

Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Impact on Caribbean Countries and Foreign Territories

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In addition to causing [massive destruction](#) to the U.S. territories of [Puerto Rico](#) and the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#) in the Caribbean, Hurricanes Irma and Maria severely affected several Caribbean countries and foreign territories. Between September 5 and 9, 2017, Hurricane Irma caused widespread damage to Barbuda, part of the independent country of Antigua and Barbuda; the island of St. Martin/St. Maarten, split between French and Dutch rule (St. Martin is a French overseas collectivity while St. Maarten is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands); several southeastern and northwestern islands of the Bahamas; and the northern coast of Cuba. Other islands severely affected were the French overseas collectivity of St. Barthélemy and the British overseas territories of Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

On September 18 and 19, respectively, Hurricane Maria severely damaged the country of Dominica and the French department of Guadeloupe with direct hits, while St. Kitts and Nevis experienced lesser damage as the hurricane passed south of the country. On September 21, the hurricane passed close to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which experienced limited impact, largely caused by flooding, and the Turks and Caicos Islands were battered once again as the storm passed nearby on September 22. Reconstruction costs are not yet known, but will likely be high for several of these islands, many of which depend on tourism.

Antigua and Barbuda

Prime Minister Gaston Browne estimates that [95%](#) of the structures on Barbuda were seriously damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Irma, although the larger island of Antigua was largely unscathed. As a result, the population of Barbuda, estimated at some 1,700 residents, was evacuated completely, with the majority of evacuees sheltering on Antigua. The governor general of Antigua and Barbuda has estimated that the cost of rebuilding Barbuda could be [approximately \\$300 million](#), not including the costs of providing shelter, schooling, and medical care to those displaced from Barbuda.

St. Martin/St. Maarten

The French- and Dutch-administered island of St. Martin (estimated population, 32,000)/St. Maarten (estimated population, 42,000) suffered widespread damage from Hurricane Irma, with 11 deaths in St. Martin and 4 in St.

Maarten. The hurricane damaged the island's water desalination plants and primary airport, as well as electrical and telecommunications networks; [an estimated 91%](#) of buildings in St. Maarten suffered damage. In the aftermath of the hurricane, the island experienced [widespread looting](#). Hundreds of Dutch and French military, police, and emergency personnel have been providing emergency relief and security and working to restore services.

Figure 1. Caribbean Island Countries and Territories



Source: Prepared by Amber Hope Wilhelm, Visual Information Specialist, and James C. Uzel, Geospatial Information System Analyst, CRS.

Cuba

Hurricane Irma caused [widespread damage in Cuba](#), killing 10 people and affecting more than 2 million along 300 miles of the northern coast. The storm damaged infrastructure (electric power, water and sanitation systems), the agricultural sector, and tourism facilities, and flooded low-lying areas of Havana. More than [210,000 homes](#) were damaged. The economy, which contracted by almost 1% in 2016, was poised to grow 1% this year, but now some economists are forecasting [continued economic contraction](#).

Dominica

With a population of around 74,000, Dominica suffered at least 15 deaths from Hurricane Maria according to the [Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency](#) (CDEMA), and damage to almost all roofs on the island. The agricultural sector also suffered widespread damage. Washed-out roads, damaged bridges, and communication outages have made rescue operations difficult.

U.S. and International Response

U.S. foreign disaster [relief efforts](#) in response to the Caribbean hurricanes have focused largely on Antigua and Barbuda, St. Martin/St. Maarten, the Bahamas, and Dominica. As of September 25, U.S. humanitarian funding for the hurricanes amounted to almost [\\$7.3 million](#), with \$1.7 million from the U.S. Agency for International Development

(USAID)/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and \$5.6 million from the Department of Defense. In response to requests for assistance, USAID/OFDA activated a regional Disaster Assistance Response Team on September 7, 2017, and predeployed team members in the Bahamas, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. In the aftermath of the hurricanes, USAID repositioned team members to hard-hit areas—Antigua and Barbuda, St. Martin/St. Maarten, the Bahamas, and Dominica. USAID/OFDA has provided immediate cash for emergency relief, and has supplied [more than 150 metric tons of relief commodities](#). (For up-to-date information on USAID/OFDA efforts, see <https://www.usaid.gov/irma>.)

U.S. military personnel from the U.S. Southern Command's [Joint Task Force-Leeward Islands](#) (JTF-LI) have also assisted USAID's relief effort. The task force consists of 300 onshore military personnel and 1,100 personnel aboard the USS *Wasp*; it includes 10 helicopters and 4 C-130 Hercules aircraft. JTF-LI has helped in the delivery of relief supplies and also evacuated thousands of U.S. citizens from St. Martin/St. Maarten, Anguilla, and Dominica. In St. Martin, JTF-LI set up two water-production sites with desalination units generating potable water.

Some Members of Congress have called for any additional hurricane-related supplemental appropriations to include assistance for Caribbean countries and foreign territories affected by the storms. With regard to Cuba, some Members have called on President Trump to remove restrictions on the ability of U.S. companies to export relief and reconstruction supplies to Cuba.

[France](#), the [Netherlands](#), and the [United Kingdom](#) have deployed military, police, and relief specialists to their Caribbean territories. All three European countries are providing significant assistance for immediate relief and plan to support longer-term recovery efforts.

Following Hurricane Irma, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) developed two response plans as part of its coordinating mechanism to identify the most urgent needs and funding required. One plan is for countries and territories in the Caribbean region, while a separate plan is solely for Cuba because of the widespread damage there. OCHA's [regional Caribbean plan](#), developed with the assistance of CDEMA and other partners, requests \$27 million in funding from September to December 2017, with \$15.1 million to target urgent needs for an estimated 265,000 people and \$11.9 million for complex logistics (including air and maritime services) and communications support. OCHA's [plan for Cuba](#) requests \$55.8 million, which would target the needs of almost 2.2 million people most affected by the hurricane. Plans for additional assistance will likely develop as these Caribbean countries and territories assess the full impact of both storms.