



Hispanic Federation: 15 Principles For a Just Recovery and Resilient Future for Puerto Rico

JUST RECOVERY

A just recovery must be in the hands of the people of Puerto Rico, led by the people, and for the people of Puerto Rico.

REBUILD SMARTER: USE DISASTER FUNDING TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR A RENEWABLE ENERGY GRID

The widespread destruction of the energy grid has created an opportunity to rebuild Puerto Rico in a more durable, resilient, and decentralized way based on renewable energy sources prioritizing rooftop solar energy. Everything possible should be done to help the island meet its goal of 100% renewable energy by 2050.

PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PROGRAMS THAT LIFT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OUT OF POVERTY

Low-income Puerto Ricans living on the island should not be treated differently from Puerto Ricans living in US states. Measures to lower child poverty in Puerto Rico by providing the same access to anti-poverty programs such as expanding the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and enabling low-income households to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) should be available to all Puerto Ricans regardless of where they choose to live. Under the CTC and EITC, individuals living in US states can receive refund checks from the IRS even if they do not owe any federal income taxes. All Puerto Ricans should have access to the same programs.

PROVIDE PARITY IN FEDERAL BENEFITS THAT PROVIDE BASIC HEALTH SERVICES

Puerto Rico is facing a dire health care crisis. Inequities in federal health care funding are a major driver of this crisis. Approximately 60% of the island's population is enrolled in Medicaid or Medicare, both of which face a tenuous future due in part to an archaic and unfair capping of federal contributions imposed upon Puerto Rico, because of its status as a territory. To ensure the health of people in Puerto Rico, it is essential that we eliminate federal funding health care disparities and make large-scale investments to revitalize the infrastructure and operations in hospitals and community health centers, and retain medical professionals on the island.

INVEST IN A SUSTAINABLE, LOCAL ECONOMY

Greater efforts should be made to ensure that disaster funding has a multiplier effect by prioritizing local businesses and non-profit organizations to additionally strengthen local economies and communities. There should be every effort made to support retention of current jobs, invest in the growth and capacity of the small business sector, and prioritize local workforce development.

EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Democratization of the recovery process is the best way to minimize corruption, fraud, and waste. Statutorily-required public participation that includes robust stakeholder analyses, and collaborative and mandatory public participation mechanisms during all phases of decision-making processes (i.e. needs assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring), and radical transparency are a democratic check on all actors - both local and federal - and a prerequisite to ensure federal dollars effectively reach impacted communities, and achieve the goals intended by federal funders. Good governance requires that federal and local contracts not be awarded to companies that have been convicted or fined for breaking any labor, environmental, or other federal or local laws.

STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Hurricane Maria destroyed an estimated 80% of existing crops in Puerto Rico, which exacerbated the island's extreme and risky dependence on imported foods. Bolstering the island's agriculture sector and promoting resilient and sustainable local food production, and access to safe, potable water, is essential as communities in Puerto Rico recover. Adequate funding for nutrition assistance programs is also needed to ensure access to nutritious food and better health outcomes.

PREVENT FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The recovery and rebuilding process should prioritize mitigation before displacement. People should be allowed to elect to stay, choose where to relocate, and have a say in decisions that impact their communities. All communities should receive equitable and just access to resources and treatment, regardless of income, property value, location, or other qualifiers.

PROTECT HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Rebuilding should not be an excuse for exploitation or for waiving any civil, human, or environmental rights in the name of speed – or greed.

REBUILD A STRONGER, SUSTAINABLE PUERTO RICO

A sustainable and just recovery must focus on future-oriented solutions, these must include internet access, clean drinking water, roads, among others, this will be critical to minimize future devastation, facilitate recovery and prepare the island for success. Recovery efforts should not only meet the needs of today's community, but should be led by the communities who know their needs best. Recovery efforts must meet the needs of the present community without compromising future generations by achieving a balance between economic, social, and environmental development.

DEBT RELIEF

A just recovery is not possible when the priority is paying creditors instead of investing in the recovery and the future of Puerto Rico. The debt cannot be prioritized or come before basic needs and essential services. Without relief, Puerto Rico's \$73 billion debt will make it impossible to rebuild the island's infrastructure and economy effectively (projected to cost upwards of \$100 billion). Puerto Rico and other disaster-ravaged U.S. territories must have a pathway to comprehensive debt relief and the ability to terminate debt obligations so they can recover and rebuild with dignity. Any benefits of projected federal disaster dollars should only be used for the benefit of the people of Puerto Rico – not the vulture funds and other creditors.

PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO PROSPER VIA ACCESS TO QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION

Children and youth in Puerto Rico have the right to a quality public education that will ensure equal access to personal, professional, and labor opportunities. Quality public education is a key element in achieving an effective recovery, lowering poverty levels, and overcoming the economic crisis of the island.

INDEPENDENT AUDIT

The future of Puerto Rico must not be compromised by repaying debt that was illegally or unconstitutionally obligated. There must be a moratorium on negotiations or repayment of existing debt until the federal government has ensured an independent audit is performed and certified by non-governmental experts and allowed the discharge of any illegal or unconstitutional debt. No funds provided for disaster recovery should be used to repay creditors, directly or indirectly, or to make economic projections for debt repayment.

SUPPORT PUERTO RICANS DISPLACED BY ECONOMIC AND NATURAL DISASTER

Our concerns extend to Puerto Ricans who have been forced to leave the island to the states because of ineffective emergency relief, a slow recovery, and lack of employment. They are disaster victims and need ongoing support from national and local governments, and from philanthropic sources, to ensure a successful transition to the US or promote a safe return to the island.

FACILITATE SAFE RETURN TO THE ISLAND

To recover long-term, Puerto Rico needs to retain and rebuild its social capital. As houses are rebuilt and businesses reopen, the federal government should work with Puerto Rico's government and community leadership to develop economic and social support plans that promote the return of evacuees and which are informed by the lessons learned from the post-Katrina process.

MARSHALL PLAN

Our federal government has a moral and legal responsibility to help Puerto Rico recover. The only way the island can do so is if our federal government enacts a "Marshall Plan" and systematically invests tens of billions of dollars to rebuild, revitalize and revive Puerto Rico's health care system, economy, housing, public social services, and infrastructure, including its energy grid, utilities, and telecommunications system.