

IMPACT OF HURRICANE MARIA

IN SEPTEMBER 2017, HURRICANE MARIA DEVASTATED PUERTO RICO AND THE CARIBBEAN JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER HURRICANE IRMA. IT WAS THE WORST DISASTER TO STRIKE THE ISLANDS SINCE RECORDS HAVE BEEN KEPT.

Rampant Inequality and Poverty Were Made Worse by the Storm

Puerto Rico was already experiencing a housing crisis before Maria devastated the island. An astonishing 45% of the territory's population [lived in poverty](#) - more than triple the 15% national average. Three out of four of the lowest-income families paid more than 30% of their income on housing, and the existing housing stock was often in poor condition, with more than 110,000 homes lacking basic kitchens and plumbing.

Lack of Access to Housing Assistance Increased Homelessness

In past disasters, both Republican and Democratic administrations activated the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) to provide the lowest-income survivors with the rental assistance and wrap-around services they needed to get back on their feet. After Hurricane Maria - and other recent disasters - FEMA refused to activate the program. Instead, FEMA relied on its Transition Shelter Assistance (TSA) motel program for Puerto Ricans displaced to the U.S. mainland, which many low-income survivors cannot access due to financial barriers. Without DHAP, homelessness increased in [Massachusetts](#) and [Connecticut](#) by 14 and 17 percent respectively.

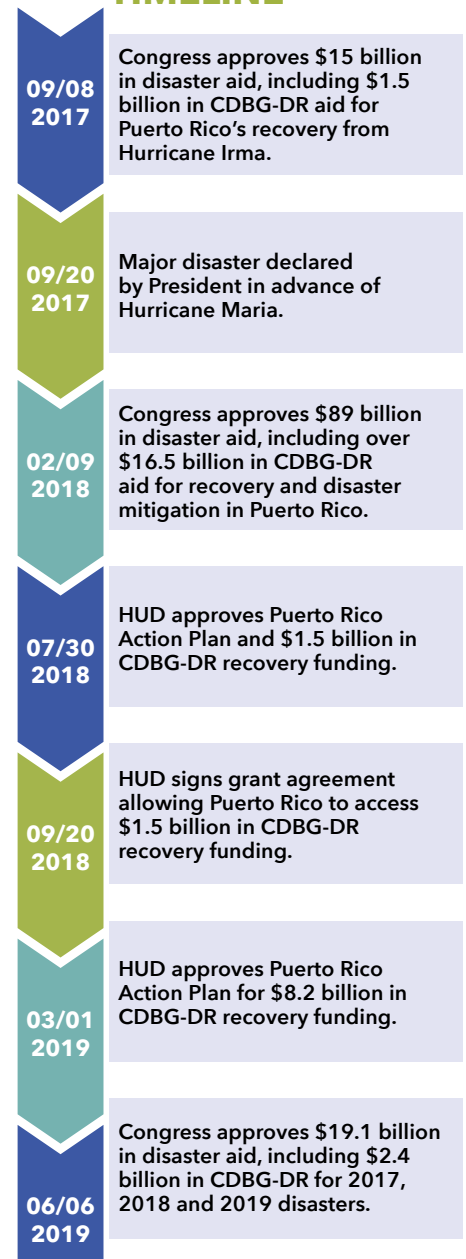
FEMA Denied Assistance to Puerto Ricans At Twice the Rate of Other Survivors

FEMA [denied nearly two-thirds](#) (60%) of the nearly 1.2 million applications filed in Puerto Rico for individual assistance - [twice the denial rate](#) in Texas after Hurricane Harvey. At least 77,000 Puerto Rican households were denied assistance because FEMA failed to recognize local land ownership practices and the island's "informal" housing system. While advocates worked with FEMA to create a new tool - a sworn statement - to help survivors overcome this barrier, FEMA has refused to notify survivors affected by the issue nor has it made the resource available on its website, at local Disaster Recovery Centers, or on social media.

Slow and Inadequate Recovery Aid is Slowing Recovery by Decades

Recovery in Puerto Rico has been slow, and advocates warn that plans for restoration lack transparency and protections for low-income survivors. As of June 1, 2019, only \$1.5 billion in Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds have been provided to the island for Hurricane Irma recovery. While Congress approved in February 2018 more than \$16 billion in CDBG-DR funds to address mitigation needs in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico, HUD has still not provided these funds to disaster-impacted communities. Moreover, advocates warn that Puerto Rico's action plan lacks sufficient details about how dollars will be used and protections to ensure low-income communities are not displaced.

HURRICANE MARIA TIMELINE



BY THE NUMBERS

- **Over 4,000 people died in storm-related deaths**
- **Over 300,000 homes in Puerto Rico damaged or destroyed by flooding and wind**
- **\$90 billion in damage to Puerto Rico**

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