

Hurricane Maria Leaves More Than 50% of Puerto Ricans in Poverty



San Juan, December 5 (RHC)-- A new report says poverty levels have spiked in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico in the wake of the Category 5 storm that battered the island on September 20th. Since Hurricane Maria hit, poverty levels have risen from 44.3 percent to 52.3 percent, according to University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Cayey Campus' Census Information Center (CIC),

Economist Jose Caraballo, director of the CIC, said power outages have led to many job losses. If recovery efforts continue to be delayed, prompting more job losses, the 254,905 people earning 20 to 50 percent above the poverty threshold could fall below it. In that case, the poverty rate would rise to 59.8 percent. Poverty is most rampant among children younger than 17, with a total of 57 percent. "These are marginalized boys and girls crying out for the same opportunities as privileged children," Caraballo said.

In response to the crisis, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has refused to extend the waiver for the Jones Act, a 97-year-old shipping law that prevents non-U.S. ships from bringing cargo to and from U.S. harbors. Lifting the law would have enabled Puerto Rico to receive aid more cheaply and swiftly via tax-free and readily available foreign-flagged ships.

In addition, U.S. President Donald Trump has reminded the island of its "massive debt," insisting that the U.S. territory owes "Wall Street and the banks which, sadly, must be dealt with."

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