



Flooding and cleanup in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico.

FAST FACTS

- Hurricane Fiona made landfall in Puerto Rico on Sunday, September 18, as a Category 1 hurricane, dropping as much as 32 inches of rain in some areas.
- More than one week after the storm, about one-third of Puerto Rican electrical customers remain without power, and approximately 13% of customers have no running water.
- About 1,000 people have been rescued from their homes, and 27 shelters have been opened to house those displaced by the storm.
- To date, International Medical Corps teams have delivered psychological first aid and distributed food vouchers in the flooded city of Toa Baja.

Hurricane Fiona made landfall on Puerto Rico on Sunday, September 18, with maximum sustained winds of 85 mph and torrential rain—nearly five years to the day Hurricane Maria devastated the island. More than one week after the storm, more than one-third of Puerto Rico’s electrical customers remain without power and about 13% of households lack access to water, as workers struggle to access submerged power substations and repair downed lines.¹ On Wednesday, September 21, President Biden approved a major disaster declaration for Puerto Rico, releasing additional federal funds for the response.²

Fiona dropped as much as 32 inches of rain in some regions, and emergency responders rescued about 1,000 people across the island between September 18 and 19.³ Five people on the island have died due to effects of the storm.⁴

Our Team Lead in Puerto Rico reports that every corner of the island has been heavily affected by Fiona’s record rainfall and resulting landslides. Massive damage to infrastructure and widespread flooding have left communities across the island without access to basic necessities such as shelter, clean water, electricity and healthcare. For days, lines up to half a mile long have formed outside of gas stations, where residents have waited between one to three hours to purchase fuel and diesel to power their generators.⁵ Many grocery stores and pharmacies have been forced to close their doors due to lack of fuel for their generators or lack of access to running water.⁶

On Friday, September 23, the President of the Puerto Rico Hospital Association, Jaime Plá Cortés, reported that all 68 hospitals on the archipelago are operational, but 15 to 20 continue to operate on generator power.⁷ As of Saturday, September 24, 27 shelters remained open in response to the storm, housing 324 women, children and men.⁸

International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps, which has been working in Puerto Rico since responding to Hurricane Maria in 2017, is now deploying an emergency response team, along with critical relief supplies, to support response efforts, working closely with the Department of Health, state officials, and local hospitals, health facilities and organizations. Hospital partners are

¹ <https://www.preps.pr.gov/>

² <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20220921/president-joseph-r-biden-jr-approves-major-disaster-declaration-puerto-rico>

³ <https://time.com/6215211/how-to-help-puerto-rico-hurricane-fiona/>

⁴ <https://disastercenter.com/FEMA%20Daily%20Ops%20Briefing%2009-24-2022.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/week-power-fiona-puerto-ricans-experience-echoes-hurricane-maria-rcna49323>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/24/us/puerto-rico-power-outages.html>

⁸ <https://disastercenter.com/FEMA%20Daily%20Ops%20Briefing%2009-24-2022.pdf>

operational, but rainwater and flooding have significantly damaged equipment. In addition, COVID-19 remains a significant concern, with positivity rates hovering near 20%.

International Medical Corps has launched an integrated response on the island, delivering mental health services, food vouchers, nutrition counseling and critical relief items to communities, health facilities and local organizations most affected by the storm. Efforts will focus on individuals and families recovering from the hurricane in some of the most-affected municipalities, including Comerío, Morovis, Salinas, Toa Baja and Utuado.

On Saturday, September 24, our team traveled to Toa Baja, a city of more than 74,000 people located west of San Juan. Toa Baja was hit especially hard when the hurricane's heavy rains caused the River Plata to overflow into the city.⁹ Our Team Lead observed that the community in Toa Baja experienced eight feet of flooding in some areas, and they had "lost everything" to the floods. She said that community members—many of whom are elderly—didn't have access to water for six days, and therefore couldn't clean their flood-soaked homes for nearly a week.

International Medical Corps' team reached community members in the neighborhoods of Toa Baja Pueblo and nearby Toa Ville, where mental health coordinators delivered psychological first aid (PFA) to 46 people coping with acute stress following the storm, providing emotional support and referrals when needed. The team also distributed wallet-sized cards, which can be quickly referenced during moments of distress, that list tips for emotional regulation and self-care. Nutrition coordinators provided nutrition counseling to residents and distributed 51 food vouchers worth \$50 each, helping to combat food insecurity after the disruption of proper nutrition channels and helping residents who have had to discard items in their refrigerators because of power outages.

International Medical Corps remains in close contact with our partner organizations across Puerto Rico, many of which still lack access to electricity and water, and are continuing operations only through the use of generators and water cisterns. To meet the expressed needs of these organizations, International Medical Corps has procured for them personal protective equipment (PPE), such as KN95 masks and isolation gowns; medical equipment, including oximeters and thermometers; WASH items, including water reservoirs, cans and filters; and other essential items, including mosquito tents and tool kits.

Moving forward, International Medical Corps will continue to scale our nutrition and mental health programs to reach up to 2,500 people over the next several weeks, and will continue to procure and distribute critical supplies both to help families recover and to help health facilities and organizations keep their doors open to support longer-term recovery efforts.

International Medical Corps in Puerto Rico

International Medical Corps has been supporting long-term recovery efforts in Puerto Rico since two Category 5 hurricanes, Irma and Maria, struck the island in 2017. When earthquakes shook the island in January 2020, our San Juan-based team responded quickly, providing critical sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and mental health awareness sessions. Within two months, COVID-19 had spread to the island, exacerbating needs among those already vulnerable to healthcare interruptions, ongoing stress and uncertainty and the mental health effects that accompany repeated disasters. International Medical Corps has continued to provide essential relief supplies and train local first responders and community leaders, strengthening healthcare systems so that they can treat COVID-19 patients and provide vaccinations.



International Medical Corps teams distribute food vouchers and deliver psychological first aid to residents of communities in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico.

⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/puerto-ricans-await-aid-fret-post-hurricane-recovery-90478889>