



## Puerto Rico Works to Recover from Impact of Hurricanes Maria and Irma

Published: October 4, 2017



On September 20th, 2017, Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 storm, made landfall in Puerto Rico, nearly immediately rendering the island's power grid, cellphone towers, and even its banking system inoperable. Puerto Rico's director of safety and public protection, Héctor Pesquera, [explained the situation](#), saying "Everything collapsed simultaneously." The hurricane is [reportedly the most powerful storm](#) to hit Puerto Rico directly in eighty years, and has left the island reeling in the days and weeks since. Worse, this massive storm arrived just days after the eye of Hurricane Irma narrowly missed the island, still wreaking havoc with record-setting wind speeds and rainfall.

Recovery from the storms has been slow, at some points almost stagnant. Nearly two weeks after Maria made landfall, the return of normalcy is nowhere in sight for the people of Puerto Rico. Most Puerto Ricans, especially those living in the interior of the island, are still living with little to no access to running water, food, electricity, cellphone coverage, cash machines, or gasoline. While ships filled with relief supplies have been arriving on the island for many days now, distributing these supplies to communities across the island has proven very difficult. Will

Booher, a spokesman for the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) (FEMA), [explained this distribution issue](#), stating, “With Maria, you had a number of roads that were completely washed out and bridges that were impacted. . .That’s what’s made it much more challenging.” In addition to roads being damaged, distribution of aid has been impeded by a shortage of gasoline and a lack of communication strategies to call for help from those with trucks.

Given this still nearly non-existent access to cell service and internet connection on the island (88.8% of cell towers were still out of service as of October 1st), it has been challenging to reach and ensure the safety of all PROTECT and CRECE team members. Thankfully, all team members located in Puerto Rico have finally been accounted for, though many are in need of more aid. Efforts are being made by the Administrative Core to create a group chat that will allow team members to contact and update each other more easily, and supplies including batteries, solar powered chargers, fans, and lamps were ordered in late September to be delivered as soon as possible.

If you are interested in helping with general relief efforts, The New York Times [posted an extensive list of charities](#) which work to help Puerto Rico and other islands impacted by Hurricane Maria. Please donate if you have the means.

For researchers looking to offer their help to scientist colleagues in Puerto Rico, Giovanna Guerrero-Medina, a Yale professor from Puerto Rico, has established [this registration form](#).