



# CORONA CRISIS AND CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ON ST. EUSTATIUS

Rapid Risk Assessment

## COLOPHON

**Author:**

UNICEF Netherlands

**Date:**

11 June 2020

**Cover photo:**

Adam Watkins

**Design:**

Schone Vormen

**Contact information:**

UNICEF Netherlands  
Bezuidenhoutseweg 74  
2594 AW Den Haag

[info@unicef.nl](mailto:info@unicef.nl)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1. Physical and Emotional Maltreatment	6
2. Social Exclusion	8
3. Alternative Care & Youth Justice System	10
4. Mental Health and Psychosocial Distress	11
5. Education	12
6. Other	14

# INTRODUCTION

Along with the rest of the world, with two confirmed cases, St. Eustatius was not spared the direct consequences of COVID-19. With the Public Entity St. Eustatius (from here, OLE)<sup>1</sup> in the lead of crisis management, schools were closed for seven weeks from March 23rd and re-opened on May 11th 2020. During the school closures, children's regular education and direct contact with teachers were interrupted. For the rest, compared to Bonaire and Saba, businesses and organizations on St. Eustatius remained open as usual with social distancing advice and movement within the island was not entirely restricted. The travel ban that was put in place however did bring the tourism sector to a standstill, which can potentially affect many already vulnerable families. Up until the date of publication of this report, there had been no indication of when the travel restrictions will end. COVID-19 not only disrupted public life, health care and the economy, it also put children's safety and their future at risk. While children appear to be less vulnerable to the virus itself, the consequences of the measures taken affected them significantly. Although the Corona measures have all been necessary understandable, it remains important for sufficient attention to be paid to the consequences for (vulnerable) children and adolescents and to the safeguarding of their rights.

This assessment report serves to assist OLE and partners, including the Dutch Government, with identifying necessary actions needed to respond to the risks and needs of the most vulnerable children and their families as the crisis continues, while also taking preventive and preparatory actions in the event of future crises. UNICEF Netherlands urges all authorities involved to centrally consider the rights and the best interest of the child in all measures taken during the Corona crisis and other crisis situations.

## Methodology & limitations

This report is primarily based on a rapid risk assessment held with a representative of OLE's Community Development Department on May 6th, 2020. A brief account of identified and possible risks faced by children during the crisis and the responses by OLE and partner organizations was provided. Follow-up information and clarity was requested and a draft of the report has been reviewed by other relevant persons within OLB. Where possible and to a very limited extent, accounts can be corroborated by sources retrieved from the public domain. The assessment report is based on what is known about the situation until now and is therefore incomplete.

The framework for this rapid risk assessment is largely based on risks and possible responses identified in the 'Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic V1'<sup>2</sup> prepared by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Other monitoring instruments produced by UNICEF, based on experiences in other crises, were also considered when developing the framework. The assessment has a child protection focus including cross-cutting themes on social protection, nutrition, and education, and to a lesser degree health and WASH. Each thematic section begins with a short description of the situation under regular circumstances or 'before the crisis' based on findings from the 2019 Situation Analysis on Children and Adolescents in the Caribbean Netherlands. The sections continue with a list of identified and possible risks and the response to these risks

---

<sup>1</sup> Openbaar Lichaam St. Eustatius

<sup>2</sup> At the end of May 2020 this document was adapted to Version 2

organized by OLB and partners. Recommendations are presented by UNICEF Netherlands related to gaps identified in the response and based on suggested responses formulated in the aforementioned Technical Note among other sources. Reference has also been made to recommendations formulated in the 2019 Situation Analysis on Children and Adolescents in the Caribbean Netherlands where these prove to be relevant during the Corona crisis as risks to children previously identified during the study may have been exacerbated during this period. Where relevant, recommendations are accompanied by available technical information on the subject.

# 1. PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL MALTREATMENT

The Convention on the Rights of the Child articles 19, 34, 39: children are entitled to protection against all forms of violence, mistreatment, abuse and neglect. Also during crises.

## The situation before the crisis

Domestic violence and various forms of abuse pose significant threats to women and children in the Caribbean Netherlands. This issue was signaled in both the 2013 and 2019 Situation Analyses and in several other studies conducted within and after that time. Because of the taboo surrounding this topic, people are not always inclined to report to the competent authorities.<sup>3</sup>

## Identified and possible risks to children during the crisis

- It is unclear to what extent risks related to physical and emotional maltreatment increased during the school closures. There have been no increase in domestic violence reports.
- There had been a child custody concern which could not be immediately resolved because a protection services office was closed. The matter was quickly resolved after that.

## Response to risks by OLE and partners

OLE and partners, including Youth Care and Family Supervision (JGCN), the Guardianship Council, the Truancy Officer, and school directors were collectively keeping an eye on vulnerable children, their families and those with special needs while schools were closed. Needs were also been identified by the Ministry of OCW which will also provide support. Internet access was being installed at all homes. OLE collaborated with the 'Kindertelefoon' on Aruba to enable children to reach out for support (via email). It is unclear how many children made use of the service.

## Recommendations for gaps in response

- Ensure that an inventory of vulnerable children, their families, and their protection needs are prepared in advance and readily available in the event of a crisis/disaster. Ensure that there is a broad understanding and consensus among partners about how to access needed information in consideration of privacy protocols.
- Develop child-friendly and age and gender appropriate messages on COVID-19, associated child protection risks and available services. Ensure that these messages reach, especially vulnerable, children and adolescents directly. Display the messages in schools. During distance education contexts, ensure that these messages are otherwise communicated to children, adolescents and their parents.

<sup>3</sup> See relevant sources in Situation Analysis Children and Adolescents in the Caribbean Netherlands, 2019, chapter 3.1. [https://www.unicef.nl/files/Situation%20Analysis%20Children%20and%20Adolescents%20in%20the%20Caribbean%20Netherlands%202019%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.nl/files/Situation%20Analysis%20Children%20and%20Adolescents%20in%20the%20Caribbean%20Netherlands%202019%20(1).pdf)

For more recent sources see Bijdragen van de Justitiele Partijen aan de Aanpak van Huiselijk Geweld in Caribisch Nederland. <http://www.raadrechtshandhaving.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Eindrapport-huiselijk-rapport-CN.pdf>

- Establish mechanisms to ensure that, while social distancing measures are in place, children at risk of experiencing violence have continued access to child-friendly, holistic care.
  - Ensure that there are no interruptions to social and child protection services during crisis situations; enable vulnerable children and their families to have continued access to services throughout crisis situations.
  - Ensure that schools and youth protection can also keep in touch with vulnerable children living in unsafe home situations, even in crisis situations. This should also be possible if there is no internet or mobile device available.
  - Ensure that there are available safe options for children to reach out for support on child protection matters.
- Revise or develop SOPs with the health sector and others to ensure the safe identification and referral of children at risk. See SitAn recommendation : put in place a comprehensive legislative framework in the area of domestic violence and child abuse, which will serve to better protect children, especially during crises.
- Involve children and adolescents when making further plans related to child protection during crisis situations.
- See also: COVID-19 response: Considerations for Children and Adults with Disabilities and Life in the Times of COVID-19: A Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities.
- See also: Technical Note: Child Helplines and the Protection of Children during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

## 2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child article 27: all children are entitled to access to social security provisions and an adequate standard of living.

### The situation before the crisis

39 per cent of households on St. Eustatius had income lower than the average monthly budget needed for basic expenses (up to 90 per cent of the reference budget). 35 per cent had an income at or below 75 per cent of the estimated average budget needed for basic expenses (the lower limit of the reference budget).<sup>4</sup> There is currently no specific data available on the number of children living in poverty. Approximately 39 percent of 0-18 year old children live with just one of their parents.<sup>5</sup> The labor participation rates among single parent-households in the Caribbean Netherlands is high. 87 percent of children on St. Eustatius living in a single-parent household have a working parent. Comparatively, in the European part of the Netherlands, 67 percent of the children in one-parent families have a working parent. Despite their labor participation, figures from 2016 indicate that single-parent households in the Caribbean Netherlands have very low standardized income or purchasing power.<sup>6</sup> Focus groups and interviews during the 2019 Situation Analysis uncovered what appears to be a stigma around collecting welfare. Most interviewees opted to work several part-time jobs in the informal sector to make ends meet.<sup>7</sup>

### Identified and possible risks to children during the crisis

- *Children living in poverty*, in households with families that were already struggling, may have encountered increased hardships.
- Children may have been *left at home alone and unsupervised* while their parents were at work.
- Children in vulnerable households may not have had *access to adequate nutrition*. A lot of children on the island were dependent on school and after school food programs. Some families needed more funds for food because children were at home and eating more.
- Children with disabilities who are already vulnerable, may have been at increased risk or receiving limited or inadequate support from parents.

### Response to risks by OLE and partners

While schools and after-school programs were closed, the organizations continued to provide the school meals for the children who had already been receiving them. Some children had been added to the lists.

It is not yet entirely clear what the financial consequences of crisis will be for families with children. The Public Entities have brought an increase in poverty to the attention of the Dutch

<sup>4</sup> Onderzoek naar het ijkpunt voor het sociaal minimum voor Caribisch Nederland, 2018, see pg. 54 or 67. <https://www.regio-plan.nl/wp-content/uploads/data/file/2017/17128-Eindrapport-IJkpunt-sociaal-minimum-Caribisch-Nederland-Regioplan.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Jaarrapport Landelijke Jeugd Monitor 2018, see pg. 118. <https://longreads.cbs.nl/jeugdmonitor-2018/>

<sup>6</sup> The average disposable and standardized incomes of different households per island, 2016, CBS.

<sup>7</sup> See Situation Analysis Children and Adolescents in the Caribbean Netherlands, 2019, chapter 3.2. [https://www.unicef.nl/files/Situation%20Analysis%20Children%20and%20Adolescents%20in%20the%20Caribbean%20Netherlands%202019%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.nl/files/Situation%20Analysis%20Children%20and%20Adolescents%20in%20the%20Caribbean%20Netherlands%202019%20(1).pdf)



Government. The Dutch Government has put emergency financial regulations in place to support businesses impacted by the crisis.<sup>8</sup> A temporary reduction in the costs for water, electricity and internet has also been arranged until the end of this year.<sup>9</sup> And budgets for food packages<sup>10</sup> and educational devices<sup>11</sup> for students have also been made available.

### Recommendations for gaps in response

- Make an inventory of vulnerable families and families at risk of becoming vulnerable and in need of social assistance due to shocks resulting from pandemics or other crisis and disaster situations.
- Make combatting child poverty a spearhead of government policy in tackling this crisis. Gain a better understanding of vulnerabilities and deprivations in order to know how and proactively plan to readily support those in need. See SitAn recommendations:
  - conduct a child poverty analysis to fill the gap in data on child poverty rates and to better monitor the (short and longer-term) impact of the crisis on children in vulnerable households.
  - carry out a multi-dimensional poverty study to gather baseline information on poverty and deprivations, in order to readily scale up all necessary services and target children and families in need during crises.
- Involve children and young people in developing poverty alleviation measures during crisis situations; ensure that information is understandable to them.
- See also: [Life in the Times of Covid 19: A Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities and COVID-19 response: Considerations for Children and Adults with Disabilities.](#)

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk/nieuws/2020/04/16/eerste-bedragen-noodregeling-caribisch-nederland-uitbetaald>

<sup>9</sup> Kamerbrief extra maatregelen Caribisch Nederland in verband met COVID-19, 24 april 2020. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/04/24/kamerbrief-extra-maatregelen-caribisch-nederland-in-verband-met-covid-19>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kamerbrief over Ondersteuning leerlingen bij onderwijs op afstand [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z07949&did=2020D16981](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z07949&did=2020D16981)

# 3. ALTERNATIVE CARE & YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 20, 37 and 40: children who cannot live with their own parents have the right to extra protection. If a child is in conflict with the law special provisions must be in place to handle the case and detention is only allowed under exceptional cases.

## The situation before the crisis

On St. Eustatius residential care and foster care are not available. Alternatives are arranged within the Caribbean Netherlands or further throughout the Kingdom when necessary. The same applies for children in conflict with the law who have to be placed in facilities.

## Identified and possible risks to children during the crisis

- The assumption is that children placed in alternative care abroad prior to the Corona crisis have been in continued contact with their parents during the crisis. There have been no children placed in alternative care during or due to the crisis.
- A major concern is the lack of suitable alternative placement with adequate supervision for children and adults if they had to be placed outside of their home during the crisis.

## Recommendations for gaps in response

- Ensure that there is suitable alternative placement with adequate supervision for children and adults if they have to be placed outside of their home during the crisis.
- Provide staff with necessary information regarding the protection of children during the covid-19 pandemic. See:
  - Protection of Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic : Children and Alternative Care: Immediate Response Measures.
  - Technical Note: COVID-19 and Children Deprived of their Liberty
  - Social Service Workforce Safety and Wellness during the COVID-19 Response: Recommended Actions

# 4. MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS

Articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child on education, free time, information, participation, health, and adequate standard of living are all connected to the mental health of children and adolescents.

## The situation before the crisis

In the 2017 Caribbean Netherlands Health Study, 18.5 per cent of children 12-17 responded that they often felt very nervous in the four weeks preceding the survey and 15.7 per cent of the children 12-17 responded that they felt depressed and gloomy sometimes in the four weeks preceding the survey. In contrast, 89.5 per cent reported that they felt 'often to constantly' happy in the four weeks preceding the survey. Importantly, 92.3 per cent of the children 12-17 stated that there is always someone in their environment who they can go to with their daily problems. This data was not available for younger children.

## Identified and possible risks to children during the crisis

- Parents became stressed. There may have also been a spread of misinformation. But there is no indication that children may have had an increased risk of being distressed during the crisis or whether there was a risk of pre-existing and undiagnosed mental health conditions worsening. Children appear to be simply missing their friends at school and otherwise unaffected.

## Response to risks by OLE and partners

- During the closure of the schools, the compulsory education officer was in close contact with all principals to see if there were children in need due to the Covid 19 crisis.
- Center for Youth and Family (JGCN) were in close contact with all of their clients.

## Recommendations for gaps in response

- Identify strategies for providing context gender and age appropriate psychosocial support to children, adolescents, parents, teachers, and social services (including alternative care) staff during periods of lockdown and when school resumes.
- See also:
  - [Interim Briefing Note - Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 OUTBREAK Version 1.5 \(also in Dutch\)](#)
  - [Social Service Workforce Safety and Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Response • Recommended Actions](#)

# 5. EDUCATION

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 28 & 29: education must aim at the fullest possible development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities.

## The situation before the crisis

While both the primary and secondary schools on St. Eustatius have achieved the basic quality standards, as determined by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, the quality of education in the Caribbean Netherlands is considered vulnerable for different reasons. In addition, there are clear signals from the educational institutions on the three islands of poverty among children and the symptoms associated with this, such as less supervision at home, addiction, and domestic violence, which are noticeable at school.<sup>12</sup> The Public Entities initially signaled development issues among children and this concern was later reinforced by the childcare baseline study conducted by ECORYS which found that the majority of children in the Caribbean Netherlands are at risk of developmental and educational disadvantages.<sup>13</sup> The 2018 Caribbean Netherlands Safety Image reported that teachers often do not know where to turn regarding their students with behavioral problems.<sup>14</sup>

## Identified and possible risks to children during the crisis

- Children's regular education/learning was temporarily interrupted. *Distance (online) education may not have been of sufficient quality* as teachers may not have been prepared to teach in digital learning environments.
- *Children's distance education may not have been sufficiently supported at home.* Parents may not have been equipped to help with schoolwork. Children may have had to help to take care of siblings/family members or work in the household, which could have led to insufficient time for home schooling.
- It is also unclear whether *older children are now at greater risk of dropping out* due to the extended interruption of school.
- Very young children (0-4) may not have received *adequate care or early stimulation* which could lead to disadvantage in their development.
- There may have been a higher risk to disadvantage/backlog in education, development and behavior for *children who need special education.*
- *Child protection risks may have remained undetected* due to interruptions in the otherwise regular protective school environment.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Parliament on the Progress of Education in the Caribbean Netherlands, 10 July 2019. [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2019Z14910&did=2019D30591](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2019Z14910&did=2019D30591)

<sup>13</sup> Nulmeting kinderopvang Caribisch Nederland, 2019. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/06/28/nulmeting-kinderopvang-caribisch-nederland>

<sup>14</sup> Veiligheidsbeeld BES 2018. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/02/12/tk-bijlage-veiligheidsbeeld-bes-2018>

## Response to risks by OLE and partners

Schools arranged distant education, some made the arrangements better than others. There is a strong concern that when schools reopen, that there will not be enough attention on socio-emotional learning and development with the focus on academic achievement and catching up for lost time.

## Recommendations for gaps in response

- Make use of standard checklist such as the 'Framework for Re-opening Schools' as well as the related Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide, Action Tracker and Logical Framework as a guideline and tools throughout the different phases of school closure and reopening processes. As schools re-open, give sufficient attention to the socio-emotional well-being of children and adolescents, as well as of the teachers and other school staff.
- During crises and school closures, schools must still play a central role in assessing the well-being of children through distance education and signaling concerns to social, protection, and other support services. Actively encourage teachers to maintain regular contact with at-risk and vulnerable students. See the approach outlined by OCW with regard to involving the services of the truancy officer: Brief regering: Stand van zaken onderwijs op afstand tijdens Corona crisis.
- Develop a separate program to provide adequate distance educational support for vulnerable children during a lockdown. If necessary, make exceptions for the most vulnerable children so that they can be taught face-to-face by their teachers in the classroom. Consider ways to do this while still ensuring respect for the dignity and privacy of the students.
- Especially while day care centers are closed, ensure that (the most vulnerable) children ages 0-4 are receiving the quality care and early stimulation they need to develop optimally within the home environment. See SitAn recommendation: bring early stimulation to the household and engage parents to complement what is being done in day care.
- Support the development and roll-out of child-friendly complaints and feedback mechanisms in schools and other education facilities.
- Mitigate obstacles that would prevent secondary school students in their final forms from transitioning to tertiary education. See SitAn recommendation: scale up guidance for students transitioning to tertiary education and the labor market and to implement a graduate tracking system.
- Ensure that teachers have the skills necessary to provide quality distance education. OCW has indicated that schools have indicated that they need help with the proper implementation of distance learning.<sup>15</sup>
- Ensure that teachers and day-care and after school center staff have necessary knowledge and skills related to child protection, child safeguarding, and safe referral practices, with a focus on gender. Ensure that these professionals are trained to recognize signs of distress, including during distance education contexts, to enable them to identify, support, and/or safely refer children who may be in distress or may have specific child protection needs.

---

<sup>15</sup> See letter to Parliament, Maatregelen OCW in Caribisch deel van het Koninkrijk i.v.m. het coronavirus, 15 april 2020 [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z06789&did=2020D14458](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z06789&did=2020D14458)

## 6. OTHER

### Recommendations for gaps in response

- Integrate a focus on child protection in emergencies/crisis situations in local *crisis management handbooks*.
- *Understanding risks, impact, and necessary responses*: Clarify short, medium, and long term risks to children during and/or as a result of crises situations and necessary effective responses; understand how large the risks are (e.g. the number of children or impact, age and gender specific) and what responses work best. Evaluate the effectiveness of the COVID19 response as it related to responding to the needs of the most vulnerable children and their families.
- *Participation*: Ensure that children and adolescents, are able to safely participate (age appropriately) in planning, rolling out and evaluations for crisis situations so that their views can be heard and considered also in future crisis situations.
- *Knowledge of risks*: Train health, education, child services, including alternative care staff, and MHPSS staff on COVID-19-related child protection risks.
- *Prevention of spreading*: Collaborate to provide safe, child-friendly hygiene promotion activities before and during outbreaks, including the development of child-friendly posters and infographics targeting children and adolescents, parents/caregivers and teachers.

### Other recommended resources:

- [Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic V2 \(including annexes\)](#)
- [COVID-19 related Child Protection resources, for professionals working on safety for children \(UNICEF Netherlands website\)](#)



UNICEF Netherlands  
Bezuidenhoutseweg 74  
2594 AW Den Haag

[info@unicef.nl](mailto:info@unicef.nl)