

Hurricane Fiona knocks out power in all of Puerto Rico

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After passing over the island of Guadalupe, the eye of Tropical Storm Fiona, now a Category 1 hurricane, entered southern Puerto Rico Sunday with steady winds of about 80 miles an hour and gusts of more than 100 miles an hour in a radius of 30 miles from the center of the storm (in the southwest region), and tropical storm conditions in a radius of 140 miles, the rest of the Island. The capital city of San Juan recorded 70-mile-per-hour gusts at its airport.

Electricity has been knocked out for the entire island, leaving the US territory of 3.2 million people in the dark.

Fiona landed in Puerto Rico on September 18, two days before the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 hurricane that left hundreds of dead and destroyed thousands of homes.

It is expected that Fiona, though not as strong as Maria, will result in devastating flooding. Already there have been reports of washed out roads and bridges that are isolating towns. The Spanish language *Miami Herald (El Nuevo Herald)* reported that on the first day of the storm, 1033 people sought refuge in 105 public shelters in 77 municipalities. Many others are in basements and with neighbors and friends. Winds have blown roofs off of many homes, according to social media reports.

Electricity provider LUMA Energy formally shut down power to 1.5 million households on Sunday afternoon, though many of those households had already lost power earlier in the day. Puerto Rican governor Pedro Pierluisi (Democrat) confirmed the blackout in his Facebook page.

A LUMA statement indicates that, as a consequence of the storm, “weather conditions are very dangerous and make it very difficult to make a good evaluation,” predicting that it may take several days to completely

restore service.

Public transportation and public schools have also been shut down as a result of the storm.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned that between 12 and 30 inches of rain would fall on southern and eastern Puerto Rico, causing catastrophic flooding, coastal flooding, and sudden mudslides, conditions that may result in lives lost.

According to the NHC, the Grande de Loiza River and the Caguaitas River in northern and central Puerto Rico have already flooded. Reports in Social Media also indicate that other rivers are also flooding in the southern region of the island, flooding roads.

Hurricane Fiona’s impact on Puerto Rico will be all the more devastating at a time in which the island is still in the process dealing with three major shocks: the COVID-19 pandemic, the considerable damage inflicted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, and the ongoing effects of the island’s financial bankruptcy.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still reaping its deadly death toll. As of September 18, *New York Times* reported the following figures for Puerto Rico:

- An average of 1,143 cases per day were reported in Puerto Rico in the last week.
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, at least 1 in 3 residents have been infected, a total of 980,975 reported cases. At least 1 in 668 residents have died from the coronavirus, for a total of 5,071 deaths.

January 2022 was the month with the highest average cases and deaths in Puerto Rico, with a peak seven day average of 27 deaths per day on January 25.

Five years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria damaged more than 700,000 homes (60 percent of the total), reconstruction is still on the agenda for the working class and poor. Alongside new, unaffordable and unoccupied housing, there is a critical shortage of

modest and public housing, as well as a shortage of Section 8 vouchers. Furthermore, a significant number of households live in floodplains, waiting for the destruction brought about by new storms and hurricanes.

Schools, clinics, hospitals, bridges and highways across the island are also still waiting to be rebuilt.

Puerto Rico's electricity grid, almost completely destroyed by Irma and Maria, leaving thousands of Puerto Ricans without power for months, was never fully rebuilt and remains very fragile to this day. In April of this year, an island-wide blackout caused by a fire in an electric plant lasted several days.

Finally, the government of Puerto Rico is carrying out austerity policies mandated by the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board's plan of adjustment recently approved by the courts and creditors. The 25-year Plan of Adjustment is meant to subordinate the living conditions of Puerto Rican workers to the profit interests of creditors and banks.

After Puerto Rico, Hurricane Fiona is set to land in the Dominican Republic and move north towards Bermuda.



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