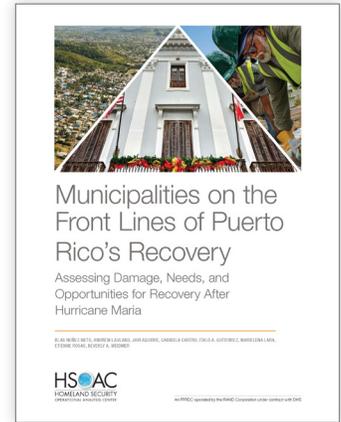


Municipalities on the Front Lines of Puerto Rico's Recovery: Assessing Damage, Needs, and Opportunities for Recovery After Hurricane Maria



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Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center experts assessed Hurricanes Irma and Maria's effect on Puerto Rico's municipalities' ability to govern, deliver services, and recover from the damage they incurred. They created a framework for assessing municipalities' recovery and developed courses of action to address damage and improve municipal capacity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How did Hurricanes Irma and Maria affect Puerto Rico's municipalities in terms of how the municipalities govern, their financial situations, and the services they deliver?
- What can be done to improve municipalities' capacity and their ability to deliver services and participate in reconstruction projects?
- Which municipalities are recovering most quickly?

KEY FINDINGS

- **The hardest-hit municipalities continue to lag behind the others.** A year after the hurricanes, the municipalities that were hit the hardest by the hurricanes continued to lag behind their peers across a wide range of indicators, even accounting for their status before the hurricanes.

- **Municipal finances complicate recovery.** Municipal revenue and budgets have been declining since 2009, leaving local governments in Puerto Rico without the necessary fiscal cushion to finance up-front costs related to response and reconstruction. The municipal budget crunch has affected Puerto Rico’s ability to recover from the hurricanes.
- **Other long-standing issues exacerbated damage and hinder recovery.** Municipalities’ ability to respond and recover was adversely affected by a variety of governance and capacity issues that have existed for many years in Puerto Rico—including a lack of transparency, capacity issues related to municipal staffing and lack of on-staff expertise in key areas, and the absence of regional entities capable of coordinating key activities across municipalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve municipal fiscal conditions. Implement strategies to improve municipal fiscal conditions and municipalities’ ability to withstand financial challenges.
- Implement regional approaches to service delivery and planning. Regional structures and approaches to service delivery and planning could enhance the delivery of key services and ensure that planning is coordinated across Puerto Rico.
- Rebuild urban centers. Restore and repopulate them by incentivizing people to move there from suburban and rural areas, including by building affordable housing, improving transportation and lighting in public areas, providing internet access, and attracting business and commerce to urban centers.
- Increase transparency. Provide constituents easy access to key information about how municipalities operate and fund themselves.
- Enhance municipal capacity. Provide municipal governments with technical guidance, best practices, and proven solutions.