



*Destruction caused by Hurricane Fiona in the municipality of Salinas, 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.
- After more than two weeks of recovery efforts, more than 100,000 Puerto Rican electrical customers remain without power and nearly 27,000 of customers still have no running water.
- Initial assessments show that 50% of electrical transmission lines and distribution feeders were damaged across the island.
- International Medical Corps has distributed food vouchers and hygiene kits, and has delivered psychological first aid in the flooded communities of Toa Baja, Salinas and Utuado.

Hurricane Fiona made landfall on Puerto Rico on Sunday, September 18, with maximum sustained winds of 85 mph and torrential rain, dropping as much as 32 inches of rain in some regions —nearly five years to the day Hurricane Maria devastated the island. More than two weeks after the storm, more than 100,000 of Puerto Rico’s electrical customers remain without power and nearly 27,000 households still lack access to safe water.<sup>1</sup> Preliminary assessments show that Hurricane Fiona damaged 50% of electrical transmission lines and distribution feeders across the island.<sup>2</sup> In the first days following the storm, emergency responders rescued an estimated 1,000 people.<sup>3</sup> On October 2, the National Health Department of Puerto Rico reported at least 13 deaths as a result of the storm, with 12 others yet to be confirmed.<sup>4</sup>

On September 21, the Biden Administration approved a major disaster declaration for Puerto Rico, guaranteeing that the federal government will cover 100% of the costs related to relief efforts during the initial 30-day post-storm response period.<sup>5</sup> President Biden traveled to Puerto Rico on Monday, October 3, pledging \$60 million in federal funding for sustainable infrastructure rehabilitation that would help prevent future hurricane damage, such as levees, flood walls and a new flood-warning system.<sup>6</sup> The island now faces a long road to recovery, with more than 800,000 Puerto Ricans registered with FEMA to request individual assistance.<sup>7</sup>

Our teams in Puerto Rico report that every corner of the island was heavily affected by Fiona’s record rainfall and resulting landslides. Massive damage to infrastructure and widespread flooding left communities across the island without access to such basic necessities as shelter, clean water, electricity and healthcare. As crews struggle to restore the island’s fragile power grid in the days and weeks following the storm, essential infrastructure is operating at limited capacity. Many hospitals, pharmacies and grocery stores are relying on generators and water cisterns, and have been forced to reduce operating hours to conserve generator fuel.<sup>8</sup> Lack of available and accessible drinking water, food and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.preps.pr.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/officials-detail-hurricane-fiona-damage-to-puerto-rico-grid/2022/09/29/024b093a-4040-11ed-8c6e-9386bd7cd826\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/officials-detail-hurricane-fiona-damage-to-puerto-rico-grid/2022/09/29/024b093a-4040-11ed-8c6e-9386bd7cd826_story.html)

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

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.salud.gov.pr/CMS/DOWNLOAD/6613>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/10/03/biden-visits-puerto-rico-hurricane-fiona/8161569001/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-visit-puerto-rico-survey-hurricane-damage-rcna50239>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/03/us/politics/biden-puerto-rico-hurricane-fiona.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/29/as-ian-batters-florida-puerto-ricans-fear-being-forgotten-00059377>

basic personal hygiene items have exacerbated already challenging living conditions and overall insecurity for many households, 43% of which live below the poverty line – three times the US national average.<sup>9</sup>

A serious concern is the mental health impact for many Puerto Ricans who are still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Maria and the 2020 earthquakes. Puerto Rico's Mental Health and Anti-Addiction Services Administration crisis hotline reported a significant spike in calls received after Hurricane Fiona, receiving nearly 3,000 calls in the five days after the storm, with more than 1,900 directly related to people in crisis due to the hurricane.<sup>10</sup> To compound the complexity of needs, COVID-19 remains a significant concern, with positivity rates at approximately 20%.

## International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps, with staff in Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria in 2017, has deployed an emergency response team equipped with critical relief supplies to support response efforts. We are working closely with the Department of Health, territorial officials, local hospitals and clinics, and partner organizations to ensure a coordinated effort that meets the greatest needs.

International Medical Corps is implementing an integrated response on the island, delivering mental health services, food vouchers, nutrition education and counseling, along with essential supplies and materials to support basic mental and physical health needs in affected communities. Efforts will focus on individuals and families in some of the most-affected municipalities, including Comerío, Ponce, Salinas, Toa Baja and Utuado.

More than two weeks into response efforts, International Medical Corps' interdisciplinary mobile teams have distributed 479 household hygiene kits to help families remain healthy and prevent the spread of disease—a primary concern as thousands of residents return to their flooded homes. Our nutrition teams have provided information and counseling related to maintaining a healthy diet after an emergency, when food insecurity and safe food preparation becomes a primary concern for many households. The team has distributed \$50 food vouchers to 51 people, to support families at risk for higher food insecurity. Our mental health teams also delivered psychological first aid (PFA) to 527 people, supporting immediate emotional needs and alleviating distress while ensuring that people are connecting to care through referrals when necessary.

International Medical Corps continues to work closely with its partner healthcare facilities to meet their identified needs, procuring and distributing critical medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (KN95 masks, gloves and isolation gowns), oximeters, thermometers and more. Additionally, we are enhancing facilities' operational capabilities to ensure that services are better able to return to full capacity, providing generators, and water, sanitation and hygiene materials, as well as other essentials, such as mosquito nets and towels.

As International Medical Corps shifts from an emergency response to a longer-term recovery phase, we will focus on a community-based approach to support affected populations with workshops in mental health and nutrition. These efforts are grounded in our existing strategies and lessons learned from recovery programming implemented throughout the years in Puerto Rico in the wake of repeated natural disasters. Our mental health and nutrition teams will provide integrated recovery workshops to holistically support the emotional and physical well-being of those affected, aiming to reach some 2,500 people.

## 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. We have 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.



*An International Medical Corps staff member provides psychological first aid and a hygiene kit to a resident of Salinas.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/29/as-ian-batters-florida-puerto-ricans-fear-being-forgotten-00059377>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2022/10/03/mental-health-puerto-rico-hurricane-fiona/8080396001/>