



Sint Maarten (Dutch side)

Situation Analysis on children and adolescents 2020

Summary report

About the Situation Analysis

All children on Sint Maarten have rights. Children's rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A child is any human being under the age of 18. The Situation Analysis is an instrument to stimulate discussion about the development and well-being of children and adolescents. It puts forth recommendations as inputs for policy decisions, and functions as an advocacy tool, providing an overview of the most critical challenges for children and adolescents.

This Situation Analysis report was fed with data from research reports and policy documents, as well as with data from interviews and focus group discussions with 137 key informants. This is not a representative sample of the population. The research was carried out in 2019.

About Sint Maarten

Sint Maarten is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands since the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles on 10th October 2010.

Sint Maarten shares the island with the French collectivity of Saint Martin, with no physical border.

In September 2017, Sint Maarten was hit by hurricanes Irma and Maria, which damaged or destroyed 95% of all structures on the island.

Economic recovery after the hurricanes was severely hampered by the infrastructural damage sustained by the tourism industry, the most important economic sector.

Figures

40,614 inhabitants + 20% undocumented people (estimate)

9,888 children <18 + 20% undocumented children (estimate) of which:

2,643 adolescents + 20% undocumented adolescents (estimate)

31% of youth 15-24 years is not in education, training or paid work

27% of households live in poverty: more hardship after the hurricanes

38% of households are headed by a female

Key findings of the Situation Analysis

1. The **primary education enrolment rates are very high**, with strong government commitment towards the education sector. **Vaccination coverage is almost universal** on Sint Maarten. Over the past five years there were **major achievements**. The Council of Ministers approved an action plan on children's rights and several important policies relating to children were developed that have yet to be approved. Other important achievements are the implementation of the protocol to report child abuse, a new Penal Code that specifies acts considered as child abuse and that regulates juvenile criminal law separately and the establishment of a closed facility for juvenile offenders. There were improvements in data collection mechanisms on children's rights. The 2017 hurricanes confronted the government with enormous challenges and many competing priorities which caused a setback in the above developments. The political instability also hampered progress.
2. **Violence is a major issue facing children, adolescents, and women on Sint Maarten**, with 85% of the 137 interviewees of the Situation Analysis indicating this. Of the 90 adults interviewed, 50% believe child sexual abuse to be a "common" occurrence in their communities and families. All but one of the 47 young people interviewed said that they know a victim of domestic violence or that they themselves grew up in a household where domestic violence was a common occurrence. Although the interviewees do not form a representative sample of the population, it is a strong signal about the prevalence of violence in the home and community.
3. **After the devastating hurricanes in September 2017, there was an increase in reported cases of child neglect**. It is not clear if this increase is attributed to improved reporting, or that more children are left by themselves while caregivers struggle to make ends meet with multiple jobs due to the economic hardship after the hurricanes.
4. **There are no recent data on the mental health of adolescents, whereas the 2017 hurricanes had a severe impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the population**. A survey in 2013 about adolescents'

mental health already showed alarmingly high rates of almost 30 percent of adolescents and young people from 13-19 years of age who thought of suicide and 13 percent attempted to do so. Also, 51 percent of adolescents sometimes or always felt lonely, whilst 53 percent felt depressed and hopeless.

5. **Undocumented children are a vulnerable group:** it is estimated that approximately 20% of Sint Maarten's child population is undocumented. Although undocumented children can access education, their possibilities to pursue higher education abroad are limited. Due to their status, they are not eligible for social health insurance and poorer households cannot afford private health insurance.
6. **The early childhood education sector and foster care system are poorly regulated.** There are no quality standards for day care centres and home-based care. As the sector is not subsidised, children from poorer households have limited access to early stimulation programmes. The foster care system does not meet international quality standards and the current capacity of the system is very fragile.
7. **Obesity, also in children, has been on the rise** on Sint Maarten as well as in the wider subregion. Of the adults on St. Maarten, 29% is obese and 38% is pre-obese. Fruit and vegetables became 2,5 times more expensive between 2006 and 2016 and food in general doubled in price over the same period. In the Caribbean region, between 28% and 35% of children aged 4-20 years are overweight and around half of them are obese.
8. **There are crucial data gaps.** Due to the lack of disaggregated data it is not possible to obtain an accurate picture of the needs of vulnerable groups, including undocumented children. Since the 2017 hurricanes, there have been no comprehensive (mental) health surveillance studies. Without data, it is impossible to provide adequate, evidence-based policies and services for children, adolescents, and their families.
9. **A draft national decree ('landsbesluit') to establish a national child rights committee is awaiting approval.** This committee shall execute the action plan and monitor progress on children's rights in the country.

Key recommendations

- Continue with the recently started (2019) bottom-up approach of discerning ways to **identify and report child abuse with first-line response services, and strengthen knowledge and capacity** to provide rapid and effective response measures.
- Establish clear and uniform **definitions on child abuse, domestic violence and neglect** etcetera to be utilised by all stakeholders. Uniform definitions will improve reporting, data collection and analysis, and support the standardised provision of services.
- **Expand parenting courses** and identify new opportunities for providing **parenting information** through existing services, such as day care centres, the Baby Clinic of the Collective Prevention Services Department (CPS), and after-school programmes.
- In light of the high proportion of vulnerable female-headed households, develop programmes that **encourage and support men to have a strong and positive role in the lives of their children.**
- Collect, update and analyse age-disaggregated **data on adolescents, especially on their mental health** and wellbeing.
- Ensure that the **draft Early Childhood Development Policy Plan** is finalised and implemented. The curriculum and programme delivery standards must be included in the regulatory framework for ECD centres as well as disaster risk management and psychosocial support strategies.

- ▶ Develop a sustained awareness campaign targeting parents and caregivers, especially those of vulnerable children, about the **importance of early stimulation, both in the home environment and in a pre-school or a day care centre.**
- ▶ Continue investing in **disaster preparedness and comprehensive school safety** to ensure that the education sector is increasingly prepared for various types of hazards and risks.
- ▶ Ensure that education and training matches the skills that are in demand from employers. It is also recommended to **strengthen job training and placement programmes for young people and to offer entrepreneurship skills.** Reinstate the **Youth Help Desk** as an information centre for young people.
- ▶ Develop and implement policies to strengthen preventative and curative services for chronic non-communicable diseases, most notably **obesity**, targeting children, adolescents and young people and their parents.
- ▶ Update the 2013 **research on adolescent health and sexuality.**
- ▶ Invest in **capacity building on data collection, data analysis, and data dissemination** to monitor progress and inform policies. This has been an ongoing process, but the 2017 hurricanes created a major setback in available data and capacity for data collection.
- ▶ Further **research the situation of undocumented children** and the extent to which they have access to social services on both the Dutch and French side of Sint Maarten.
- ▶ **Formalise a national child rights committee** tasked to execute the approved action plan to advance children's rights and monitor progress. **Approve the draft policy plans pertaining to children's rights**, such as the Policy to Prevent Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, Early Childhood Development Policy Plan, the Integrated Youth Policy Plan, the Safety Net Policy.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is the United Nations Children's Rights organisation. UNICEF has a mandate to safeguard the rights of all children, everywhere. That mandate is rooted in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which sets out universal and indivisible rights that apply to every child, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015, which apply to every country.

UNICEF Netherlands, 2020

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