



A landslide caused by Hurricane Fiona in the town of Utuado, Puerto Rico.

FAST FACTS

- Hurricane Fiona, a Category 1 hurricane, made landfall in Puerto Rico on Sunday, September 18, in the afternoon.
- The storm dropped as much as 32 inches of rain in some areas, and rain remains in the forecast for this week. Flood watches and alerts remain in effect.
- 1.27 million Puerto Ricans remain without power; two-thirds of customers have no running water.
- About 1,000 people have been rescued from their homes, and 132 shelters are open to house those displaced by the storm.

Background

Hurricane Fiona made landfall on Puerto Rico with 75 mph winds and torrential rain on Sunday, September 18, nearly five years to the day after Hurricane Maria devastated the island. Approximately 1.27 million customers remain without power as of Tuesday morning, while two-thirds of customers lack access to water as severe flooding has impacted filtration plants.¹ On Monday, Governor Pedro Pierluisi said that he was hopeful that power would be restored to most customers “within a matter of days.”²

After strengthening from a tropical storm to a Category 1 hurricane on Sunday, Fiona dropped as much as 32 inches of rain in some regions of Puerto Rico before tracking westward toward the Dominican Republic.³ As floodwaters rose on Sunday and Monday, emergency responders rescued about 1,000 people across Puerto Rico.⁴ Puerto Rican authorities have reported two deaths as a result of the storm—one man was swept away by a flooded river, and another died while attempting to fill his generator with gasoline while it was on during the blackout.⁵

Our Puerto Rico Team Lead reports that “every corner of the island was heavily affected” by Fiona, and that “record rainfall and landslides caused massive damage to infrastructure and widespread flooding, leaving communities across the island without access to basic necessities such as shelter, clean water, electricity and healthcare.” Another team member who lives in the western inland town of Utuado, where a bridge built after Hurricane Maria was swept away by high flood waters on Sunday, has reported that the town is inaccessible, and the municipal government and emergency teams are working to restore access.

In addition to power and water outages, internet and mobile phone reception is weak, making communication challenging. In the heavily affected southern portion of the island, many families are still displaced from the 2020 earthquakes, placing them at greater risk from the impact of this weekend’s storm.

On Sunday, President Biden approved an emergency declaration for Puerto Rico to provide federal assistance to disaster relief efforts. More than 300 FEMA emergency workers are responding to the emergency.⁶ Forecasters predict that the outer bands of the storm could bring an extra four to eight inches of rain early this week.⁷

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/weather/live-news/hurricane-fiona-news-09-19-22/index.html>

² <https://www.cnn.com/weather/live-news/hurricane-fiona-news-09-19-22/index.html>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/19/hurricane-fiona-puerto-rico-live-updates/>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/19/hurricane-fiona-puerto-rico-live-updates/>

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/weather/live-news/hurricane-fiona-news-09-19-22/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/19/weather/hurricane-tropical-storm-fiona-monday/index.html>

⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/floods-storms-hurricanes-weather-dominican-republic-b0932ff0e3c40627e81ffad4d4d5d0dd>

As of Monday morning, 132 shelters were open in response to the storm and are currently housing 2,198 occupants.⁸

International Medical Corps Response



The impact of Hurricane Fiona in the town of Utuado, Puerto Rico.

International Medical Corps has been on the ground since the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017 and is now deploying an emergency team and critical relief supplies to support response efforts. Our team on the ground is safe and accounted for, and they are coordinating closely with the Department of Health, state officials and local hospitals, health facilities and organizations to support response efforts.

Assessments are underway across the island, but conditions remain dangerous due to debris, flooding and the threat of additional landslides. The governor has requested that people remain at home. Hospital partners are 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 is supporting recovery efforts across the island, focusing on ensuring that healthcare facilities can reopen their doors and maintain normal hours of operations. Today, teams have started assessments and begun distributing portable vaccine cold-chain equipment and other critical supplies.

International Medical Corps will continue to focus on providing mental health and psychosocial support services to communities across the island that are coping with the loss and uncertainty caused by repeated disasters. As

conditions ease, our teams will also continue to implement nutrition activities that educate parents, caregivers and children on the correct management of food in times of crisis and counseling on breastfeeding and infant and young-child feeding (IYCF) practices for new and expectant mothers.

Teams anticipate that needs will include hygiene kits, tarps and other critical supplies; energy sources and/or other equipment to keep health facilities operational; mobile health services, including mental health care; ongoing COVID-19 response support; and/or medical surge staffing.

“The resilience of communities has been significantly strained,” said Erica Tavares, International Medical Corps’ Senior Director of US Programs. “We can’t underestimate the impact of repetitive loss on families from the multiple disasters over the last several years. Continued investment in mental health services will be required as Puerto Rico once again comes together to recover and rebuild.”

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 within 48 hours, providing critical sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and mental health services. Within two months, COVID-19 spread to the island, exacerbating needs among those already vulnerable to healthcare interruptions or experiencing the mental health effects that accompany repeated disasters and ongoing stress and uncertainty. In response, International Medical Corps has continued to provide essential relief supplies, strengthening health facilities so that they can treat COVID-19 patients and provide vaccinations, and training local first responders and community leaders.