

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

Puerto Rico

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs): 44.5% of total population, 2018¹**
2. **Migration Facts²**
 - a. 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.³
 - b. 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.
 - c. Refugees: Due to the condition of coloniality, the task of refugee registration falls to the US government.
3. **State Measures**
 - The lack of public policies on migration issues in Puerto Rico, added to the context of a pandemic, has [delayed migration processes](#). Thus, appointments before the Immigration Court have been repeatedly suspended, preventing the regularization of the migrant population.
 - There is also a delay in access to essential social services by the migrant population on the island, mainly Dominicans.
 - The irregularized Dominican migrant community does not have access to health, like other migrants such as Haitians, which makes them especially vulnerable to covid-19.
 - Irregularized migrants, mainly Dominicans, [cannot access tools such as the PUA](#) [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance], even if their sons and daughters were born in Puerto Rico.

¹ <https://censo.estadisticas.pr/Comunicado-de-prensa/2019-12-19t145558>

² <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=All%20County%20Subdivisions%20within%20Puerto%20Rico&g=0400000US72&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S0102PR&hidePreview=false>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/19/health/sutter-puerto-rico-census-update/index.html>

4. Migrant Situation Alerts

Irregularized migrants

- Most irregular migrants in Puerto Rico come from the Dominican Republic. They arrive via fragile vessels called yolas. In these yolas arrive Dominicans, Haitians, Cubans and, in more recent years, Venezuelans.
- Despite the economic crisis and the pandemic, [the arrivals of yolas have increased](#). Thus, for example, in mid-December agents from the United States Customs and Border Protection intercepted a “yola” boat, in which a group of 15 Dominican citizens were detained.
- Migrant smugglers have been reported, it is known that they can charge between a thousand and up to 10 thousand dollars for transfer to Puerto Rico. Several have been sunk in transit and many others are arrested and returned.
- The pandemic has worsened [the situation of Dominican migrants](#), whose employment and economic situation has been substantially hit. Many of these women have lost their jobs as domestic workers.
- The situation of Dominican women, heads of families and with very high indicators of gender violence is particularly worrying.

Detained and deported

- Control of the borders of Puerto Rico falls under the federal jurisdiction of the US Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security. Irregular migrants are intercepted and deported even in the context of the pandemic. Cases related to re-entry after deportation or a criminal record follow three possible courses: they go before the Court of the Federal District of Puerto Rico, the ICE Immigration Detention Center in Aguadilla or the Broward Transitional Center in Florida.
- In December, Dominican citizens traveling in a yola were detained and surrendered to the US Coast Guard and later to the Dominican Republic Navy, being ["repatriated" to their country](#). [These returns](#) occur constantly.

Migrant youth

- Migrant children and adolescents, whose parents have lost or deteriorated their employment conditions. They have difficulties accessing virtual education, [many do not have internet or devices](#). Likewise, many others do not have access to health.

5. Social Responses

Migrant resistance

- [The Dominican community](#), according to one of the migrants residing in Puerto Rico, has been a significant source of support during the pandemic.
- Migrants, against all odds, continue to travel in *yolas* to Puerto Rico to continue with their vital projects and join their families.

Solidarity networks

- [The Aurora Project](#), an effort of the teaching staff and students of the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), coordinated by a professor in the School of Education, Gladys Capella Noya, helps children with limited resources and their families in the community. During the pandemic they have provided computers and internet to some families in Río Piedra.
- Also, the [contributions of the Center for Urban, Community and Business Action of Río Piedras \(CAUCE\)](#) are recorded, for the revitalization of the urban center and communities of the Río Piedra area.