

Puerto Rico

1. Poverty rate determined by unmet basic needs:

In 2018, 44.5% of the population lived in poverty

2. Migration data:

- **Emigration:** There is a significant flow of internal migration from the island to the US states. It is estimated that at least 4.6 million Puerto Ricans reside stateside according to the 2010 census. It is estimated that after hurricane María 130,000 Puerto Ricans left the island and established themselves mostly in central Florida.
- **Immigration:** According to the 2019 US Census Bureau, 87,133 people born off the island live in Puerto Rico. There are 68,000 Dominicans registered in the country, according to the 2010 census, however it is very possible that this represents a significant underestimation and that the number of Dominicans could reach 200,000. Likewise, we note Cuban immigrants (17,860 according to the 2010 census) as well as Haitian immigrants.
- **Refugees received:** Due to the condition of coloniality, the task of refugee registration falls to the US government.

3. Covid-19 infection rates:

- Registered cases: 53,364
- Percentage of cases as portion of population: 1.6%
- Deaths: 728

4. Measures adopted by the state:

- Curfew that includes limits on daily text messages, closures, and restrictions on the sale of alcohol established by governor's executive order.
- Migrants remain without access to economic assistance despite experiencing significant levels of poverty.
- Assistance was slowed by the suspension of social services.
- Mistrust of authorities limits access to medical services.
- Mask use and practice of social distancing.
- An incremental increase in return migration to Puerto Rico has been reported.
- Due to the colonial condition, the government of Puerto Rico cannot close borders nor ports without authorization by the US government. Because countries have

limited the travel of US citizens during the pandemic, airfares have dropped in price (down to \$17 from Florida in some cases), resulting in an increase in tourism. There have been cases reported of visitors that disobey local control measures, and tensions have arisen between the medical and economic government advisory groups related to this matter. The National Guard has been activated for pandemic response.

5. Migrant situation alerts:

Unregulated migrants:

Before the pandemic

Most unregulated migrants in Puerto Rico arrive from the Dominican Republic. They arrive via fragile watercraft called *yolas*. Dominicans, Haitians, Cubans, and more recently Venezuelans arrive by *yola*.

During the pandemic

Despite the economic crisis and the epidemic, migrants have continued risking their lives so that they might aspire to a better life. The number of women unregulated migrants has risen in recent decades, a migratory condition that exposes them to violence and exploitation.

- **Refugee/exile petitions**

During the pandemic

The adopted measures concerning mobility, asylum, and refuge have been confusing. There is little publicly accessible information about the asylum petition process for unregulated migrants that arrive to Puerto Rico.

- **Detentions and deportations**

During the pandemic

Control of the borders of Puerto Rico fall under the jurisdiction of the federal US Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security. Unregulated migrants are still intercepted and deported even within the context of the pandemic. Cases featuring re-entry after deportation or those with previous criminal convictions follow three possible courses: 1) they go before the Federal District Court of Puerto Rico, 2) they are sent to the ICE Immigration Detention Center at Aguadilla, or 3) to the Broward Transitional Center in Florida.

6. Social responses:

- **Migrant resistance**

The conditions of Dominican migrants in Puerto Rico has been aggravated by COVID-19. Organizations like the Comité Dominicano de Derechos Humanos and the Colectiva Feminista en Construcción have made public complaints to the government that tend to the needs facing the population, including unemployment, health services, and gender violence. Both organizations realized the initiative: “Brigadas por la vida en Barrio Obrero [Brigades for Life in the Working Community],” where they called for government action, they served food, and donated food to migrants.

- **Solidarity networks**

Community sectors have responded to satisfy basic food needs as well as legal counseling on the right to receive emergency medical services.

Organizations have opened telephone helplines to attend to the increase in situations of gender violence, including against women migrants. To help families with food needs, organizations collaborated to distribute needed goods as community solidarity.

- **Xenophobia**

There have been documented experiences of xenophobia against the immigrant community. One Dominican woman attempted suicide after receiving institutional abuse during her stay across some months in a refuge in Canóvanas.

High functionaries from the Department of Housing are on record with undignified commentaries: “Go back to the Dominican Republic, there’s nothing for you here,” and “they’re trash,” provoking this woman’s attempt to take her own life.

There exists a right-wing discourse alleging xenophobia against US citizens, while xenophobia against Caribbean migrants is ignored.

(IM) MOBILITY

COVID-19

IN THE AMERICAS