

# STRONG COMMUNITIES, STRONG COUNTRY

*Stories of hope, opportunity  
and resilience in Sint Maarten*



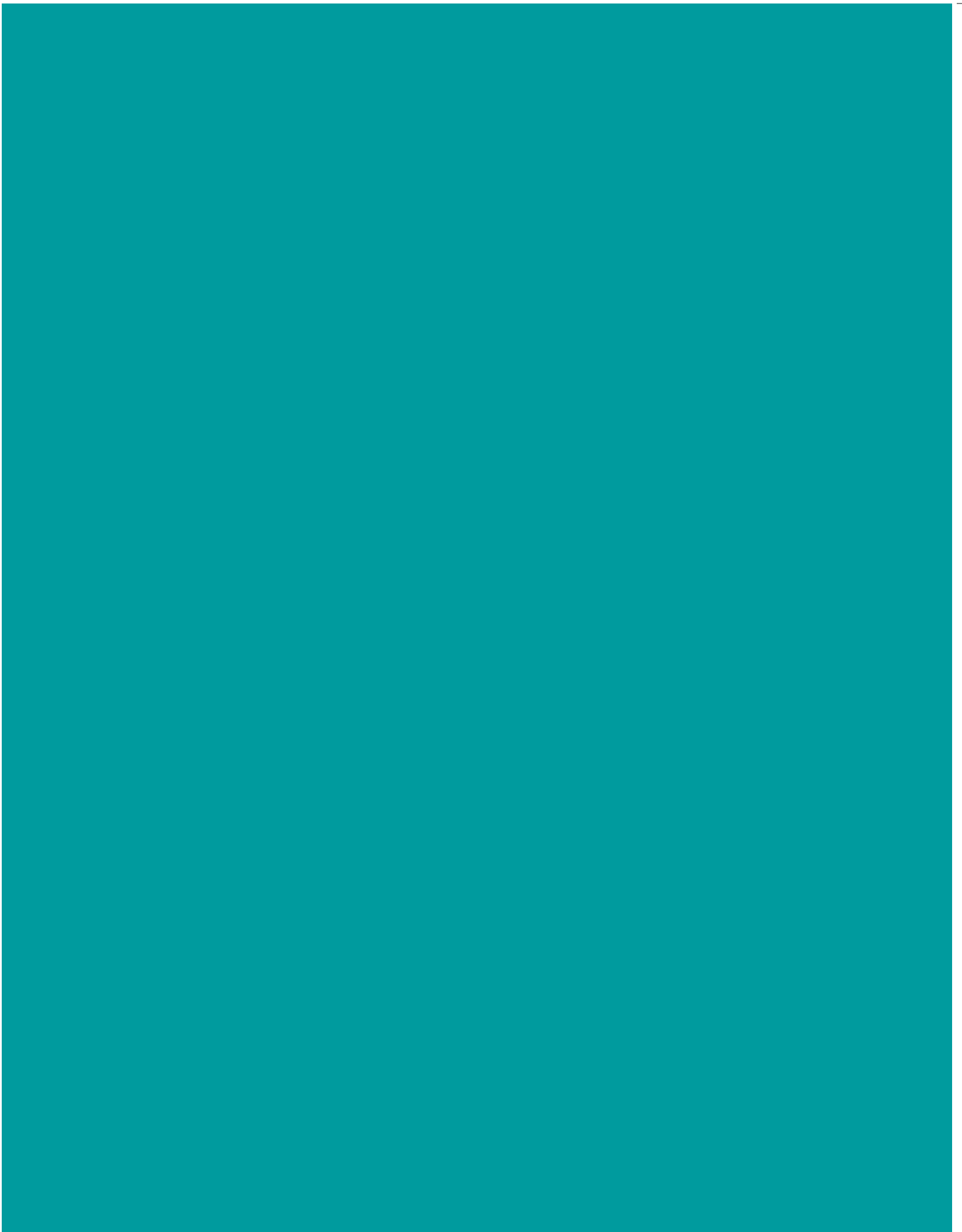
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# Sint Maarten Strong: In Recognition of the Strength and Unity of a People

On September 6, 2017, the people of Sint Maarten experienced a once-in-a-generation natural disaster.

A storm the size and intensity of Hurricane Irma was considered extraordinary. At her peak, Irma was the strongest storm in the Atlantic Basin in 12 years, slamming into Sint Maarten with winds up to 180 miles per hour. Two weeks after Irma, Sint Maarten braced for Hurricane Maria, another massive Category 5 storm that skirted south of the island but still affected it, bringing tropical storm force winds and heavy rains that complicated the already overwhelming cleanup efforts.

As global temperatures rise and oceans get warmer, hurricanes—which feed off warm, moist air—are predicted to intensify. Hurricane Irma displaced over 5,000 people and damaged up to 90 percent of the buildings in Sint Maarten. The World Bank estimates the combined cost of Sint Maarten's damages and losses from Hurricane Irma was around US\$2.73 billion or 255 percent of the country's GDP.

In Irma's aftermath, and in the face of the widespread devastation, Sint Maarten, which is located in the heart of the Caribbean's "Hurricane Alley," knew it needed to look beyond reconstruction and create systems and structures that would make it climate resilient so it would better weather storms like Irma and Maria.

Recognizing this need for preparedness, **The Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund** was launched in April 2018 to help Sint Maarten rebuild stronger and more sustainably, to support longer-term development priorities. The tripartite, US\$519 million fund is financed by the Government of the Netherlands, administered by the World Bank, and implemented by the Government and people of Sint Maarten.

Although disasters are inevitable and unpredictable, the fund's goal is to make sure that Sint Maarten is prepared. The fund's projects are aligned with the country's most critical needs—institutional strengthening, capacity building, climate-resilient infrastructure, and social and economic cohesion. At the heart of each effort is the community, whose stories of cooperation, resilience, and hope continue to inspire as the country rebuilds.

Having reached the midpoint of its proposed operations, the fund continues to progress and evolve, moving beyond recovery and transitioning into long-term sustainability while remaining true to its mandate: helping the people of Sint Maarten to build back better, safer, and stronger.



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Photo © UNICEF NL/Sint Maarten Trust Fund

Pupils at the Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School play HURRYcane Run, a board game developed by the SSSD and UNICEF NL, with the support of the Sint Maarten Trust Fund to teach children the importance of hurricane and disaster preparedness.

## HURRYcane Run: Keeping Children Safe by Making Disaster Preparedness Fun

**T**he nearly 10,000 children in Sint Maarten were among the most vulnerable victims of Hurricane Irma in September 2017. The massive Category 5 hurricane was one of the strongest ever recorded in the Atlantic, with sustained winds of up to 180 miles per hour. “It was very scary for me because I was younger,” said Keandra Harriot, 11, who was only 5 when Irma hit. “It was a big storm, and there was a lot of rain.” Alexander Williams, 10, described it as traumatizing. “I was staying with my grandmother, and our roof blew off,” he recalled.

Keandra, Alexander, and their classmates at the Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School were among the first to play HURRYcane Run, the board game developed by MECYS’s Student Support Services Division (SSSD) and UNICEF NL as part of the CRPP. The game was conceptualized as an entertaining way to help educators teach children about the

importance of hurricane effects and preparedness. Players win by getting to the finish line as quickly as possible and move ahead faster by answering hurricane preparedness questions or accepting challenges based on different scenarios.

“It’s definitely a fun game! This is the most fun I ever had playing a game!” Alexander said. He also learned some important lessons. “The most important thing I learned was to have a medical kit because it’s something I never really thought about, but once during a storm, I fell and hurt my foot when I went to save my dog,” he said.

For Keandra, it was the same: “During Irma, all the glass windows in the hotel got broken and my mum forgot her slippers, so my dad lent her his but then he cut his foot on the splinters. Having a full medical kit would have helped.”

**“I think children should play this game because they will learn that when a hurricane is happening, to have everything prepared.”**

— **Alexander Williams**, age 10, a pupil of Asha Stevens Hillside Christian School and a big fan of HURRYcane Run



## Highlights

- » HURRYcane Run, a board game developed by the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) in collaboration with UNICEF the Netherlands (United Nations Children’s Fund the Netherlands), teaches children how to prepare for a disaster.
- » Having recognized the gap in emergency response protocols specific to children, MECYS identified the area as critical for long-term resilience.
- » The Child Resilience and Protection Project (CRPP) development objectives focus on strengthening the capacity of Sint Maarten’s child protection system, nurturing the well-being of children and adolescents, and equipping schools to better respond to future disasters.

## Child Resilience and Protection Project

**Project:** P172582

**Start date:** October 22, 2020

**End Date:** July 31, 2024

**Total Financing:** US\$5 million

They also shared some good tips: “Make sure your devices are charged before the storm hits,” Alexander said. “Have a portable charger and also take note of your surroundings, so if you get lost you can know where to go,” added Keandra.

## How the CRPP Is Making Sint Maarten Safer for Children

In the immediate aftermath of Irma, schools were closed for six weeks because many buildings were damaged by flooding, equipment in schools was ruined, and there was no water or electricity. Five daycare centers were destroyed, and almost half of all sports facilities needed urgent repairs. Young lives already disrupted by the storm were now further displaced by having fewer safe spaces.

Aware of this critical gap in emergency response and disaster resilience, MECYS formulated a national strategy outlining the key areas to strengthen education and child protection capacities to better respond to future disasters and keep children safe. This strategy underscores the CRPP’s three development objectives, each of which has associated project components: strengthening the capacity of the child protection system, nurturing children’s and adolescents’ well-being, and equipping schools to better respond to future disasters. The CRPP is implemented by UNICEF Netherlands, working closely with MECYS, which is responsible for enacting policy.

As part of its long-term objective to make Sint Maarten more resilient to external shocks, the CRPP is bolstering the country’s most precious resource: its youth. HURRYcane Run was created to give schools in Sint Maarten an effective tool to reinforce the lessons taught in class. It helps children learn how and why to stay safe during disasters, while playing together strengthens friendships. UNICEF NL’s goal is to distribute the game to schools across the country. SSSD’s goal is to distribute the game to schools across the country.

## Lesson Reinforcement

Shuldiana Carty, who teaches Alexander and Keandra, likes that HURRYcane Run gets her students thinking, even if they don’t realize it. Hurricane preparedness is part of the curriculum, so the game is used to stimulate engagement. “They feel more included and involved—I’ve heard them talking about the game with each other on breaks, so it’s something where they can share their experiences with parents and friends. I enjoy them enjoying the game,” she said.

“Hurricanes are uncontrollable. From the moment children can understand what’s happening, parents should talk to them about it. Let them know, yes, it can be scary. Help them understand what they can expect, what to do to stay safe,” she added.



Photo © National Recovery Program Bureau/Sint Maarten Trust Fund



*Take the chance. Take advantage of the knowledge you will gain. You can use it wherever you go, to other employment, or even to build your own house.”*

— **Shannon Bell**, beneficiary of the Emergency Income Support and Training Project

Shannon Bell, a beneficiary of the Emergency Income and Support Training Project — and the program’s top performer in 2019 — with her award during her graduation.

## An Opportunity to Pursue Untapped Possibilities

In 2017, 34-year-old Shannon Bell was working as a graphic designer, but after Category-5 Hurricane Irma hit Sint Maarten on September 6, the company where she had worked never reopened. She was on of the thousands of people who lost their jobs after the storm’s winds of more than 180 miles per hour left a trail of devastation throughout the country.

Shannon’s new path began in 2018 when she responded to a newspaper announcement for a six-month intensive course on general property maintenance, which was financed by the EISTP, supported by the Sint Maarten Trust Fund (SXM TF), and administered by the World Bank on behalf of the government of the Netherlands. Shannon excelled and finished as the top participant in her cohort, in the program covering carpentry, masonry, landscaping, electric, and plumbing. As part of the course, she was given the opportunity to work with a construction company, where she learned additional skills such as steelwork.

After graduation, Shannon was quickly recruited by a construction company in charge of the post-Irma housing reconstruction under the Emergency Recovery Project I (ERP-I), another SXM TF project. Today, Shannon works as a health and safety officer for airport reconstruction: “It was an old passion rekindled,” she said proudly.

### Creating Opportunities after Irma

Sint Maarten’s overall 2017 unemployment rate (6.2 percent) and youth unemployment rate (23.8 percent) rose significantly following the hurricane as tourism businesses shut down. Rapid economic recovery and reconstruction have been critical to generating revenues and avoiding further job losses, and support to stimulate access to finance and business recovery has also been necessary to enable the private sector to grow and contribute to Sint Maarten’s overall economic recovery. The EISTP was prepared as an emergency response to help mitigate the economic impacts

## Emergency Income Support and Training Project

**Project:** P167368

**Start Date:** August 2, 2018

**End Date:** February 28, 2028

**Total Financing:** US\$22.5 million

### Highlights

- Income support and medical insurance have been provided to two out of every four unemployed persons in Sint Maarten between 2018 and 2020.
- So far, 1,822 people have completed training and received certification in the construction and tourism sectors to prepare them for the job market.
- The Emergency Income Support and Training Project (EISTP) achieved its objective of building and upgrading skills and enhancing the employability of under- and unemployed workers affected by Hurricane Irma.

by protecting poor and vulnerable people, and Shannon is among the 1,960 EISTP beneficiaries who received income support and training through 2022.

The EISTP extended the successful Hospitality First Training and Education initiative started in December 2017 by the nonprofit Sint Maarten Training Foundation, which also began operating that month, and was subsidized by the government of Sint Maarten. The EISTP got underway when the major educational institutions on the island were severely damaged and remained closed.

One main component of the EISTP's focus was on supporting the social safety net and enhancing employability by providing occupational training and income support to beneficiaries left under- and unemployed from the tourism sector, which was the economic sector hit hardest by Irma. That aspect of the project, which was operated in collaboration with the

University of St. Martin and the National Institute for Professional Advancement, was completed in September 2020. The occupational training program offered a six-month training and certification program with theoretical and hands-on experience and an opportunity to take a course on English as a second language. The program also provided participants with health insurance during their coursework.

The project achieved its objective of building and upgrading skills and enhancing participants' employability. It provided income support and training to 1,960 beneficiaries, as verified by the Stichting Overheids Accountants Bureau, exceeding the original project target of 1,800 beneficiaries by 9 percent, of which 69 percent were women. The program reached two out of every four unemployed persons in the country, of which 27 percent were youth. Thus, the project reached the most disadvantaged population in the labor market—women and youth. Ninety-three percent of the beneficiaries completed the recommended training successfully, exceeding the completion target by 50 percent.

### It Is Only the Beginning

Just like Shannon, many participants who graduated from the training program were able to find new jobs or return to their previous jobs. Moreover, for many, acquiring the certificate has been a stepping stone that encourages them to further their education at the University of St. Martin or the National Institute for Professional Advancement.

Speaking about her own progression from EISTP training to housing reconstruction work under the ERP-I, she says, "it was the best feeling, seeing the joy on the faces of the people who were displaced and had to wait months after their homes were destroyed to finally be able to return [to their own home]."

Shannon stated, "You're not just developing yourself; it affects the people around you, people in need. The home repairs project, for example—to me that was an exciting project because not only was it construction-related, but also you are giving back to the community."



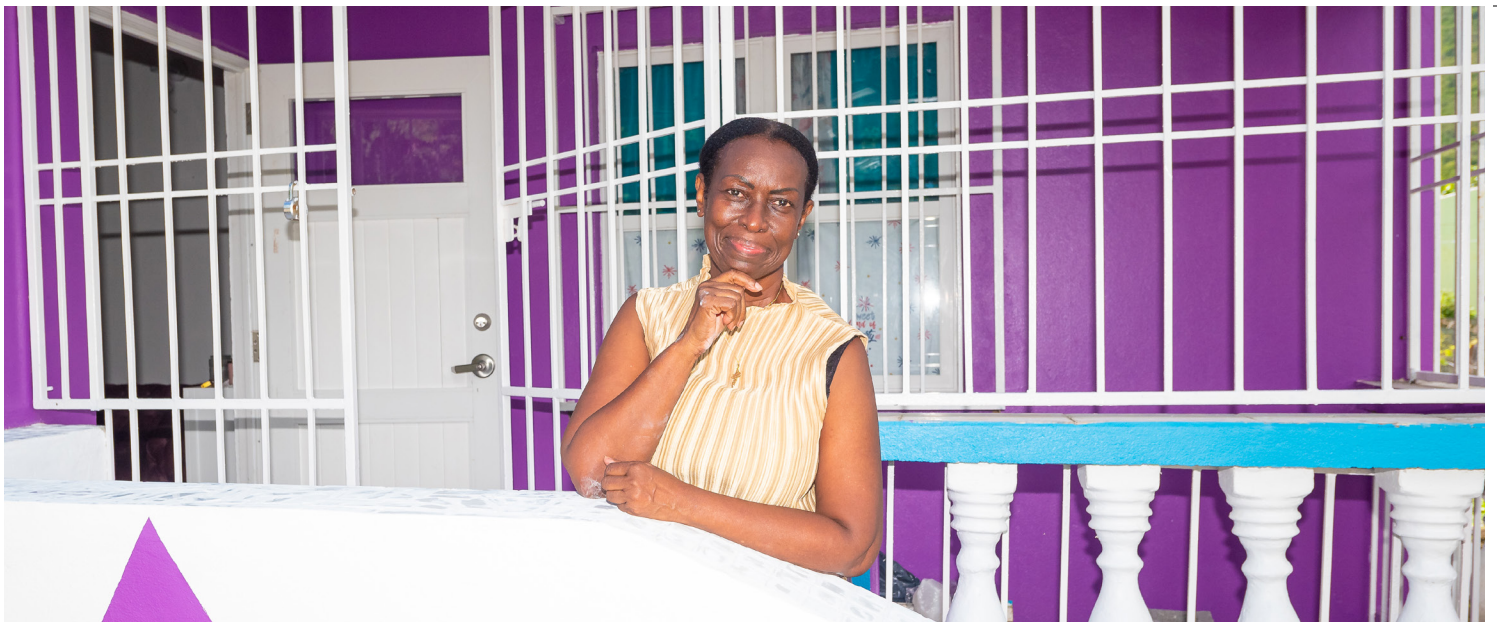


Photo © National Recovery Program Bureau/Sint Maarten Trust Fund

Florentina Richardson stands proudly in her home, refurbished with help from the Emergency Recovery Project – I.

## Resilience after a Disaster

**F**lorentina Richardson was planning to replace the roof of her house, but Hurricane Irma saved her the trouble, she recalled wryly. As the massive Category 5 storm approached Sint Maarten in September 2017, Florentina sensed the danger and managed to get one of the last flights off the island before the storm hit.

A few days later, Florentina returned on a flight carrying desperately needed supplies and humanitarian aid, including some she had prepared herself. She was thunderstruck by the devastation of her country and home.

The hurricane had blown almost all the roof right off Florentina's house, and a live electrical wire was exposed in the yard. When she opened her front door, she saw that the only thing left undamaged was a picture of Jesus on the wall. The furniture was in disarray, the curtains were down, and there was widespread water damage, including a line on the wall marking the height of the floodwaters.

Florentina said, "I fell on my knees and thanked God because looking at this damage, if I stayed, I would have died, and nobody would have known until much later when they started cleaning up."

When she began cleaning, she asked her neighbors to help install a tarp as a temporary roof, but pigeons got into the house. "The pigeons took over. There were droppings everywhere. Whatever I had saved from the hurricane, they ruined. They occupied the house for nearly three years," she said.

With her home unlivable, Florentina was forced to live off the kindness of her neighbors, often sleeping on friends' couches. When the Sint Maarten Government, with the support of the Sint Maarten Trust Fund's Emergency Recovery Project I (ERP-I), announced that it would help repair hurricane-damaged homes, Florentina signed up immediately.

"That all the stakeholders and the World Bank were able to come together to help the people who can't help themselves—especially senior citizens—there is no word in any language big enough to say thank you."

—**Florentina Richardson**, whose home was repaired with Emergency Recovery Project I support



## Highlights

- » About 3,440 citizens have benefited from project activities, including through the provision of more hurricane-resilient public utility services.
- » Nearly 450 homes have been repaired.
- » Local first responders' disaster preparedness capacity has increased.

## Emergency Recovery Project I

**Project:** P167339

**Start Date:** July 10, 2018

**End Date:** December 31, 2025

**Total Financing:** US\$119.7 million

## The First Step to Reconstruction, Recovery, and Resilience

Hurricane Irma—one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the Atlantic Basin—hit Sint Maarten on September 6 with winds and rain so intense that approximately 90 percent of the country's buildings were damaged. The government estimated that the 19,400 homes of Sint Maarten's 40,000 documented residents were damaged, and 5,000 people were displaced.

ERP-I was one of the first projects approved by the Sint Maarten Trust Fund, in July 2018, to quickly address the most immediate recovery priorities. The National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB) implements the project, working closely with NV GEBE, the country's main utility company, the Sint Maarten Housing Development Foundation, and the Ministries of General Affairs; Justice; Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunications; Public Health, Social Development and Labor; and Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

The project focuses on building the capacity of Sint Maarten's first responders to react more efficiently, restore critical public utilities faster, and retain higher overall disaster preparedness capabilities. ERP-I also restores housing.

In 2022, about 3,440 citizens benefited from the project's more hurricane-resilient services, such as underground electric cables, telecom conduits, and potable water distribution pipes. Fire, ambulance, and police services also received critical upgrades to infrastructure, equipment, and

vehicles. And nearly 450 Sint Maarteners—like Florentina—were helped with repairing and rebuilding their homes.

To ensure an even stronger response capacity going forward, the project has also provided support for Sint Maarten to obtain a Caribbean Catastrophe Disaster Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) subscription and Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) membership.

## Grateful for the Support

Florentina recalled some people's skepticism about ERP-I repairing homes: "They believed if they signed up, it meant the government could come later and take their house away. For me, however, and other people who can't help themselves, this was a great opportunity."

ERP-I and the NRPB replaced her roof, repaired the windows, installed new doors, and upgraded the wiring. Florentina's move home in 2022 could not come fast enough. "I told them that whether it was ready or not, I was moving back into my house by September 11. And I was able to," she said.

With her roof repaired and the pigeons gone, Florentina was more than satisfied: "Just to have a roof over my head, even if they didn't also do the rest, I am grateful for the support and for how the NRPB kept in touch after. I know I can always reach out. That all the stakeholders and the World Bank were able to come together to help the people who can't help themselves—especially senior citizens—there is no word in any language big enough to say thank you."



Photo © National Recovery Program Bureau/Sint Maarten Trust Fund



*I already had in my mind that I wanted to be a seamstress full time. It took me about a year and a half to lay the groundwork. I really wanted to do my research, find out what I needed to apply to the Enterprise Support Project, and have a workspace prepared. I wanted to be ready.”*

—**Jo-Ann Schet**, owner of Leighloe Designs, a small business supported by the Enterprise Support Project

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Jo-Ann Schet in her workshop. Jo-Ann always dreamed of being a full-time designer and seamstress, and with support from the Enterprise Support Project, she was finally able to achieve that goal.

## Taking Dreams to the Next Level

**A**s Jo-Ann Schet, an accomplished seamstress, started her fashion company, Leighloe Designs, in 2016 out of a workshop in her home, things were progressing well: she bought sewing machines, worktables, and everything necessary to make her small business dreams come true. But one year later, in September 2017, Hurricane Irma hit Sint Maarten as a massive Category 5 storm and shattered Jo-Ann’s dreams—her workshop was destroyed. “Irma decided she needed my equipment,” Jo-Ann recalled. “I had to start all over again.”

She started slowly rebuilding by taking a corporate job and continuing to sew on the side. Then, fate intervened: “[My friends] were talking about this program, the Enterprise

Support Project, that was a great opportunity but almost nobody was taking advantage of,” Jo-Ann recalled. Her mind started turning, and all the plans for her business that she had put on hold could now move forward. She traded full-time work for part-time work to concentrate on her business. Her pitch focused on establishing a sewing school where she could train people in the community in a potentially lucrative trade.

“In the last two years or so, I’ve really seen an increase in the number of people interested in learning to sew—especially during Covid when everybody was on the do-it-yourself trend. I went from four or five students when I first started to about fifteen now,” she said.

## Enterprise Support Project

**Project:** P168549

**Start Date:** April 4, 2019

**End Date:** June 30, 2025

**Total Financing:** US\$35 million

### Highlights

- The Enterprise Support Project (ESP) has injected US\$12 million into the Sint Maarten economy to date, supporting the recovery of 165 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), of which 62 are owned or operated by women.
- The training program targets existing and new MSMEs to build capacity, with topics ranging from business planning and entrepreneurship to marketing and taxes.
- Direct financing packages support asset and repairs expenses, operational expenses, and loan refinancing.

### Keeping the Economy Alive

Hurricane Irma damaged the physical infrastructure of Sint Maarten and devastated the economy. Estimated damages and losses totalled US\$2.73 billion—255 percent of GDP. The upcoming tourist season had to be cancelled, which was a big blow because the country depends on the sector for 73 percent of its foreign exchange and up to one-third of its jobs.

The ESP was launched in April 2019 and implemented by the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB), working closely with select local financial institutions, the Ministries of Finance and of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication.

In 2022, the ESP injected US\$12 million into the economy, supporting the recovery of 165 MSMEs, of which 62 are owned or operated by women. Feedback has been positive, with 91 percent of beneficiaries indicating that the project's

activities mirrored their needs. The ESP provides three types of assistance packages. The first is a hybrid 65 percent grant/35 percent loan facility to help with asset acquisition and repairs. The second is a 100 percent loan for existing expenditures, and the last is a refinancing option to help free up capital.

To help beneficiaries get the most of their experience, the NRPB launched its Business Fundamentals training program to target existing and new MSMEs, with classes in business planning, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. Topics were then expanded to include marketing strategies, financial management, administration, compliance, and taxes. Out of the 49 participants, 36 completed the training.

### Small Business, Big Dreams

With ESP support, Jo-Ann now focuses on sewing full-time. She invested most of her ESP funding into industrial sewing machines and other equipment necessary to outfit a workspace that could facilitate teaching.

She has a full schedule. She teaches every day except Wednesdays and Fridays, which she dedicates to custom orders and designs for her ready-to-wear collection. "I used to work on domestic machines but they aren't designed for all that work and can wear down quickly. By upgrading, I was able to have more students and incorporate more days," she said.

Jo-Ann's goal is to keep the traditional clothing and culture of Sint Maarten alive. She also wants to work toward creating a distinctive Caribbean product that can appeal to a wider market, attracting local consumers as well as tourists.

Her five-year vision is to create a one-stop shop for sewing supplies and clothing on the island:

"Companies here prefer to order off-island. But what if they ordered from local seamstresses? It's right here; if there's something wrong it's easily fitted and altered. From an economic perspective, we need support from our own people."

Jo-Ann also shows that support by encouraging other local business owners to take advantage of the ESP opportunity: "If I didn't apply to [the] ESP, I probably wouldn't be teaching right now, or I would still be teaching on the same domestic sewing machine with just one student. It is a really good opportunity for Sint Maarteners. Just do it!"





Photo © Sint Maarten Trust Fund

“Miss Sally” Benjamin, sits behind the wheel of the new bus that her foster care foundation, New Start for Children, was able to purchase with support from the Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience Project, part of the Sint Maarten Trust Fund.

## Miss Sally’s Calling: Caring for Children in Need

**V**eronica “Miss Sally” Benjamin grew up in Trinidad with her aunt, who had no other children and treated her as a little adult. After her aunt died, Miss Sally returned to her parents.

At about age 14, she was deemed the responsible one in the family who “knew how to do things,” so her parents entrusted her ten younger siblings to her care. Even though her big heart led her to quit school to work and look after them, she said, “foster care is not something I dreamed about growing up. I am a seamstress by trade. I like designing costumes and things like that.”

A few years later, when Miss Sally moved to Sint Maarten as a young bride, she found herself caring for the children of her husband’s work colleague, who had decided they wanted to stay with her. “They didn’t know me, but people’s

children seem to hold on to me for some reason,” she said. And after caring for more than 50 children over nearly 60 years, Miss Sally, 71, is still going strong.

Her path to fostering began when a friend asked her to take care of five siblings whose mother was sick. Miss Sally declined because her work required frequent travel and her husband could not care for them alone, but two years later, she heard her friends discussing five siblings who were being mistreated to the point that the eldest ran away—they were the same five she had turned away.

“I felt so rotten. That was Christmas Day. The Court of Guardianship [which oversees foster care in Sint Maarten] reopened on January 6. I went straight to them and requested they give me the children. And they did. After that, the Court kept calling me asking if I could take in more

“I started the foundation so we could continue having the children. I am not the going-out type. They keep me company. I treat them well, and we exchange—I am not doing anything for them that they are not doing for me.”

—Veronica “Miss Sally” Benjamin, Director, New Start for Children Foundation

## Highlights

- » The capacity of Sint Maarten's civil society organizations (CSOs) has increased through training and grants for community-based projects.
- » In two years, 2,500 Sint Maarteners have benefitted from the project, 25 percent of the overall project target.
- » Over half of the beneficiaries are women.

## Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience Project

**Project:** P172339

**Start date:** June 26, 2020

**End date:** June 28, 2024

**Total funding:** US\$7.2 million

children and I kept saying yes because I couldn't bear to hear another story like that again."

Miss Sally and her husband cared for the children they took in on their own, supplemented by a small state stipend of about US\$280 per child. As they were growing older, they considered winding down after 20 years of fostering, but social services instead persuaded her to create the New Start for Children Foundation. "It was nothing planned. I always say when you come here on Earth, whatever you have to do, you have to do it before you leave. And I guess this is it."

### Strong Community, Strong Country

The New Start for Children Foundation has since been able to tap into the Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience Project (CSPFRP), part of the Sint Maarten Trust Fund. Through the Resources for Community Resilience (R4CR) grant program, the CSPFRP has played a crucial role in supporting CSOs that fill critical community service gaps, such as helping the foundation purchase a new school bus in 2022 to get the children to school and extracurricular events.

The CSPFRP is implemented by The International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), working closely with the World Bank, the Government of Sint Maarten, and relevant community and state agencies, including the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB).

Through its small-grant program, the CSPFRP aims to help finance 100 projects and target 10,000 people. In addition,

the CSPFRP helps these CSOs build capacity, through training and skills development that help them better manage resources, and grant writing to help them find alternative sources of funding. By June 30, 2022, 73 percent of the 37 sub-projects were completed, and 73 percent of CSOs reported improved capacity for management and implementation. In its first two years, the CSPFRP has benefitted nearly 2,500 Sint Maarteners, of whom more than half are female.

### Looking Ahead

The New Start for Children Foundation operates a five-bedroom foster house with a maximum capacity of 20 children from 0 to 18 years of age. Miss Sally wants the children to feel at home and grow up as strong, capable human beings. "It's not their fault, circumstances brought them to my home, and they should not pay for it." The foundation also assists single parents and families in critical situations with the care and raising of their children.

Recently, Miss Sally delegated the running of the foundation to her capable staff, comprising her daughter-in-law and a former ward. "I have good help, I am not involved much anymore, I give a little advice here and there. They practically run the whole show."

Last November, Miss Sally visited 12 of the children, now grown, who used to live with her and her husband and were now raising families of their own. "I got goosebumps," she said proudly. "The children have good positions, and that is my reward. You feel good because everybody is doing well."





Photo © Sint Maarten Medical Centre/Sint Maarten Trust Fund



*We work to a certain quality standard, and we want the Sint Maarten people to know that not because it is the only hospital or the only choice they have, but to assure them that we have a certain standard, so it is safe to be hospitalized or get treatment here. We provide the best care to our ability.”*

— **Giovanni Diran**, Operating Room Assistant Staff Supervisor

Giovanni Diran and Lorraine Tjinajoe, Operating Room Support Staff Supervisors, share their experience providing critical healthcare to the people of Sint Maarten.

## First Responders Persevere to Provide Services

**A**fter Category 5 Hurricane Irma hit Sint Maarten on September 6, 2017, everything was in chaos. Lorraine Tjinajoe, an operating room assistant staff supervisor at the Sint Maarten Medical Center (SMMC) recalled, “The country was a whole mess, everything [was] upside down. There was no garbage pickup; flies and mosquitoes were everywhere because there was no running water, no electricity. Everywhere and every corner were piles and piles of junk.”

As an SMMC staff member, Lorraine had been onsite at the hospital preparing for Irma’s approach. “All the medical staff on call had to stay on site to be ready to receive patients,” she said. Her unit prepared the operating room against storm damage by covering the medical and electrical equipment with plastic drapes.

The SMMC building withstood the brunt of Irma’s impact, and the operating room remained largely untouched and operational, but the recovery efforts were hampered by the widespread devastation. “We had limited stock for

emergencies, but given the scope of Irma, everything was just at a standstill. We had no laundry coming in, no basic things that you are used to. We had to use our scrubs over and over, and plastic sheets, not the usual linens,” Lorraine recalled.

Global supply chain constraints further slowed recovery efforts. “To serve the people of Sint Maarten, we had to get supplies from outside, but because the traffic into the island over air or sea had stopped, we could not get those supplies in time. We ran out of basics like gloves and sutures,” noted Giovanni Diran, Lorraine’s colleague.

He also explained that keeping everything running was dependent on how fast stocks came in, but the timing of deliveries depended on outside factors. And since Irma, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have further strained supply channels, so the hospital tries to order as many supplies as possible to last between deliveries.



## Hospital Resiliency and Preparedness Project

**Project:** P167532

**Start Date:** August 16, 2018

**End Date:** July 31, 2024

**Total Financing:** US\$28.61 million

### Highlights

- Overseas referrals have dropped 91 percent in five years.
- The Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan and an Evacuation Plan have been developed.
- Some services have expanded, such as dialysis, chemotherapy, and operating room capacity, and new specialty care units have been established, including ophthalmology, neurology, and urology.

### Building the Health Care Sector's Preparedness and Resilience

As the only hospital in Sint Maarten, the nonprofit SMMC has worked to provide the best possible service despite external constraints. Following Irma, the Sint Maarten Trust Fund responded to the country's need for improved hospital preparedness and service capacity and worked with the SMMC to launch the Hospital Resiliency and Preparedness Project, which includes the construction and launch of an improved SMMC facility.

To ensure minimal patient-care disruptions as the hospital upgrades its infrastructure and services, the project will follow a transition and contingency plan, with three key indicators to guide the progress. The first indicator is the number of overseas medical referrals required. Over the past five years, the SMMC has far exceeded expectations, reducing referrals by 91 percent. Although COVID-19 and

related global movement restrictions influenced the data somewhat, the downward trend has held.

The second indicator involves implementing the Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan and the Evacuation Plan. Accordingly, the SMMC is also involved in island-wide Emergency Support Function disaster evacuation preparedness sessions. Topics include activation and communication processes among first responders, patient evacuation protocols and procedures, and regional disaster response collaboration. Other ongoing activities include departmental emergency drills focused on the Fire Disaster and Safety Plan and the Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan for key departments such as the intensive care unit, surgery, and pediatrics.

The third indicator relates to technical audits, which assess the implementation of clinical practice guidelines and quality control mechanisms in selected cases, in addition to the percentage of these cases that are rated as satisfactory.

### Delivering Quality Health Care to the People of Sint Maarten

A lot of things have improved under the project. "I see that the hospital does a lot more quality checks as well to make sure everything follows protocol and is up to standard," said Giovanni.

The project has also helped to repair structural damage caused by Irma; increase the safety, preparedness, and overall resilience of the current hospital; expand the capacity of selected services (with new dialysis, chemotherapy, and operating rooms) and create new services such as ophthalmology, neurology, and urology; and add more patient rooms and beds.

"Our aim is to be the best on the island....We are working towards that so the population will be satisfied with the service we are providing. If there are things that need improvement, we are also looking at that as we evolve [in] to the Sint Maarten General Hospital in a few years from now. We are all in a learning process to better ourselves for the people, to give them the best service," Lorraine said.

## About Sint Maarten

Sint Maarten, “the friendly island,” is a cosmopolitan Caribbean melting pot that is famous for its stunning ocean vistas, diverse ecosystems, fusion cuisine, vibrant culture, and warm, welcoming people. At just 13 square miles, Sint Maarten is the smallest of the four countries that make up the Kingdom of the Netherlands, occupying the southern part of the island it shares with the French overseas collectivity of Saint Martin.

Over 1 million people visit Sint Maarten every year, and about 80 percent of them arrive on cruise ships that dock in Philipsburg, the capital, or land at the iconic Princess Juliana International Airport. Tourism is the country’s biggest industry, making up almost half of the GDP and providing jobs for up to one-third of the labor force.

Sint Maarten is vulnerable to external shocks, such as disruptions to the global travel and tourism sector. Its biggest threat, however, comes from natural disasters. On September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma, a massive Category 5 storm, slammed into Sint Maarten with winds of as much as 180 miles per hour. Just two weeks later, Hurricane Maria passed just south of the island, sparing Sint Maarteners a direct hit but bringing enough rain and wind to complicate ongoing recovery efforts.

With Hurricane Irma having affected 90 percent of Sint Maarten’s infrastructure and large parts of its natural environment, the World Bank estimates the country’s damages and losses at US\$2.73 billion, or 255 percent of GDP.

## The Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery, and Resilience Trust Fund

In response to the need for the country’s improved disaster preparedness, The Sint Maarten Reconstruction, Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund (SXM TF) was launched in April 2018 as a tripartite partnership between the Government of the Netherlands, the Government of Sint Maarten, and the World Bank to help the country rebuild stronger and more sustainably, in line with longer-term development priorities.

The SXM TF is financed by the Government of the Netherlands, administered by the World Bank, and implemented by the Government and people of Sint Maarten. The project is envisioned to run until 2028. The current SXM TF portfolio amounts to US\$519.42 million.

Five organizations (project implementation units, or PIUs) currently execute or manage SXM TF projects:

- National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB)
- Princess Juliana International Airport Operating Company N.V. (PJIAE)
- Sint Maarten Medical Center (SMMC)
- UNICEF Netherlands
- VNG International (VNGI)

There are currently 10 ongoing projects that are supported by the SXM TF, with 3 more under preparation and 1 completed:

### Ongoing

- Airport Terminal Reconstruction Project
- Child Resilience and Protection Project
- Civil Society Partnership Facility for Resilience Project
- Digital Government Transformation Project
- Emergency Debris Management Project
- Emergency Income Support and Training Project
- Emergency Recovery Project I
- Enterprise Support Project
- Fostering Resilient Learning Project
- Hospital Resiliency and Preparedness Project

### Under Preparation

- Housing Project
- Improving Mental Health Services Project
- Sint Maarten Wastewater Management Project

### Completed

- Roof Repair Project

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For more information about Sint Maarten and the World Bank, please visit: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sintmaarten>

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