

# Economic and Financial Committee

*“Providing sustainable funding to  
create resilience against the impact of  
natural disasters in the Caribbean”*

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Forum: Economics and Finance Committee

Issue: Providing sustainable funding to create resilience against the impact of natural disasters in the Caribbean

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# Context & Historical Background

## **The overall issue**

Recently, a large increase, in natural disasters took place in the regions of the Americas and the Caribbeans, major continental nations are capable of providing aid for the victims in order to counteract and overcome the major hindrances that come with the disasters. The nations in the Caribbean are mostly developing countries, with a low wage demographic, which rely heavily on aid to support their populations.

## **Understanding the natural phenomenon**

The Caribbean islands are prone to various kinds of natural disasters, it is important to find ways to deal with them specifically. These include earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides, flooding, tsunami and hurricanes.

- Earthquakes and volcanoes are a particularly severe threat because of “the irregular time intervals between events, lack of adequate forecasting, and the hazards associated with these” (Organization of American States). These hazards include a direct destruction of infrastructure and the loss of human lives in densely populated areas, or the triggering of other natural disasters such as tsunamis or landslides.
- Hurricanes are severe storms “characterized by winds directed inward in a spiralling pattern” (OAS). They are especially dangerous because of their large zone of influence and considerable destructive potential. Combined with high tides, they can also cause severe flooding in unprotected areas.

## **Ways to deal with the issue**

The ECOFIN committee will need to find ways to support Caribbean nations in the integration of measures to prevent the damage caused by natural disasters into their economy.

This is done through hazard mitigation, that is “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters” (FEMA). This is most effective through the implementation of comprehensive, long term strategies both at the local and national level.

These strategies must:

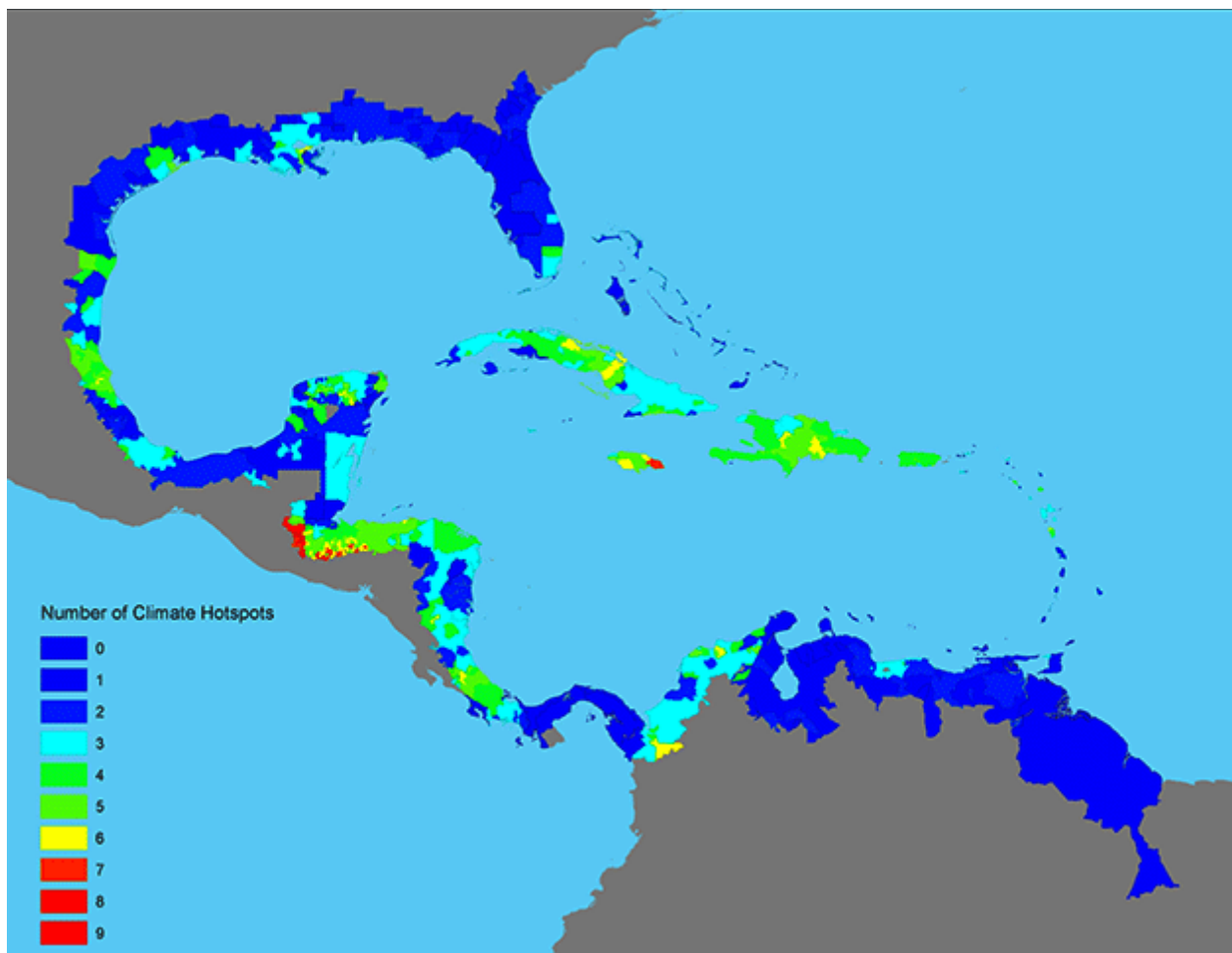
- Take approaches on the most vulnerable and risk-prone areas.
- “Build partnerships for risk reduction involving government, organizations, businesses, and the public” (FEMA)
- Increasing public education and awareness of threats, hazards and security maximizing strategies.

National emergency warning capabilities must be improved in the Caribbean islands. This is done through the installation of “radio broadcasts, cable over-ride systems, sirens and phone messaging systems,” these allow civil service authorities to be effectively contacted (OECD).

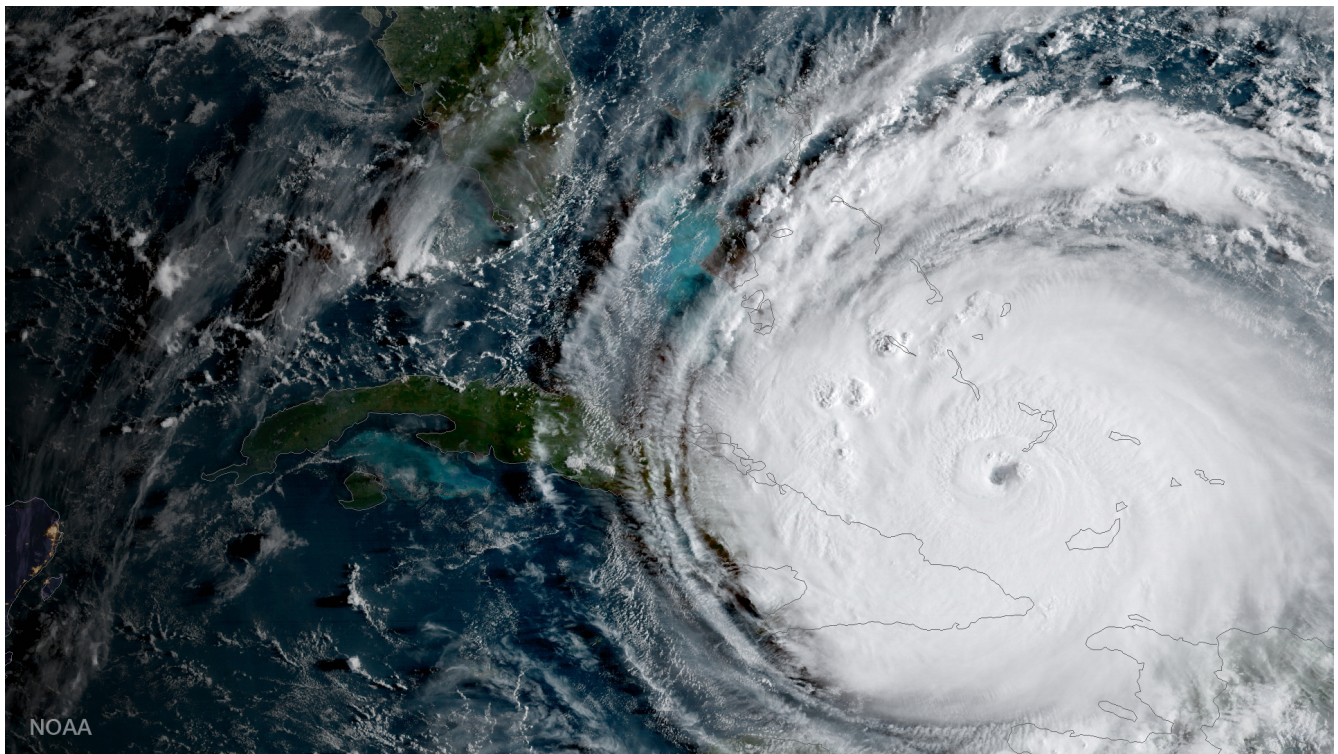
In countries such as Australia, the use of telephone-based communication for emergency warnings is expanding, this is due to the significant increase in the development of mobile networks. Such factors must be taken into account when trying to devise a resolution to deal with the issue in the Caribbean.

Upgrading seismic surveillance networks is also essential. Although earthquakes cannot be predicted, these networks can “facilitate emergency response (by giving the intensity and location of the tremors) and can provide early warning to tsunami-prone regions.” (OECD)

Other tools such as geographic information systems and satellites can allow nations to identify specific regions that are more prone to natural disasters thus allowing for more fit preventive measures. International cooperation may be important in the “deploying (of) satellite systems which offer a wide range of capabilities” (OECD).



Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean number of extreme climate hotspots, by administrative unit. Blues are low number; greens moderate; yellow to red show progressively more (Columbia University).



Hurricane Irma. *Time.com*

### **Recent disasters**

Recent hurricanes in the Caribbean make this topic an even more pressing issue. Hurricane Irma and Maria have recently captured the most public attention.

Hurricane Irma is the strongest “Atlantic basin hurricane ever recorded outside the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea,” it stayed a category 5 hurricane for nearly three days, and caused the largest evacuation in the history of the Bahamas. 95% of the infrastructure of the island of Barbuda was destroyed by the hurricane.

Hurricane Maria is one of the worst natural disasters on record in the Dominican republic and Puerto Rico. After damaging tens of thousands of homes in Puerto Rico, some private companies received contracts from governmental bodies in order to provide infrastructural support (emergency tarps, plastic sheeting...). The help of the private sector, if well regulated, is a viable option when dealing with this issue.

Other notable hurricanes include hurricane Katrina, Jose and Katia.

The magnitude of the impact of the hurricanes is colossal. In Dominica an estimated 95% of the roofs were blown off in multiple parts of the nation. In Puerto Rico electrical services were shut down by the weather, more than 70% lost access to safe water and the telecommunications infrastructure barely worked. The US Virgin Islands has been declared as a disaster zone by the Washington and has ordered assistance to be sent. Many other islands have been affected by

similar circumstances and others such as roads blocked by debris, crops dead, and major touristic sites destroyed and/or shut down. It is important to note that the majority of the islands repair cost are higher than the nations can afford in some cases the costs are predicted to cost up to 3.5 times the GDP of some countries . This will majorly slow down the reconstruction that is needed and will leave the regions unable to sufficiently provide food, shelter, electricity, healthcare and many other necessities for the citizens.

## United Nations Involvement

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has scaled up its humanitarian response in the Carribean island region to help children and families affected by the natural disasters. The UN agency also helped diminish the risk of potential maladies that the islanders could contract (dengue, zika and chikungunya).

“It’s absolutely vital that children who have lived through these traumatic events get the psychosocial support they need,” said UNICEF Mexico Ambassador Thalia, who visited UNICEF operations centre this week to learn more about UNICEF’s response. (UN News)

The World Food Programme (WFP) also sent numerous metric tons of emergency food supplies and other equipment on behalf of the WFP, CARE and Catholic Relief Services, to nations severely hit by Hurricane Irma such as Haiti.

After Hurricane Irma, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated its crisis preparedness plans in several countries in the Caribbean region. This will allow for an immediate response to the disaster such as debris and waste management, emergency employment and supporting core government functions.

The UN system placed in Cuba also put in place a 55.8 Million USD plan to help the two million people severely affected by Hurricane Irma. Several other UN agencies launched a \$15.1 million regional humanitarian response plan to cover the urgent immediate needs of the victims. Even more recently 400 representatives from governments, multilateral and civil society organizations and the private sector gathered at the UN headquarters in New York to raise US\$1.3 billion in pledges and over \$1 billion in loans and debt relief for the support of the areas affected by Hurricane Irma and Maria.

Multiple other UN members and UN recognized/supported organizations have showed concern to the recent catastrophes and have taken the lead to correctly guide the direction the discussions should take:

“The magnitude of reconstruction will require significant levels of financing which we are unable to generate on our own. Countries are highly indebted, with limited access to financing due to their middle-income status,” said CARICOM Secretary-General, Irwin LaRocque. “The task of rebuilding is beyond us.”

“Countries in the Caribbean need support now to rebuild, and to take effective climate action. We need a new generation of infrastructure that is risk-informed, to underpin resilient economies, communities and livelihoods,” said UN Secretary-General, António Guterres.

## Different Perspectives

**United States of America:** The United States has many territories in the regions and was heavily affected by the storms. The US government offered 22 million dollars to support relief in the Caribbean. 54 members of USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team were deployed in 11 different location around the archipelagoes. The US also provide 10 airlifts carrying 185 metric tons of relief supplies (23 Chainsaws 4,260 Kitchen Sets 10,100 Blankets, 5,500 Hygiene Kits, 1,790 Rolls of Plastic Sheeting, 600 pounds of Chlorine, 14,400 Water Containers, 2,000 pounds of water purification tablets), 55 Missiozswer made to deliver aid & response personnel, and also other plans to help water purification. The US also faced major controversy regarding puerto rico and the lack of effort to help the territory which is one of the most heavily impacted places from the hurricanes of the 2017 autumn. The trump administration was also harshly criticized for the lack of support it had for not only its territories such as puerto rico and the US Virgin Islands, but also for refusing to support Cuba which has faced major since the hurricane season.

**Britain:** The UK has stationed about 500 personnel in the islands including 55 police officers, Three aircraft that include medical supplies and aid (shelter for about 1,000 people, rations and clean water. 5,000 solar lanterns) have also been dispatched. the British government also announced a 32 million pound disaster relief fund and promised to offer private donations to the Red Cross. The kingdom also began some reconstruction projects which are shown to be slow and inefficient due to the lack of some essentials. Although the prince went on a visit to the affected islands the country has been denounced for the lack of response and public support.

**France:** France had a massive response to the hurricane providing a force of 410 gendarmes and 80 police officers were sent to the regular stations in the area and a further 665 to the islands of Saint Martin and Saint Barthélemy. The government also sent nearly 200 personnel to help with the reconstruction, and provide supplies to get faster reparations, 100 firefighters were also sent to reinforce the 450 people from that service and the security services already present. A transport plane carrying 400 million euros of supplies was sent to the french territories, including 2.2 tonnes of medical supplies, 85 tons of food, and a million liters of water, as well as a dozen of highly-qualified personnel. A massive Navy helicopter (Tonnerre) was set off from toulon carrying police vehicles, four helicopters (to add to the five that are already on the

islands). The French government was criticized for not having established any measures before the hurricanes, the french president responded by suggesting a visit to the storm-affected areas.

**Netherlands**: The Dutch territories in the Caribbean were some of the most damaged, about 6 out of 10 houses in St. Maarten are said to have been destroyed. The Dutch government has provided some financial support to the islands. In order to provide moral and public support to the islands the King Willem-Alexander has gone to visit them beginning with St. Marten and other islands around the region. On his visit the king described the area, "I've seen proper war as well as natural disasters before, but I've never seen anything like this... Everywhere you look there's devastation, you see the collapse.". These words have encouraged the dutch population and others to join the cause in helping the suffering islanders of the Caribbeans.

**Cuba**: Cuba was also heavily affected by the storm nevertheless, due to historic hostilities and cold relations with some major powers, Cuba has received less help than many other nations in the same region, and relies on the few governmental donations, and NGOs that are willing to help as well as the United Nations who has shown a great will to help and improve the destroyed areas of the cities in Cuba and many other islands. The capital of Cuba was left without electricity or water for multiple days, and many of its smaller cities are still not able to get these two necessities. Over the last few months Cuba has received major help from other touristic corporations, showing support financially and through social media, the country that tends to be criticized by the Western world power has started to receive a lot of sympathy.

## Questions To Consider

How can technological advancements be used to prevent natural disasters?

What measures should be taken to prevent the damage caused by natural disasters on the long and the short term?

What are the current needs of countries that have been faced by hurricanes and other natural disasters?

How should the issue be treated at the local level (education...)?

How can the normal needs of developing countries (food security, education...) be incorporated into these natural disaster prevention measures?



## Key Words

-Caribbeans: The Caribbean is a region that comprises the Caribbean Sea, its islands and the encompassing coasts. The area is southeast of the Gulf of Mexico and the North American terrains, east of Central America, and north of South America.

-Hurricane: A tropical cyclone is a rapidly rotating storm system characterized by a low-pressure center, in the Atlantic.

-Archipelagoes/west indies: Caribbean region

-Relief: financial and/or practical assistance that can be given to the regions in special need or difficulty, in order to help rehabilitation.

## Useful Links

**Organization of American States-** <http://www.oas.org/cdmp/document/mitiplan/mitapend.pdf>

**Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency-** [http://cdemavl.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/34/1/DISASTER%20IMPACT%20ON%20THE%20CARIBBEAN%20\\_Collymore%20revised%20in%202001\\_.pdf](http://cdemavl.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/34/1/DISASTER%20IMPACT%20ON%20THE%20CARIBBEAN%20_Collymore%20revised%20in%202001_.pdf)

**Department of Homeland Security-** <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning>

**Hurricane Irma-** <http://edition.cnn.com/specials/hurricane-irma>

**Hurricane Irma in the numbers-** <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/10/us/irma-facts-record-numbers-trnd/index.html>

**Hurricane Maria interesting article-** <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/28/puerto-rico-urgently-needed-tarps-delayed-by-failed-30m-fema-contract>

**Center for Disease Control and Prevention-** <https://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/prevguid/p0000372/p0000372.asp>

**Different countries' positions-** <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/21/caribbean-islands-hurricane-irma-maria-puerto-rico>

**Association of Caribbean States-** <http://www.acs-aec.org/index.php?q=disaster-risk-reduction/natural-hazards-in-the-caribbean-too-costly-to-ignore>

**UNESCO-** <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57754#.WkALGSOcbjB>

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