

EU response to the Caribbean hurricanes

The scenes of devastation caused by recent hurricanes in the Caribbean are a stark reminder of the destructive force of nature. As residents struggle to rebuild their lives following the passage of the latest storms, attention turns to the relief efforts. The EU can help through emergency humanitarian assistance and a variety of funding mechanisms, depending on the status of the territories concerned and their relationship with the EU.

EU Civil Protection Mechanism

Created in 2001, the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) (UCPM) is tasked with coordinating the action of EU Member States and partner countries (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey) following a man-made disaster or natural catastrophe. Its scope of intervention is not limited to its members but has a worldwide reach, thus all territories in the region affected by the recent hurricanes, including third countries, may apply for support under this mechanism. The UCPM intervenes at the request of the affected countries: since its creation in 2001, it has responded to over 200 requests.

UCPM action is spearheaded by the [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) (ERCC). The ERCC is managed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) and operates 24 hours a day. Once a request for intervention has been approved, the ERCC evaluates the needs and ensures that there is no overlap or gap in the relief operations of UCPM members. Following the devastation wrought by recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, UCPM teams are preparing to intervene under the coordination of the ECHO regional office in Managua (Nicaragua), while a European Commission humanitarian team is already present on the ground in Haiti. To ensure a quick response, some EU countries (but not all UCPM members) have pooled response teams under the [European Emergency Response Capacity](#).

Hurricanes Katrin, Irma and Jose (left to right) on 8 September 2017, and the EU Member State islands affected

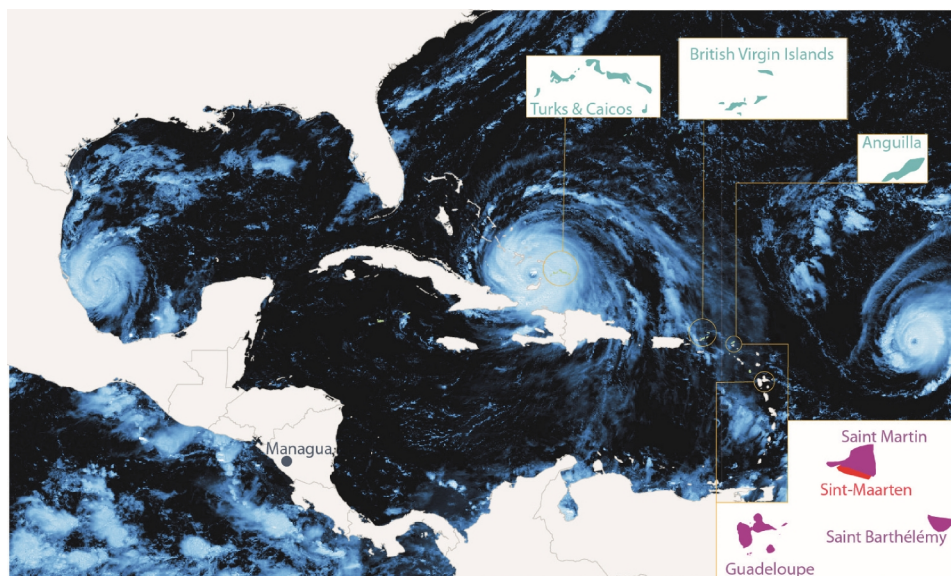


Image source: NASA; map by Eulalia Claros, EPRS.

To carry out its tasks, the ERCC uses powerful [monitoring tools](#), which are developed largely in close cooperation with the Commission's Joint Research Centre. It can also trigger specific [mapping of the affected zones](#), through satellite data provided by [Copernicus](#), the EU earth observation programme. To take just one example, the EU recently [provided the USA](#) with satellite images of the areas affected by hurricane Harvey. The ERCC also publishes [daily maps](#) and [daily flashes](#) for the general public.

The EU also provides emergency funding to support

the delivery of aid, with over €2 million allocated to the Caribbean as of 12 September.



EU Solidarity Fund

Providing for emergency and recovery operations in areas affected by a major natural disaster, the EU Solidarity Fund is open to Member States and candidate countries. A recent witness to the brute force of Hurricane Irma, the French territory of Saint Martin, one of the EU's nine [outermost regions](#) and thus an integral part of the EU, is eligible for support under this mechanism. To receive help, the Member State involved (in this case, France) must apply to the European Commission for assistance within 12 weeks of the first damage. With a maximum annual allocation of €500 million, the EUSF may be used to fund measures such as providing temporary accommodation, supporting rescue services or cleaning up disaster areas. In principle, it is limited to non-insurable damage and does not therefore compensate for damage to private property. The EUSF has [intervened](#) in over 75 disasters to date, allocating a total of €5 billion to help alleviate the impact of natural disasters, including the 2007 hurricanes in Réunion and Martinique, both of which are outermost regions.

In the case of outermost regions, a special lower threshold is applied, such that the damage caused exceeds 1 % of a region's GDP (rather than 1.5 % in other regions), to take account of their specific structural social and economic situation. In addition, following the adoption of an [amendment](#) to the EUSF Regulation in July 2017, Member States affected by a natural disaster may now draw on a special EU financing mechanism, to help supplement EU Solidarity Fund assistance. This allows the application of an extraordinary EU co-financing rate of 95 % under a cohesion policy programme in an affected region. Accordingly, programmes in outermost regions such as Saint Martin, which have an 85 % co-financing rate, will now be eligible for an additional 10 % support in the event of a major disaster. At the time of writing, Saint Martin had not yet applied for assistance under the EUSF.

In addition to this emergency assistance, it is also worth highlighting that several EU-funded programmes are already active in the region and improving the lives of local people. The [ERDF-ESG Guadeloupe et Saint Martin operational programme](#), for instance, which has a total budget of €273 million, includes an investment priority on disaster management, providing funding for activities such as strengthening buildings against the risk of earthquakes. The [Interreg V Saint Martin – Sint Maarten cooperation programme](#), focuses, among other things, on preventing the risk of flooding through better management and control of rainwater, while the priorities of the [Interreg V Caribbean cooperation programme](#) include increasing natural hazard response capacity by putting in place shared risk management systems. Saint Martin may also be able to receive support from the [€587 million](#) available to France under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived ([FEAD](#)), an EU fund that provides material assistance such as food, clothing and essential goods for deprived groups.

Support for overseas countries and territories

As overseas countries and territories (OCTs), the British territories of Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, the Dutch territory of Sint Maarten and the French territory of Saint Barthélemy have a special relationship with the European Union, governed by a Council [decision](#) on the association of the overseas countries and territories with the European Union. This text provides that humanitarian and emergency aid may be granted to OCTs faced with serious economic and social difficulties of an exceptional nature resulting from natural or man-made disasters. Under the rules, aid is financed from the general budget of the Union, with a non-allocated reserve of €21.5 million set aside to finance humanitarian and emergency assistance for the OCTs.

Although formally classified as an OCT, Sint Maarten, which shares an island with the French outermost region of Saint Martin, may also receive additional assistance. At Parliament's 13 September plenary session, President Tajani [announced](#) that he had submitted a request to Commission President Juncker to ask that Sint Maarten be allowed to benefit from EU funding on similar terms to its northern neighbour, Saint Martin.

Assessing EU response measures

The UCPM and the ERCC were recently [examined](#) by the European Court of Auditors, which found them to be 'good examples of value added by European cooperation'. On the EUSF, a 2015 [Commission report](#) noted that while applicants had a better understanding of the application process, money still reached the regions affected too late, emphasising the time-consuming procedure for the adoption of the mobilisation decision and the corresponding amending budget. Similar criticisms were raised in Parliament's 2016 [report](#) on the EUSF (rapporteur: Salvatore Cicu, EPP, Italy), which stressed that beneficiaries still faced problems owing to the length of the process involved.