

Anticipated Vulnerabilities: Displacement and
Migration in the Age of Climate Change—
Lessons from Holyoke's Response to Hurricane
Maria for Massachusetts' Municipal Vulnerability
Preparednes Program.

Carlos Vargas-Ramos, PhD

(Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College-CUNY)

Charles R. Venator-Santiago, PhD

(Institute of Latino/a, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Connecticut-Storrs)

The top three reasons for leaving Puerto Rico for Holyoke were:

damaged or uninhabitable homes (25.6%);

lack of steady income or employment (18.6%);

and lack of food (18.6%).

If you moved to the U.S. because of the hurricane that struck Puerto Rico, what was the reason?	Freq.	Percent
Children's school closed	2	4.7
Did not have any source of steady income	8	18.6
Had no access to needed medical treatment	4	9.3
Home destroyed, damaged, and uninhabitable	11	25.6
Hopelessness	1	2.3
My job/place of employment closed	2	2.7
No electricity	2	4.7
No electricity, Little access to fuel	1	2.3
No electricity, No running water	1	2.3
No job prospects	4	9.3
Not enough food for my family	8	18.6
Total	43	100

The majority of displaced Puerto Ricans arriving to the City of Holyoke relied on **kin networks**, that is, family and friends who provided support in addressing their needs.

Given the socio-economic standing of Puerto Ricans residing in Holyoke, we conclude that **working-class and Puerto Ricans living in or near poverty** assumed a disproportionate burden in support of displaced Puerto Ricans migrating to the city of Holyoke.

Who did you rely on THE MOST to address that need? (Indicate the leading source)	Freq.	Percent
Federal government (FEMA, U.S. Corps)	7	16.7
Local civic groups, including community Organizations	1	2.4
Municipal government	3	7.1
Neighbors	6	14.3
On your own	9	21.4
Relatives/Friends	16	38.1
Total	42	100

Various levels of **government encouraged Puerto Ricans to leave** the island and travel to cities like Holyoke.

Some Puerto Ricans were persuaded to leave the island and migrate to Holyoke under the **belief that resources awaited them**, or that the city could provide more opportunities (e.g., work, housing, health care, etc.) for Puerto Ricans to find relief and start a new life.

Most Puerto Ricans made an individual decision to leave the island.

Displaced Puerto Ricans residing in the Holyoke and in Western Massachusetts view the City of **Holyoke as a resource.**

Federal government's **response** to the disaster created by the displacement of Puerto Ricans was **inadequate**, and at times exacerbated or created new crisis.

A **fundamental failure** in the response to the crisis was **the lack of adequate information and data sharing** about the needs of displaced/migrant Puerto Ricans.

The **Federal** government's **refusal to share substantive information** with the local entities about the Puerto Ricans that they were bringing to the City of Holyoke created obstacles for the response to the crisis.

The **Puerto Rican local municipal governments** were the **first line of response** to the disaster,

but their **ability** to coordinate beyond their jurisdictions was fairly **limited** and mired by **lack of capacity, lack of efficacy, corruption, lack of preparation, and lack of resources.**

Communal solidarity was a key dimension of the positive responses to the disaster in Puerto Rico and in the City of Holyoke.

A sense of solidarity among Puerto Ricans is a **resource** for future responses to a crisis.

However, this source of capital may be **of limited duration**, and **dependent on the existing stock of material resources**.

Civic, religious and secular organizations provided **substantive**, albeit **limited**, support to Puerto Ricans in the island and in the United States

Affordable and accessible housing was the primary need of displaced Puerto Ricans arriving to the City of Holyoke.

After moving from Puerto Rico to Holyoke or elsewhere in Hampden County, what were your needs?	Freq	Percent
Access to needed medical treatment	4	9.8
Access to needed medication	1	2.4
Furniture	1	2.4
Need housing	18	43.9
Not enough food for my family	3	7.3
Not enough income for my family's needs	4	9.8
Other	1	2.4
Rent/mortgage is too high for my income	2	4.9
Transportation	1	2.4
Unemployment	6	14.6
Total	41	100

Access to affordable housing became the **key to stabilizing displaced** Puerto Ricans.

Most respondents found the available sources of support, such as civic organizations, government agencies, churches, and other entities, helpful.

Who did you turn to in order to solve the most pressing need?	Freq.	Percent
Charitable organizations	6	14.3
Federal government (FEMA, etc.)	6	14.3
Local civic groups, including community	2	4.8
Municipal government	1	2.9
On your own	1	2.9
Relatives/Friends	14	33.3
Schools	1	2.4
Social services agencies	4	9.5
State government	7	16.7
Total	42	100

Most respondents found the available sources of support, such as civic organizations, government agencies, churches, and other entities, helpful.

However, most respondents were unable to distinguish the differences between federal, state, and city agencies as well as civic organizations. In many instances, respondents conflated all agencies and organizations as city agencies.

Ultimately, however, the majority of respondents stated that the **governments of Massachusetts and the City of Holyoke provided helpful support.**

The majority of displaced Puerto Ricans saw **social service agencies** as a lifeline in the crisis, perhaps **the most important lifeline**.

The **needs of displaced** Puerto Ricans who settled in the City of Holyoke or in Western Massachusetts quickly became **similar to those of other Puerto Ricans** already residing in the area.

What are the top three needs you and your family have right now?	Freq.	Percent
Access to needed medical treatment	1	2.1
Disabled	2	4.2
Going into debt	1	2.1
Illness	4	8.3
Job does not pay enough for needs	4	8.3
Need housing	1	2.1
None	4	8.3
Not enough food for family	9	18.8
Not enough income for family's needs	9	18.8
Overcrowded home	3	6.3
Rent/mortgage too high for income	8	16.7
Unemployment	2	4.2
Total	48	100

Central to the success of this approach was the **creation of a central place or resource center** that provided access to various federal, state and local agencies and resources for an extended period of time. This **“one-stop-shopping” approach** was effective and efficient.

Regular meetings (i.e., conference calls) among responding entities to share information, coordinate response and request resources were also seen as **instrumental in facilitating the delivery of services** under circumstances of great uncertainty and limited surplus of resources

Central to the success of the response to the post-Maria migration of Puerto Ricans to the City of Holyoke was **the solidarity, collaboration and synergy of civic leaders and leaders of agencies** who were committed to offering a collective response.

Standing patterns of cooperation, coordination and communication paved the way for a focused response once the arrival of displaced persons reached unmanageable proportions for any single entity.

Insufficient resources before and during the response to the arrival of displaced persons **hampered** the effective **response** and assistance of entities recruited or volunteered to provide assistance.

The experience of Holyoke with people displaced from Puerto Rico by hurricane Maria show **the need for preparation and anticipation at the municipal level;**

a tall order given the multiple demands and limited resources municipal government already experience.

Recommendations

- **Create a “one-stop-shop”** location, staffed with culturally competent individuals well-publicized and ongoing availability for a determined period of time, is a central feature of any successful response to address large migrations caused by a climate change displacement. This location should provide access to the key federal, state, and local agencies as well as to local civic organizations that will enable migrants to incorporate or join the community;
- Local city officials and civic leaders charged with responding to the influx of migrants should have **clear and unconstrained access to information and relevant data** about the needs of displaced or arriving migrants;
- **Federal and inter-agency agreements** provide key resources to address the challenges posed by displaced migrants arriving to any community;
- More attention needs to be paid to the **ability and flexibility of social services agencies** response to an influx of new residents and arrivals;
- The creation of a **fungible and shareable form** and case management follow up services that may allow a coordinating governmental entity the ability to track case management across several service agencies and services rendered.