

Over \$1 Billion in FEMA Funds to Mitigate Future Disaster Hazards

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Milestone reached thanks to the efforts of FEMA employees, the local government and eligible organizations, as part of the \$28 billion allocated for Hurricane María

San Juan, Puerto Rico –As Puerto Rico’s recovery from damage caused by Hurricane María progresses, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has allocated over \$1 billion to reduce the impact that other natural disasters may have on the island. These funds include measures such as the use of components that are more resistant to wind, changes from low-water-crossings to bridges, storm runoff management on municipal and state roads, elevating structures in flood prone areas and other techniques that seek to strengthen reconstruction projects.

To date, over 6,300 projects to rebuild public buildings, roads and other spaces in the communities have benefited from mitigation funds. With this, the Agency seeks to create long-term resilience on the island.

“About 87 percent of projects for hurricanes Irma and María have funds that go toward mitigation. For these, FEMA funds go beyond repairing the damage: we are helping the new reconstruction to withstand future events, which will reduce reconstruction costs later on,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

Waterproofing for the Auxilio Mutuo Hospital facilities is part of the mitigation measures that this institution will develop with the allocation of over \$12.8 million from FEMA. As explained by its Executive Director Jorge L. Matta, among the main damage and challenges to this century-old structure — the first of its buildings was inaugurated in 1910 — were leaks and the power supply during the first 20 days after Hurricane María, while the electrical system was restored.

Through mitigation funds, roofs and windows will be waterproofed, in compliance with historic preservation guidelines. The allocation will also strengthen the



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uninterrupted supply of energy through a system that will produce energy in the hospital, with a battery bank and a recharging system with generators; all this, without removing their emergency generators. To address mitigation against future strong winds, the work will include reinforcements to protect the internal electrical system.

“For institutions like this, the cost of doing all which needs to be done, if it were not with the help of FEMA, it would be very difficult, if not impossible. We are convinced that we will definitely have a much more robust hospital. And we are grateful that they can help us so that we can have a very resilient hospital, worthy of caring for all our patients and everyone who arrives,” said Matta.

Meanwhile, mitigation measures will be carried out in several communities around the island to benefit residents. One example is the Abra Honda Low Water Crossing in the municipality of San Sebastián, where the Guajataca River washed away a road during the floods caused by Hurricane María. The mitigation proposal seeks to elevate the road with a single-span bridge that is above flood level. For this, the municipality has close to \$2.2 million from FEMA for the low water crossing, which will connect roads PR-451 and PR-4451 and will provide the most direct route between the Guacio neighborhood and downtown San Sebastián, where most of the community’s jobs, hospitals and supermarkets are located.

Deputy Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator Andrés García said that "this achievement would not have been possible without the efforts of several people and components at FEMA who have worked as a team with the Government of Puerto Rico, COR3, the municipalities and eligible non-profit organizations. Our Hazard Mitigation team has done a commendable job ensuring that our island has funds that will strengthen our infrastructure for the long term. We are very grateful to them. In addition to being a part of FEMA, they are also survivors, so they understand the importance of this reconstruction first-hand.”

For the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, maximizing the resources available when designing and building resiliently, considering future risks, is vital to avoid, to the extent possible, significant damage as a result of a new natural disaster.

“As part of the assistance that our COR3 staff offers to subrecipients, we guide them through the project formulation process to ensure that factors that pose a



threat to infrastructure and communities are taken into consideration. This is how we rebuild with efficiency and resilience, implementing mitigation measures in the reconstruction,” said COR3’s executive director.

To date, FEMA has obligated nearly \$28.6 billion for over 10,200 projects that will support Puerto Rico’s recovery.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 y recovery.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



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