Background and Rationale

The Antigua and Barbuda Declaration of 2017 formalised Caribbean countries’ commitment to school safety. Since then, significant advancements in school safety have been made at a global and regional level. To uphold the relevance of the regional commitment to the Caribbean School Safety Initiative, the Third Ministerial Forum held in 2022 yielded the Sint Maarten Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean, which underscores the school safety framework of the CSSI to ensure the right to quality and inclusive education for all. It also appraises the regional exposure and vulnerability to natural, biological, anthropogenic, or societal hazards (including various types of violence) that can potentially cause disasters.

The 2022 Sint Maarten Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean explicitly speaks to the need to address the manifestation of the systemic nature of risk and the required joint effort across sectors; it recognises the rising human and financial cost of disasters. The Declaration frames these challenges in the context of Small Island Developing States.

The Declaration re-affirms the recommendations of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Action Plan and the Punta del Este Declaration
The Caribbean region continues to experience the effects of systemic and multi-hazard risk as we witness the interplay and amplification of the varied effects of multiple events like increasingly frequent and intense climate events such as hurricanes, as well as geological events (earthquakes and tsunamis), and social (migration) as well as biological hazards, among others.

Against this backdrop, the recovery plans and other instruments designed and implemented by national and regional entities present an opportunity to: 1) reiterate the value of education in building resilient societies, and 2) the need for multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and regional coordination. In this order of ideas, the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), which aims to advance school safety in the Caribbean, is the regional mechanism to rehearse this link between education and resilience, and secure coordination.

The CSSI virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum provides an opportunity to further expand upon the existing dialogue around this central matter with a broad spectrum of stakeholders and identify the key issues for high-level discussion at the IV Ministerial Forum scheduled for 2025 in St. Lucia.

Priorities for further dialogue at the regional level

Some of the key issues emerging from the III Ministerial Forum in Sint Maarten, outcomes of the 12th Caribbean Conference on Comprehensive Disaster Management held in Barbados in 2022, the Regional Platform for DRR in the Americas and Caribbean held in Uruguay in 2023, among others, include:

- Support partners in recognizing their role in resource mobilization for effective advancement of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative and promoting synergies as a commitment to energize efforts in advocating for political support, taking into consideration the overall need to increase access to financial resources, especially for SIDS to support DRR taking into account simplification, speed and scale;
• Strengthened relationship between regional and national governance mechanisms, fostering a space for knowledge management, exchange of experiences and best practices.
• Strengthened emphasis on biological, anthropogenic, and other threats in assessments, policy, and contingency planning for the education sector, where needed.
• Implement strategies aiming to close the digital gap and provide students with resources to manage learning gaps.
• Update policy and plans to consider biological hazards with a multi-hazard approach based on risk information and knowledge. When reopening it is important to consider: wellbeing, protection, policy frameworks, financing opportunities, safe operations, reaching the most vulnerable, and learning.
• Address the importance of requiring that educational infrastructure and school facilities be accessible, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, including by adopting multi-hazard risk reduction mitigation and preparedness approaches and measures that ensure the continuity of their services.

Climate Change

Globally, according to the UNDRR's Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, disasters will push an additional 100.7 million people into poverty by 2030 and an estimated 37.6 million more people will be living in conditions of extreme poverty due to the impacts of climate change.

That being said, the broader Latin American and Caribbean region is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, and home to one in four recorded disasters. According to the joint OCHA-UNDRR Panorama of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2022 report, more than 190 million people have suffered some form of impact since 2000.

Specifically in the Caribbean, a significant proportion of the population in the region lives in coastal areas, including in areas that are at high or very high risk of being affected by coastal hazards, such as contaminated freshwater aquifers (e.g. through salt water intrusion), eroded wetlands, shorelines, floodplains, storm surges and tsunamis, and that these threats, enhanced by the increasing occurrence of extreme events, are of critical importance in the case of SIDS.

Any dialogue regarding preparedness, risk reduction and early warning for improved school safety in the Caribbean must consider the potential impact of climate change, among others.
Role of Youth in DRR and safe schools

Highlighting the vital role of young people as agents as well as drivers of change and the positive contribution they can make to creating a culture of safety and prevention and to the resilience of future generations, and noting the contributions and wishes as documented by the youth participation in multiple fora, the CSSI finds it is time to ensure real and operational participation of youth in school safety and not just in discussion forums.

At the 3rd Ministerial Forum, the CSSI decided to support a governance structure for decision making and engagement such as the CSSI youth officers as proposed by the youth themselves at the 2022 CSSI Youth Forum.

The CSSI Ministerial Forum

The Caribbean Safe School Ministerial Forum is the flagship triennial meeting attended by Ministers of Education from the whole region, high level education officials, disaster risk reduction practitioners, and international and regional stakeholders, to explore and identify policy opportunities and gaps for Education Sector Resilience, as well as their regional coordination. This, in the context of systemic risk, and with a multiple hazards approach, including biological hazards, such as COVID-19.

It is the Forum for attaining and/or affirming the support of the region’s Ministries of Education of the current Sint Maarten Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean, as well as to the agreed Road Map for its implementation. The Declaration embraces the Comprehensive School Safety Framework as its internationally recognized approach to reducing risk to various hazards in the education sector. Currently nineteen countries and territories have already signed the Declaration, and it is expected that in future other Caribbean states will join the Initiative.

The Fourth Ministerial Forum will be hosted by the Ministry of Education of St. Lucia, and is tentatively scheduled for March 2025. Given the timespan before the next Ministerial Forum, this virtual pre-Forum provides an opportunity to capture and synthesize the spectrum of discussions currently taking place by Ministries of Education, stakeholders and other partners that could form the foundations of the discussions on the eventual Agenda at the Ministerial Forum itself.
CSSI Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum Objectives

The objectives of the event would be:

1. To review the progress of the current CSSI roadmap and gather inputs to improve existing policies and tools.
2. To promote the expansion of countries committing to the Sint Maarten Declaration across the Caribbean.
3. To promote the sharing of lessons learnt from the interplay of multiple natural, socio-natural, and human-induced hazards towards increasing school safety across the Caribbean.
4. To set the agenda for the Fourth CSSI Ministerial Forum to be held in St. Lucia in 2025.

2024 Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum Expected Outcomes

1. Consensus on the way forward for technical partners and other stakeholders to support the advancement of the CSSI.
2. Monitoring of the current CSSI Road Map to be tabled at the Fourth Ministerial Forum on Safe Schools.
3. Recommendations for setting the agenda for the Fourth Ministerial Forum on School Safety.
4. Guarantee the link with the next regional and global Platforms for DRR, as well as in the CDEMA-CDM Conference, by identifying key CSSI messages to be brought forward.
5. Documenting and sharing the lessons and experiences beyond the Ministerial Forum.

2024 Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum Format

The Virtual Pre-Ministerial Forum will take the form of four 90-120 minute virtual sessions to take place over a period of three days, beginning with a high-level session involving Ministers of Education in the entire Caribbean region.

The forum aims to support the action of School Safety focal points at Ministries of Education. The sessions would aim to strengthen and establish partnerships with other sectors, as well as, with other stakeholders and practitioners, to better understand the systemic nature of risk, and the ways to manage it.
Draft agenda

DAY 1: Morning session (closed) with Ministers of Education
DAY 2: Morning session (closed) with school safety focal points
    Afternoon session (hybrid by invitation and open) with youth representatives
DAY 3: Afternoon open session with stakeholders

Involved stakeholders of the proposed programme

- Ministers of Education
- School safety focal points
- National Disaster Management Offices Directors
- Inter-sectoral partners
- Practitioners (teachers, principals, communities)
- Youth
- Other stakeholders