



OXFAM RESEARCH REPORT

FAR FROM RECOVERY

PUERTO RICO SIX MONTHS AFTER
HURRICANE MARIA



OXFAM

COVER: View from Palmarejo, in Villalba, Puerto Rico, where Oxfam distributed water filters to families. *Coco McCabe / Oxfam America*

INTRODUCTION

Hurricane Maria caused widespread devastation across Puerto Rico, killing as many as 1,052 people, destroying hundreds of thousands of homes, causing an island-wide blackout that for many continues to this day, and blocking over half of the 3.4 million residents from access to potable water. Six months into the crisis, the situation remains critical, particularly for those displaced from their homes, vulnerable populations, and rural communities. With hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans still living without access to the electric grid, and tens of thousands displaced from the island and living in the United States, recovery for a great many is a distant dream, and basic needs are still not met.

Oxfam teams in Puerto Rico partner with local responders who are working tirelessly to build back their communities. From existing civil society organizations to local churches to university students to local governments, Puerto Ricans organized to clear roads, to provide food and water to vulnerable neighbors, and to restart businesses and services. But the magnitude of the hurricane requires a robust federal government effort. This report seeks to briefly assess the current situation in Puerto Rico at the six-month mark and to identify urgent areas for attention that will allow Puerto Ricans to finally rebuild their lives and prevent a similar humanitarian crisis in the future. It makes the following points:

- The humanitarian disaster in Puerto Rico continues to this day. Six months after Hurricane Maria hit the island, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans are still without access to power.¹ The lack of electricity prevents people from rebuilding their lives, accessing health services, ensuring education for children, and easily accessing potable water.
- The federal government showed delays and inaction in a number of urgent and even lifesaving areas, such as a timely investment of resources, staffing the response, and executive actions to address the crisis. Delays and inaction continue, displacing people, stifling the economy, and bankrupting the most vulnerable.
- Dedicated federal funding for recovery and development in Puerto Rico under the most recent budget was \$11 billion; this sum represents a fraction of the \$94 billion that the governor of Puerto Rico has requested for rebuilding.² An absence of funding for programs will not only stifle the recovery process, but also increases the already high level of vulnerability to natural hazards in Puerto Rico, thereby allowing for a similar humanitarian crisis to occur again.
- The Individuals and Households Program (IHP) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can provide essential support

to Puerto Ricans who have lost their homes and belongings, but the system for applying for IHP support currently faces numerous challenges, with recent analyses showing a high rate of rejection of applications.

Moving forward, Oxfam calls for the following:

1. The federal government must provide serious and dedicated funding to rebuild Puerto Rico. This means an urgent investment of dedicated dollars toward making victims and communities whole again after the disaster, and longer-term commitments for disaster mitigation, climate resiliency, and economic recovery to stave off another humanitarian crisis.
2. The federal government must operate on a “people over process” principle. Success should be measured, first and foremost, by how many disaster survivors are helped. Reaching those most vulnerable will likely require adapting procedures and processes to Puerto Rico’s unique context and waiving laws or rules that impede the recovery.
3. Federal agencies must maintain a basic level of transparency for aid recipients and for the public at large. Puerto Ricans require greater transparency from FEMA regarding its process of selecting recipients of disaster assistance and the amounts provided. For the general public, the federal and local governments must do more to provide prompt, accurate, and publicly available information on response efforts.

A note on the methodology and the lack of available data

One of the challenges following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico is the scarcity of reliable information on such basic questions as the number of people killed by the hurricane and the number of homes destroyed, as well as the precise actions taken by the government to address the crisis. The lack of information prevents a full accounting of the needs of the victims of the hurricane, of the adequacy of government actions, and of progress to date. This report uses the data available, supplementing it with information from interviews with several key organizations in Puerto Rico in February of 2018.

THE STRENGTH AND IMPACT OF HURRICANE MARIA

Hurricane Maria was one of the strongest and most devastating hurricanes to ever hit the United States. While Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria were all classified as Category 4 hurricanes at landfall in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico, respectively, Hurricane Maria had the highest maximum wind speeds at 155 miles per hour (mph), just 1 mile per hour less than a Category 5 hurricane. Maria neither weakened nor shifted course, but rather punished the island for almost 30 hours nonstop. Moreover, Maria was the second of the one-two punch of hurricanes hitting Puerto Rico. Just two weeks before Maria made landfall, Hurricane Irma passed by Puerto Rico's highly populated northern coast—including the capital city of San Juan, resulting in 63 percent of the population losing power and 34 percent losing access to potable water.³

Hurricane characteristics of Harvey, Irma, and Maria			
	Harvey—TX	Irma—FL	Maria—PR
Hurricane strength (at landfall)	Category 4	Category 4	Category 4
Maximum sustained wind speed (at landfall)	130 mph	130 mph	155 mph
Estimated damage	\$125 billion	\$50 billion	\$90 billion
Estimated deaths	88	72	64 to 1,052

Sources: National Hurricane Center (NHC) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)⁴ Office for Coastal Management of the NOAA;⁵ Texas Department of State Health Services;⁶ Florida Division of Emergency Management;⁷ Puerto Rico Department of Public Security;⁸ and The New York Times.⁹

Estimates of the death toll show the fatal impact of the hurricane and its aftermath. Although the official death toll is just 64, other estimates that take into account the breakdown of the health care system immediately following the hurricane put the death toll much higher, at 1,052 or even 1,085.¹⁰ According to this larger estimate, the majority of the deaths were caused by illnesses (such as pneumonia, Alzheimer's, kidney disease, diabetes, and hypertension). While the circumstances contributing to these deaths are still unclear, the breakdown in health services following the hurricane was a primary cause. Only on February 22, 2018, did the governor of Puerto Rico announce an independent commission to estimate the number of casualties from the hurricanes.¹¹

THE CONTINUING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN PUERTO RICO

Hurricane Maria has led to an ongoing humanitarian disaster in Puerto Rico. Despite the large-scale mobilization of support from government and civil society, further well-coordinated efforts are needed to restore the power supply, rebuild housing, and address the long-term needs of Puerto Rico.

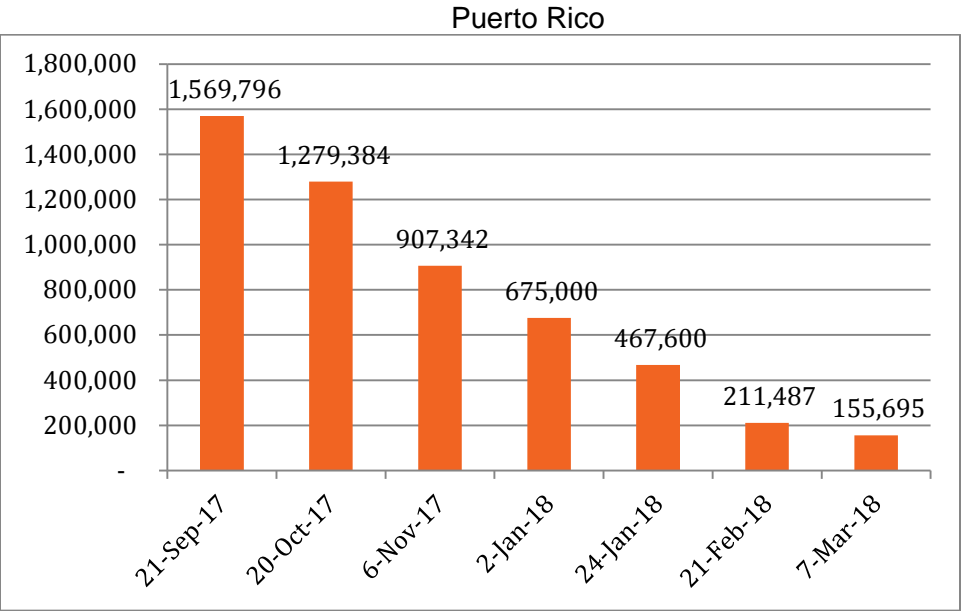
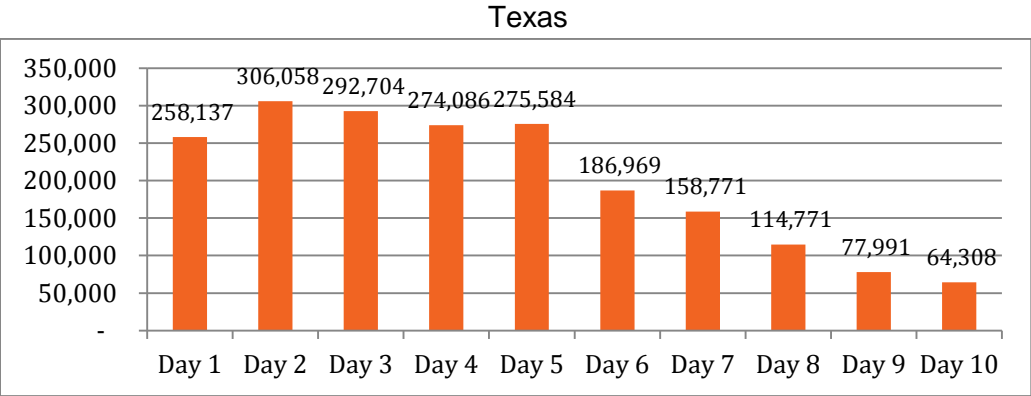
Electricity: Most critical for relieving the humanitarian crisis is the restoration of electricity to Puerto Rico. Four months after Hurricane Maria hit, there were more subscribers without power in Puerto Rico than there were at any point in Texas after Hurricane Harvey (as of January 24, 2018, 467,600 subscribers were without power in Puerto Rico; the highest number of subscribers without power in the aftermath of Harvey in Texas was 306,058).¹²

The ongoing power outage in Puerto Rico is one of the largest and longest power outages in US history.¹³ As of March 7, 2018, the Department of Energy (DOE) reports that roughly 11 percent of subscribers (155,695) remain unconnected to the grid.¹⁴ Given that the US Census Bureau reports that the average number of people per household in Puerto Rico is 2.82, this translates to roughly 440,000 people who lack power in their homes.¹⁵ Many are located in vulnerable areas and particularly in rural areas.¹⁶

In reality, the situation may even be worse, as mayors and the public at large have questioned the accuracy of the number of subscribers reconnected to the grid, claiming that the number is exaggerated.¹⁷ Moreover, large-scale blackouts occur. For example, on March 1, 2018, two power plants shut down, causing approximately 970,000 Puerto Ricans to lose power.¹⁸

It remains unclear when power will be fully restored in Puerto Rico.

Number of subscribers without access to electricity in Texas (by day) and Puerto Rico (by month)



Source: DOE Situation Reports, 2017–2018.¹⁹
 Note: The DOE could not accurately report on the number of subscribers without power in Puerto Rico during some of the months after the hurricane. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the time between these figures.

Blackouts prevent any hope of stabilizing home life. Even for households that have access to the energy grid, persistent power outages make electricity erratic for many people, preventing reliable access to water, refrigeration, food preparation, and light. Families cannot access water, because water pumps are powered by the electric grid. Perishable food cannot be kept at home, because refrigerators are useless. For those who have access to generators and fuel, the exorbitant costs of fuel stress already financially strapped families, and pollution from generators exacerbates respiratory problems. A lack of access to electricity also affects the provision of other basic services, such as schools, hospitals and clinics, and potable water services.

Housing: Another aspect of the continuing humanitarian crisis is the destruction of hundreds of thousands of homes. Even now, no official count of the number of homes that have been destroyed or otherwise structurally damaged has been publicly released. However, the governor of Puerto Rico has provided a rough estimate that 472,000 housing units have been seriously affected by the storm: 87,094 destroyed completely and 385,703 sustaining major damage.²⁰

Water: Although water systems have been restored in much of Puerto Rico, some communities still do not have easy access to drinking water. The hurricane reduced access to potable water by an estimated 70 percent in the days after the event.²¹ At present, the governor of Puerto Rico estimates that nearly 97 percent²² of water subscribers have been reconnected to the water system, although the precise number of Puerto Ricans with access to potable water is not clear. A central problem in the provision of water is the lack of electricity to power the water pumps, which require electricity to operate.

The Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewers Authority (PRASA) reported in late February 2018 that of the 877 potable water pumps that serve the island, 111 do not operate at all because of a lack of power, while hundreds of them work using emergency generators that have high fuel costs.²³ The communities whose pumps currently do not function are found in every region of the country, including the San Juan metropolitan area. Moreover, there are an estimated 237 small water systems that fall outside of the PRASA system, and several dozen of them are currently in need of repair.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, many Puerto Ricans have been compelled to consume untreated water; at least two deaths have been attributed to leptospirosis (a waterborne illness), and as of November 2017, a total of 76 cases of the disease had been reported.²⁵

The Oxfam team in a number of communities observes increased burdens for women as a consequence of a lack of access to water. They report increased complaints from women about the negative physical impacts to their health from hauling water, about the challenges to hygiene from lack of water, and for elderly women, about the physical inability to haul water and use buckets to flush toilets. Women must expend additional labor because washing machines do not work and because they are burdened with caring for the elderly and bedridden without the support of electricity for cooking, food preservation, and washing clothes.

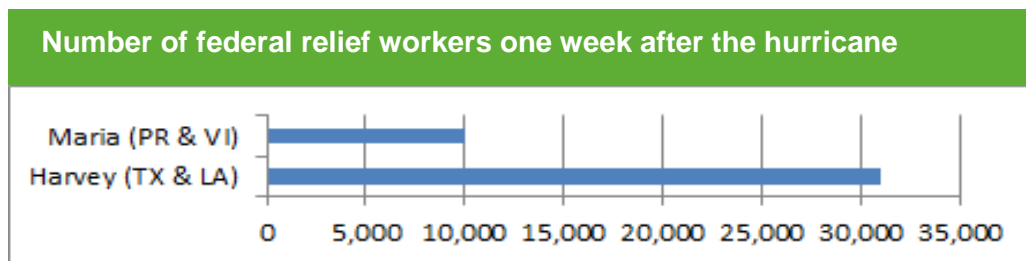
Health services: Some areas of Puerto Rico still do not receive adequate medical attention. To this day, many private health clinics continue to operate on generator power, which forces them to reduce the hours of service due to the fuel costs of running the generator for long periods of time. Moreover, data provided by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Puerto Rico show that hundreds of doctors have left the country since Hurricane Maria, leading to staff shortages.²⁶ Oxfam found that the communities most affected by the shortened hours and

staff shortages are located in the mountains or on the east coast, where the hurricane hit the hardest and the need is the greatest.²⁷

Schools: Throughout Puerto Rico, most classes are back in session, but some schools face serious limitations. At least 70 schools were severely damaged or destroyed.²⁸ The Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico has conducted an informal count of schools and identified dozens that have not been connected to the electric grid; these schools often run on generators, which results in teachers holding classes for only four hours in the morning due to fuel costs, instead of the usual seven hours per school day.²⁹

THE INADEQUATE ACTIONS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AFTER THE HURRICANE

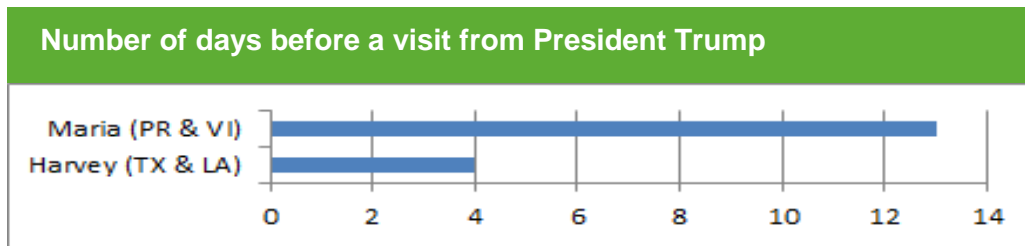
Despite the enormous resources spent to date and large number of personnel mobilized, the response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico was slow, with key aspects of relief mishandled. A lack of publicly available performance data prevents a comprehensive analysis of the federal response, including whether tax dollars were well spent. FEMA states that in Puerto Rico it conducted “the longest sustained air mission of food and water in FEMA history.”³⁰ However, the federal government response to Hurricane Maria was delayed and inadequate in key areas, such as the amount and timing of federal funds for hurricane relief; the size and speed of the distribution of tarps and food; and the timing of the waiving of the Jones Act.



Sources: FEMA and the New York Times.³¹

Note: VI is Virgin Islands.

Despite the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria on the citizens of Puerto Rico, the presence of federal relief workers soon after impact was relatively scant on the island. As a point of comparison, at the one-week mark after each storm, the number of FEMA, National Guard, or other federal relief personnel on the ground in Texas was triple the number in Puerto Rico, despite the greater need and level of devastation on the island.³² The weak staffing presence served to undermine the immediate relief efforts in the aftermath of the hurricane.



President Trump showed a slow reaction to Hurricane Maria. As a point of comparison, while the president visited Texas just four days after Hurricane Harvey, he did not visit Puerto Rico until 13 days after Hurricane Maria. The Jones Act, which only allows US-flag ships from the United States to transport goods and passengers from one US port to the next,³³ remained in place for eight days after the hurricane, thus inhibiting the shipment of much-needed relief supplies to Puerto Rico.³⁴ Moreover, the suspension of the Jones Act only lasted for 10 days, meaning that it had nearly no impact.

Funding from the federal government was delayed as well. Two weeks after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, Congress passed \$15.25 billion in relief funding as part of the Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Requirements Act of 2017.³⁵ In contrast, Congress took more than a month to approve a \$36.5 billion bill as part of the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Requirements Act of 2017, which included \$16 billion for the National Flood Insurance Program that primarily benefited Texas and Florida (approximately 2 percent of Puerto Rican homeowners hold flood insurance that allows access to these funds).³⁶ The delays in properly funding federal programs can impede their ability to respond to the needs of hurricane victims, especially in the case of such programs as the Community Development Block Grant program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The distribution of tarps is another process that has experienced delays to this day. A critical program to install tarps, Operation Blue Roof of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), is one of the few publicly available performance indicators from the federal government that showed the target number and the progress. Two weeks after Hurricane Irma in Florida, USACE had offered blue roofs—tarps that serve as temporary roofs—in 17 counties of Florida; meanwhile, two weeks after Hurricane Maria, USACE still had not installed its first blue roof in Puerto Rico.³⁷ Then, as of December 11, 2017, USACE had only hit 28 percent of its target of a total of 71,680 requested blue roofs.³⁸ According to the latest information in February 2018, the program still had not hit its target, having distributed just over 50,000 blue roofs.³⁹ FEMA also managed the distribution of over 100,000 tarps;⁴⁰ however, a \$30 million tarp contract was mishandled by FEMA when it awarded it to a newly established Florida company called Bronze Star LLC, which had no track record of supplying tarps or fulfilling government contracts.⁴¹ Oxfam staff, local officials, and other NGOs observed that people

desperately needed tarps in the months following the hurricane, but reported that very few were available from FEMA.⁴²

While FEMA has stated that it completed the largest airlift of food and water in its history, news stories of the mishandling of contracts raise serious questions as to the number of Puerto Ricans that went hungry when meals were not delivered. A FEMA contract for 30 million meals was subcontracted to a wedding caterer in Atlanta; when the first set of 18.5 million meals was due in October of 2017, the contractor provided just 50,000.⁴³ Overall, however, it is unclear what the target number for delivery was, and whether FEMA achieved those targets, especially among the Puerto Ricans most affected by the hurricane.

THE NEED TO FUND EFFORTS TO REDUCE VULNERABILITY TO FUTURE DISASTERS

The severe human impact and the catastrophic nature of the hurricanes in Puerto Rico were not just due to the size and strength of the hurricanes, but also to the vulnerability found in Puerto Rico. If adequate funding to reduce vulnerability is not provided, the increasing frequency of future natural hazards owing to climate change will continue to cause widespread damage and suffering in Puerto Rico.⁴⁴

Vulnerability is a key concept in explaining the impact of natural hazards. The basic idea is that people have varying levels of vulnerability to even the same natural hazard based on a variety of characteristics. A rich, scholarly literature has sought to identify the precise characteristics of vulnerability, ranging from factors such as socioeconomic indicators to political voice.⁴⁵ This brief analysis includes only a handful of readily available vulnerability characteristics.

Forms of vulnerability in Puerto Rico, Florida, and affected counties in Texas

	Affected counties in Texas	Florida	Puerto Rico
Poverty rate (2016)	15.1%	14.7%	43.5%
Median household income (2012–2016)	\$57,186	\$48,900	\$19,606
Unemployment (August 2017)	4.2% (all Texas)	4.0%	10.1%
Population with a disability and under 65 (2016)	7.6%	8.6%	15.3%
Population older than 65 (2016)	11.4%	19.9%	18.9%
State/island government debt (per capita) (FY 2017)	\$1,722 (all Texas)	\$1,624	\$21,108
Political voice	Full	Full	No voting representation in US Congress ⁴⁶

Sources: US Census Bureau, *New York Times*.⁴⁷

Note: Puerto Rico debt includes debt in the form of bonds only, not pensions. The population with a disability is for people under 65 years of age, averaged from 2012–2016.

Even before the hurricane, Puerto Rico had a number of characteristics that made its citizens vulnerable to hurricanes and other natural hazards. The poverty rate was 43.5 percent in 2016, compared with 12.7 percent in the United States as a whole. Before the hurricanes, general economic activity in Puerto Rico was slower, as well, with a median household income in Puerto Rico from 2012 to 2016 at just \$19,606. The government of Puerto Rico before the hurricanes found itself in a debt crisis, with more than \$73 billion in bond debt as well as over \$50 billion in pension obligations. Puerto Rico was relatively vulnerable due to the poor quality of its infrastructure, particularly its electricity generation and distribution networks. At the national level, Puerto Rico has very limited political voice. Puerto Rico has no voting rights in the federal government; instead, the island’s citizens select a resident commissioner, who is a nonvoting representative in the US Congress. As a point of comparison, the above table refers to similar vulnerability characteristics in Texas and Florida, sites of recent hurricanes.

In order to address the challenges facing the island and to “Build Back Better,”⁴⁸ the governor of Puerto Rico has requested \$94 billion to finance the rebuilding of Puerto Rico.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Congressional funding for recovery earmarked for Puerto Rico under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 is \$11 billion, including \$2 billion for the rehabilitation of the electrical grid of Puerto Rico, with another \$4.9

billion for Medicaid in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Given the fiscal weakness of the Puerto Rican government, including a bond debt of over \$73 billion, the probability of the island government raising sufficient funds to invest in critical programs is very low.

The lack of federal funding puts Puerto Rico at risk of the same humanitarian disaster recurring. The concept of “building back better,” which includes disaster risk reduction,⁵⁰ indicates that now is the time to make investments that reduce the vulnerability of Puerto Rico to future natural hazards. The current lack of funding means that Puerto Rico will at best build back to the standard from before the hurricane, a standard that lacked climate resiliency. For example, Puerto Rico will likely repair its outdated electric grid to its former standard without substantive upgrades, meaning that the next hurricane will likely cause the same disastrous blackouts.⁵¹ Widespread blackouts, such as the one on March 1, 2018, when an estimated 970,000 Puerto Ricans lost power,⁵² appear to confirm this danger.

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR PUERTO RICANS

Assistance from FEMA, particularly through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP), is critical for Puerto Ricans to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Maria. While there are a variety of mechanisms by which FEMA provides support to hurricane victims, the most important in the current phase of recovery are Housing Assistance and Other Needs Assistance, which form part of the IHP.

Recent academic and media analyses have scrutinized FEMA data on registrations for assistance via the IHP. According to one report, whose data has not yet been publicly released, Puerto Ricans have submitted approximately 1.1 million registrations for assistance from the IHP.⁵³ Of these, only a few thousand have received the maximum grant of individual assistance of \$33,300.⁵⁴ Also, 434,000 grants of Housing Assistance or Other Needs Assistance have been provided (with some households receiving both), a ratio of 0.39 to the total number of registrations, with just under 6,000 under review.⁵⁵ Although a certain percentage of rejections are due to applicants’ errors (such as duplicate or multiple applications) or fraud, this ratio of grants to total registrations appears lower than for other hurricanes in the United States. For example, records state that of the total number of registrations, the number of grants under IHP (composed of Housing Assistance and Other Needs Assistance) for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was 1.89 million from 2.4 million applications, a ratio of 0.77.⁵⁶

Potential recipients of assistance from FEMA in Puerto Rico face a number of challenges when applying, which may partly explain the relatively low approval rate for applications. Oxfam partners in Puerto Rico, along with other reports,

describe a complex and frustrating process of applying for assistance that often denies support for people who lost nearly everything they own. Puerto Ricans were instructed to apply for assistance via phone or internet, but with the power grid and phone networks down in much of the island, they were unable to do so.⁵⁷ Oxfam also heard anecdotes of telephone applicants who, after finally communicating with FEMA, found the person answering unable to speak Spanish, a problem for many applicants because 80 percent of Puerto Ricans report that they speak English “less than very well.”⁵⁸ During home inspections by FEMA, a critical step in receiving housing assistance, Puerto Ricans were unable to communicate with the inspectors and, therefore, did not understand the various documents required for the inspection.

The precise eligibility criteria for the various forms of assistance—and the factors that determine the precise amount provided—are not presented in an accessible manner, nor were they communicated to the people of Puerto Rico clearly. Oxfam has observed cases in which applicants were afraid of eliminating eligibility for aid if they installed repairs to their homes such as fixing their roofs, which led to unnecessarily destroyed belongings. Moreover, a commonly cited problem is the lack of documentation of home ownership, which has led to the denial of support for an unknown number of homeowners in Puerto Rico, many of whom inherited their property without a deed.⁵⁹

Civil society helps citizens face bureaucracy

The local organization ENLACE G8, which supports eight communities surrounding the Martin Peña Channel, known as “el caño,” coordinates lawyers to help people fill out FEMA forms. The center has Wi-Fi, volunteers who can help people understand the requirements of the forms, and lawyers who can help with any legal issues. Since the hurricane, ENLACE has been running clinics in two locations across the eight Martin Peña Channel communities. In just a few days, its lawyers and volunteers helped more than 200 families fill out the FEMA forms, and provided many more, like Daisy Ruperto Padilla, with additional legal support.

Daisy Ruperto Padilla had already filled out a FEMA form for her two-story home whose roof had been torn off by the hurricane, but she hadn’t heard anything back because she was living with her sister in Caguas. Caguas used to be a quick trip from San Juan, but now the journey can take two hours by car. Daisy also did not have a working phone. She needed FEMA to inspect her home, provide support to repair the damage, and let her return. Many Puerto Ricans are living with other family members, but despite the kindness of their relatives, they can’t stay forever.

To make things even more complicated, Daisy Ruperto Padilla didn’t have proof of ownership of her home. She inherited it from her mother, but under

Puerto Rican law, houses are split evenly among all of a parent's children, so she needed an affidavit from a notary to prove the house is hers. Without such proof, FEMA won't provide her the help she needs to repair it. She tried to keep a smile on her face and thanked everyone at the center who helped, but after her long drive, she was anxious to resolve the issue.

Source: <https://firstperson.oxfamamerica.org/2017/10/without-electricity-or-the-internet-how-can-puerto-ricans-get-fema-help-by-a-looming-deadline>

A NOTE ON LACK OF TRANSPARENCY ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

As part of this analysis, our team discovered sparse information on the activities of the federal government and particularly FEMA in their responses to the humanitarian crisis following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

Most importantly, nearly no performance data is available that includes targets and actual achievements. Only one federal entity, USACE, has supplied both pieces of information.⁶⁰ Even this information was provided comprehensively only once, and has not been regularly updated. Based on our search, publicly available data on targets and achievements is not available for FEMA operations (USACE is not a part of FEMA). Because of this lack of basic performance information, it is difficult to determine the achievements of FEMA following extreme weather events such as Hurricane Maria, and also whether taxpayer dollars were well spent.

Second, FEMA does not regularly release disaggregated data on spending and activities. The primary updated information provided by FEMA is general data in terms of approved spending and a select few outputs, including individual assistance applications approved, total IHP dollars approved, and total public assistance grants dollars obligated.⁶¹ Basic details on this spending or the outputs—such as the number of applications, applications under review, and even the types of assistance under these general categories—are not regularly updated and released on publicly available websites. Moreover, FEMA has publicly released only the most general descriptions of staffing and activities in Puerto Rico, such as the number of federal staff deployed, the total amount of food and water distributed, the number of generators distributed by USACE, and the amount of medical relief provided by a Department of Defense hospital ship.⁶² These updates do not capture the full scope of federal activities, and particularly not of actions taken by FEMA. In contrast, updates on disaster assistance from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) often provide greater detail regarding the scope of its activities.⁶³

Critical details on FEMA operations, such as the support provided to the most vulnerable areas and populations of Puerto Rico, including support for single mothers, the elderly, women, girls, and others, are not indicated. The absence of specifics in the plans, implementation, and execution of FEMA programs means that it is difficult to evaluate the gender sensitivity of each. Similarly, given the lack of information on planned activities of the government, especially in vulnerable communities, coordination with interventions of the variety of actors supporting hurricane victims is difficult.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Puerto Rico is far from recovering from the impact of Hurricane Maria. The humanitarian crisis continues to this day; hundreds of thousands of people are still struggling to get by without access to power. Additionally, hundreds of thousands have suffered damage to their homes, and tens of thousands are displaced.

Despite the humanitarian crisis, from the moment the hurricane struck through today, the federal government, in which Puerto Rico has no voting representation, has shown delays and lackluster work, thus preventing hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans from returning to their lives. Dedicated federal funding for recovery and development in Puerto Rico under the most recent budget was \$11 billion, a fraction of the \$94 billion that the governor of Puerto Rico estimates is needed for substantive recovery. And a principal source of relief for Puerto Ricans—the Individuals and Households Program of FEMA—faces numerous challenges, with preliminary data showing a relatively low ratio of grants provided compared with the total number of applicants, as well as few households receiving maximum grants of aid.

Oxfam, therefore, recommends the following:

1. **The federal government must provide serious and urgent funding to rebuild Puerto Rico.** Given the underlying systemic poverty and crumbling infrastructure, the current funding is simply inadequate to address the estimated \$94 billion cost of social and economic recovery and development in Puerto Rico. Serious and urgent federal funding means a bold investment of dedicated dollars toward disaster mitigation, climate resiliency, and economic recovery in order to stave off another humanitarian crisis. More federal dollars are needed to rebuild the devastated infrastructure, to reinstate social and municipal services, and to lay the groundwork for a vibrant economy.
2. **The federal government must adopt a “people over process” principle, especially when determining eligibility for assistance and when determining the amount of individual assistance.** Success must be measured, first and foremost, by how many disaster survivors are helped. As

currently implemented, FEMA has delayed or even denied the provision of benefits to those most in need. To the extent possible, FEMA and other agencies should operate on an outcomes-based strategy that prioritizes the timely disbursement of additional dollars for those most affected over strict adherence to bureaucratic standards. This recommendation likely requires adapting procedures and processes to meet the island's unique cultural, geographic, and political context. At times, the government must waive regulations that act as impediments to recovery, especially for those most vulnerable.

3. **Federal agencies must operate with basic transparency, both for Puerto Ricans requiring assistance and for the public at large.** Puerto Ricans require greater transparency from FEMA regarding its process of selecting recipients of disaster assistance and the amounts of disaster assistance provided, including:
 - a. The denial rate for aid (including which types) and the reasons for denial
 - b. The criteria and processes used to assess damages
 - c. The criteria and processes used to assign amounts of assistance

For the general public, the federal government must do more to provide prompt, accurate, and publicly available information, particularly on:

- a. Performance information, including targets and actual achievements
- b. A full accounting of the scope of activities
- c. Disaggregated information, including the geographic distribution of aid, and aid targeting vulnerable populations

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ABOUT OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 organizations networked in more than 90 countries as part of a global movement for change to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

Oxfam America	Oxfam India
Oxfam Australia	Oxfam Intermón (Spain)
Oxfam-in-Belgium	Oxfam Ireland
Oxfam Brazil	Oxfam Italy
Oxfam Canada	Oxfam Japan
Oxfam IBIS (Denmark)	Oxfam Mexico
Oxfam France	Oxfam New Zealand
Oxfam Germany	Oxfam Novib (Netherlands)
Oxfam GB	Oxfam-Québec
Oxfam Hong Kong	Oxfam South Africa

NOTES

¹ Figures on electricity outages in this report are based on reports from the US Department of Energy (DOE) and the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA). As of this writing, the most recent report is from March 7, 2018. “On March 7, PREPA reported that 89.43% of customers (1,317,293) have power, which leaves 10.57% of customers (155,695) remaining without power.” Since the US Census Bureau reports average persons per household in Puerto Rico is 2.82, that means that, at a minimum, roughly 440,000 people lack power in their homes.

It must be noted that these agencies report only on official “subscribers.” People in Puerto Rico report that many communities do not fall under that description, so the actual number of individuals without access to power is almost certainly much higher than indicated here.

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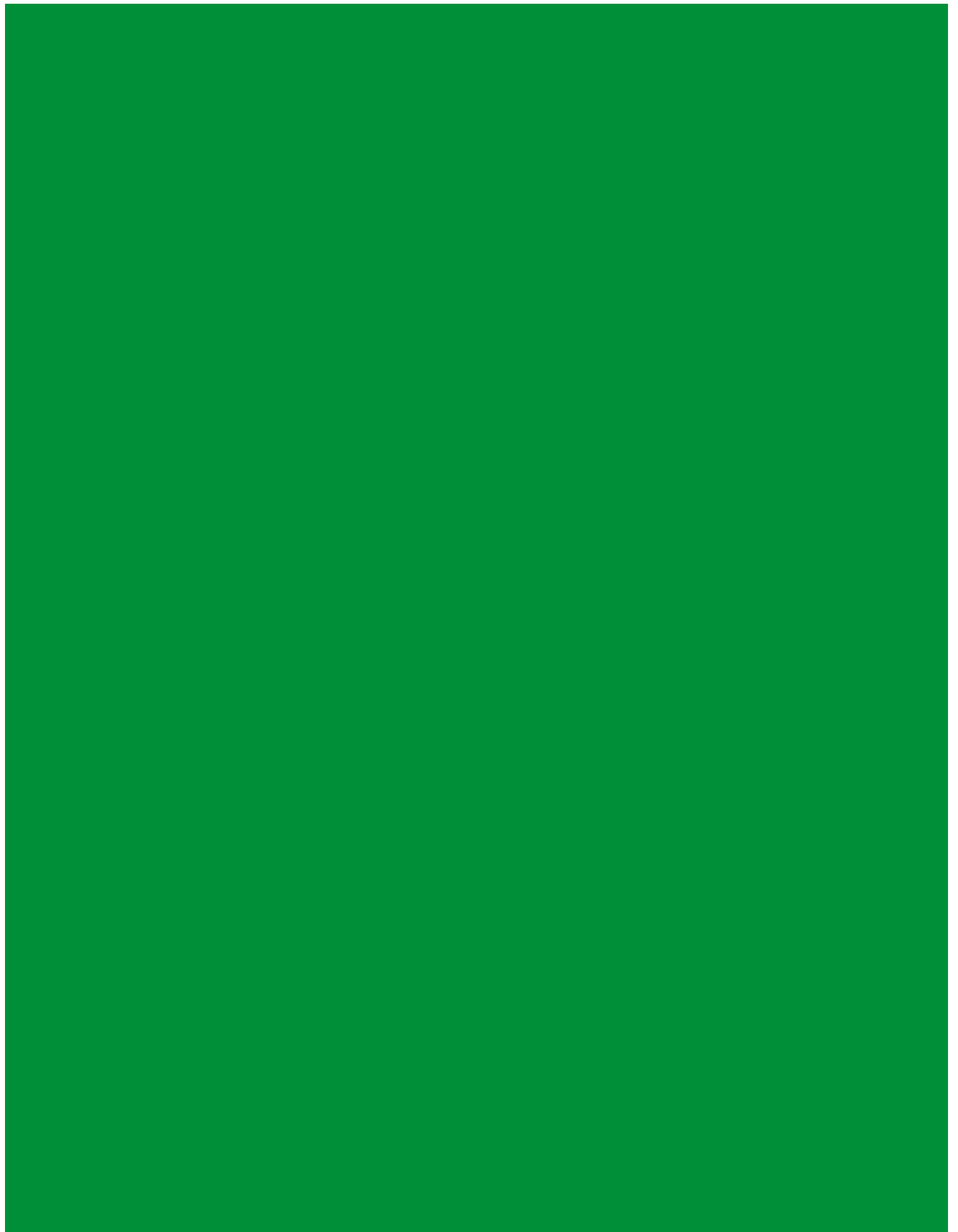
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