommodate the additional children and adults from Sint Maarten.

Educational Support

All children were enrolled in school or day care. All schools had capacity to absorb them, though questions remain about how their new budgets will reflect the increased numbers. The RCN/OCW has arranged additional school furniture and materials to accommodate the larger numbers, and those should arrive in a few weeks.

There are four children between the ages of 1 and 4 attending the Buzzy Bee day care center five days a week. The assessment team made a visit to the center and visited all of the classes. The children are reportedly doing well, fitting in and displaying no signs of concerning behavior.

The Expertise Center in Education (ECE) did an initial inventory of all of the Sint Maarten students at the secondary school (GVP) and no immediate care needs were identified.⁵ After the initial inventory an ECE specialist/art therapist engaged the students some introductory expressive activities. The approach was explicitly not to prompt discussion of distressing events, but to get to know each other. It was noted that many of the Sint Maarten students did not know each other prior to arriving in Statia, and many did not know children on the island. The purpose of the creative activities was to build relationships through fun activities. Afterwards the specialist met with each student to share information about activities that were available to them, where they could go for support, and reassure them that they were valued in the St. Eustatius community in order to promote their integration. At the time of writing contact with the parents or host families had not taken place.

Due to the school holiday the assessment team was not able to spend considerable time with principals, teachers or students. Schools re-opened on the last day of the assessment and the team was able to meet with two principals (2 of the 4 schools) and visited the care team of the Gwendolyn van Putten School, the Secondary School (GVP) to check in on the situation of the students from Sint Maarten, and students in general in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

- Governor de Graaf Elementary School
 - With a total student population of 45, the school hosted three students from Sint Maarten, one of whom has returned. The focus of support was getting the students into a normal school routine as soon as possible. The principal reported that the students were in school the day after arriving on Statia, were immediately given uniforms and well-coached into the school setting and activities.
 - The principal reported that the older of the two students was born in Statia and has spent holiday on the island, so it is not a new environment. He reported that she does remember distressing events such as losing the roof of her house and witnessing the looting, which she talks about. The Orthopedagoog (whom the team met) will be following up with the student and her host family.
 - The principal feels that there is expertise on the island to support students, but there needs to be a stronger coordination system, with a clear protocol outlining roles and responsibilities in emergency situations as concerns the movement and protection of children, the reopening of schools, damage assessments, and communication with schools in Sint Maarten.
 - The principal suggested it would be useful to have hurricane/disaster preparedness in the school, perhaps with the assistance of the St. Eustatius National Parks (Stenapa).
 - He said this would be particularly useful now as with the switch to English language instruction they do not have curricula in Social Studies or Science and they are exploring options for instructional content in those areas with a focus on Statia environment, history and culture.

⁵ In the elementary schools the Orthopedagoogs were checking in on the students from Sint Maarten and will resume after the school holiday.

- Bethel Methodist School
 - Ten students from Sint Maarten brought the total school population up to 115 students, though four students had already returned.
 - The team met one male student who was returning and for his last day had brought chocolates to express his appreciation to the staff (which he shared with the assessment team). Staff said that he did not want to return so was sad.
 - The assessment briefly met another male student who said he would return when his family had electricity returned and he was looking forward to going home.
 - The principal spoke of a young girl from Sint Maarten who had appeared quite happy, but one day looked very sad and said that she missed her family.
 - The principal shared that this has been a stressful series of events he had fallen ill and is very exhausted.
 - The principal reported that he went into the classrooms to try to provide information to prepare the students for the hurricanes but didn't feel he could adequately prepare them given the severity of the storms. He said they don't have materials to prepare effectively and that could be helpful.
 - Need age/developmental-level program for students to explain about weather, storms, hurricanes, clear and simple instructions on how to prepare, etc.
 - Believes that children will inform parents and improve family safety.
 - This should happen more than just at the beginning of the season but during the whole year.

The ECE and schools (including GVP) have made it a priority to focus on educational progress for every student from Sint Maarten in the Statian system and the availability of records with which to return to Sint Maarten in order to resume studies at the appropriate level. These are important efforts that should be supported in order that those students evacuated do not fall back in their studies because of these events. The students from St Maarten arrived without any school-records so their school level had to be guessed by.

Summary of some key challenges for and concerns about the children in the Statian educational system:

- School principals in Statia stated that they did not have information about what schools the students attended in Sint Maarten, nor what was expected in terms of documentation that the students should return with.
- Not clear how long students will stay and some didn't show up after holidays. Apparently they went back to St Maarten without notification.
- Language: Elementary school in Statia is now English language (since last year). Secondary school as well. Students in Sint Maarten study either in Dutch or English, so it was particularly difficult for pre-exam students to be placed in a school system of a different language.
- It was noted that there were three secondary students who could not be supported with the GVP curriculum and were tutored privately. Reportedly they returned to Sint Maarten as soon as schools opened.
- The uncertainty of not knowing how long they will stay in Statia, be away from their families and study in a new school system is a source of distress for the children. It is also a challenge for the teachers and care teams to plan how to best support them.
- Initially when communication with family in Sint Maarten was limited it was very difficult for the children. Now it is reported that most have daily communication with family and that has improved the situation.
- In terms of stress and psychosocial well-being, the ECE reports that some students have expressed worry and concern about their family members back in Sint Maarten, and guilt for having had the opportunity to leave and not be there to assist them in rebuilding. Some informants report positively that these students are quiet and reserved, while others are concerned these are signs of unhappiness or sadness. More follow up is required.
- Children are reported to show signs of anxiety during normal rainstorms usual for this time of year.
- It is important to note that teachers and administrators have also been very stressed ensuring the safety of students and working to reopen schools as quickly as possible. Illnesses are reported and generally a sense of fatigue.
- The students increase the class sizes of all the schools, though they did have the capacity to absorb them. At the Buzzy Bee day care center the additional four children do raise the teacher-student ratio for a couple of the classes.

Extra-curricular Activities

It is reported that the community has really made a concerted effort to involve the children from Sint Maarten in community activities enjoyed by Statian children. A very popular afterschool program is run by the Mega D Youth Foundation (MYF), which provides arts, music, sports and homework tutoring, as well as a warm meal every day after school during the school year (there is also a summer camp). The MYF had a waiting list of about 30 students prior to the hurricanes even before the children from Sint Maarten arrived in Statia. The program made the decision to take in most of the students on the wait list along with about 206 from Sint Maarten who wanted to attend. This increased the total of students in the program, necessitating securing additional space at the community center, hiring some additional teachers, and cutting back on snacks to manage the budget. DOTK also took in two students from St Maarten.

Reports are that the Sint Maarten students are fitting in well and despite the large numbers the program is going well. The MYF is in the process of fundraising to meet the additional costs.

Last Update on Sint Maarten Children

According to the Life Coaches, as of 13 October, of the 109 children and adults who were evacuated from Sint Maarten to Statia, 78 are remaining—58 who are children (so 23 had left). On 17 October, the Director of Community Services stated that 26 children had gone home. However, as schools reopened on Monday 16 October officials were reporting that some Sint Maarten students had gone back for the Statia school holiday the previous week and not returned, so actual numbers of remaining students from Sint Maarten cannot be reported herein.

Most of the stakeholders with whom the team spoke, including the Acting Governor, stated that the Sint Maarten students are welcome to stay as they wish and will be supported. There was mention that the issue is somewhat contentious within the larger island community, with not everyone supporting the effort, but this could not be explored in depth. There are reasonable concerns about how long host families can accommodate the additional financial and social strain of caring for additional members of the household.

Discussions with the life coaches team highlight the support they need to continue this work. They have been overwhelmed with caring for those evacuated, while having experienced two hurricanes themselves. Those who flew to accompany the evacuees expressed how stressful it was for them to see the conditions in Sint Maarten and continue to work tirelessly to support those who evacuated. The team is in need of respite and support, like all of the other first responders.

The questions of the children's legal status remains unclear, at least to the assessment team at this point. As well, the longer-term support for those who choose to stay on Statia will require much better coordination and collaboration than has been shown in the process up until this point.

Other critical concerns remaining include:

- The lack of registration and information sharing systems, and overall gaps in the collection of data—and now how many have gone home? To where and whom?
- Questions about how the return of evacuees will be facilitated: payment of return airfare for those who can't afford it; communication between the Public Entity and the relevant bodies in the government of Sint Maarten; follow up after return, etc.

6 It was noted that these were mostly older teens and some left very quickly without notice. It is not confirmed if these were the same students who could not be accommodated by the secondary curriculum and left when schools resumed in Sint Maarten.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-term

- Evaluate the evacuation process with all stakeholders involved to learn from the process and to define which organization is responsible for which part of the process.
- Support (knowledge, finances and capacity) to appropriate host family assessments, monitoring of children in the homes, schools and afterschool programs.
- Organise events which support children to overcome stress and to be prepared for future traumatic events using film, arts, etc.
- Make available or develop age-appropriate disaster preparedness communication materials for children, particularly for the ages 4 – 10 years.
- Integrate disaster preparedness into school curriculum on Social Studies, geography, eo. Climate and Weather educational programming for students of all ages (age/development appropriate) with a focus on preparation (how the family can prepare, what should be in an evacuation kit, etc.)
- Develop child led and participatory approaches towards disaster preparedness management.
- Coaching and support to social workers, who are responsible for monitoring of children at home.
- Technical and other supports, including coordination and facilitation of services of different organisations on the island in the area of child protection, if needed from UNICEF.
- Support to reintegration planning with Public Entity services, other community services, and relevant Sint Maarten entities, with a clearly articulated plan of follow up.
- Support to disaster - preparedness for schools including lessons on climate change/ hurricanes to create better understanding on the presence of hurricanes, how to get more information and the differences with normal weather conditions.

Medium-term

- If possible, follow up on “lessons learned” meeting with BES, Sint Maarten, Curacao and Aruba to understand how support might be provided to strengthen the system of data registration and evacuations.
- Work with the relevant entities to develop an inter-agency/country registration system, protocol and standard operating procedures for the large-scale movement of unaccompanied children between islands/across borders (include immigration, justice, social affairs, etc.)
- Request UNICEF participation in the Statia Disaster Management Committee to provide technical guidance on child protection in disaster preparedness planning, response and recovery.
- Explore possibilities of on-going school-level (including day care and afterschool) involvement in disaster preparedness planning, response and recovery on Statia.

RELATED AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

St. Eustatius Office of Disaster Management

- Same disaster coordination structure as in Sint Maarten, except:
- Without ESF 10 (tourism)
- Coordination function is not with the Fire Chief, but under the directorship of the Island Secretary (Coordinator focal point)
- In planning for the Irma response the Disaster Management Committee (DMC) expected a large influx of evacuations from Sint Maarten
- They planned to receive locals from St Maarten, or persons with a relationship to Statia to come for maybe a period of up to 30 days.
- They had been very worried about food and medical stocks, as supplies come from Sint Maarten, but there were sufficient stocks on the islands and they subsequently received some from St. Kitts (leading to a review of their reliance on Sint Maarten economically)
- As there is only basic medical care available on Statia the DMC evacuated some medically fragile patients (e.g. physical trauma, pregnant women, stroke patient, etc.).
- The airport was functioning during daylight hours for flights to Curacao, and they used the helicopter to St. Kitts for nighttime evacuations
- Shelter:
- The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church was used as an emergency shelter, primary for elderly and fragile individuals.
Numbers of sheltered:
- Irma = 22 persons
- Maria = 32 persons

Housing damage:

- There was some housing damage and the DMC had considered containers for temporary housing (also for Sint Maarten evacuees), but they would take some time to arrive and they feel that there is sufficient housing available
- The housing challenge is more of an ongoing one—lack of availability of social housing for economically vulnerable families (especially single mothers)

Economic impacts

- Tourism related economic activities are suffering, but flights and ferry service have restarted. Many tourists on St Eustatius come for one or two days from Sint Maarten. So as long as tourism is not restored on St Maarten, St Eustatius tourism will suffer.

Disaster management and child protection

- The Coordinator reported there is a real need for age-appropriate disaster preparedness communication materials for children, particularly for the ages 4 – 10 years
- She recently attended a conference and had examples of child-friendly booklets (from Florida, USA) that could be models to be adapted for the Stata context
- It is important to work with children and families to learn what is important to pack, and consider things that might not seem obvious (certain documents, like school records; earplugs)
- She believes that if children are involved in planning for disasters they will be more likely to grow up taking care of the environment
- The Coordinator reported that there is a legal requirement for every school to have a disaster management plan (but it was not clear to me if they all do)
- School principals and disaster management focal points at each school are responsible for carrying those forward
- The EOC will sit and review the events of this hurricane season and revisit the concerns about children and preparedness.

Regarding preparedness, some stakeholders consulted feel that there could be more effective public information regarding emergency preparedness. There is a tendency for people to wait until the emergency is very imminent so there needs to be an effort to develop a culture of planning and preparedness. This would be strengthened through more interaction with the community, such as dialogues and other public events, in addition to radio and social media outreach.

- Ecumenical prayer services (sans Apostolic and Muslim) at the beginning of hurricane season in June (prayers for protection) and at the end in December (thanksgiving). These could be openings for further preparedness work.
- Climate and weather educational programming for students of all ages (age/development appropriate) with a focus on preparation (how the family can prepare, what should be in an evacuation kit, etc.)
- Child and youth focused DRM (with Stenapa, schools, youth programs, incorporation into day care and school curriculum)

Other Child Protection Issues Arising

- Strategies for mapping and working with community-based child protection mechanisms (e.g. faith communities, youth groups, MYF, Daughters of the King, etc.) to explore opportunities for more out of school support, as well as community-based psychosocial support.
- Further technical support for Life Coaches as requested, perhaps also CYF Social Workers, Red Cross, school care teams, Disaster Committee, etc.
- e.g. Return to Happiness, Psychological First Aid, UNICEF/CP AoR child protection in emergency training, etc.)
- Focus on staff care/support
- Support to domestic violence prevention using social norms change approaches (support to We Care program)

There are so many different programs being planned that there is a need for a strategic and coordinated approach (Strong Roots, DARE, We Care, We Can, possible Red Cross DRR, etc.). Concerns:

- Much of this is targeted at schools and some school administrators reported that this is overwhelming for schools. Aim to integrate as much as possible the different programs.
- Extra-curricular activities should be based on what children are interested in (who is asking the children what they want to do?).
- Need for more afterschool opportunities (currently the two main programs reach less than 25% of school-age children).

Recommendations for Child Protection Response in St. Eustatius

- i.** Support to Life Coaches and others responsible for the monitoring of children evacuated to St. Eustatius from St. Maarten to ensure quality care, documentation and coordination. This should include advocacy for and technical support to the development of protocols and standard operating procedures across the responsible entities.
- i.** Facilitate technical capacity building for Life Coaches, social workers, and other childcare professionals, as well as possibly the Disaster Management Coordinator, Red Cross team leader, etc. in the areas of child protection in emergencies, psychosocial support, self-care and staff care, and other topics identified as priorities. Training should emphasize regional expertise and content/materials adapted for the context of St. Eustatius.
- i.** Technical assistance to domestic violence awareness raising and response programming by the responsible entities. This may take the form of training of social services and community-based organization staff/volunteers (including faith groups), including exposure to/training in social norms change processes; information and communication campaigns (radio, social media, newspaper), community events, etc.
- i.** Support to the establishment of more afterschool options for school-age children, that may include expanding the existing programs (MYF and Daughters of the King), as well as identifying new possibilities for structured activities promoting development and social-emotional learning (e.g. sports, martial arts, cultural, environmental, etc.)



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