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Special 2019 Extension of Federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance for Puerto Rico After Hurricanes Maria and Irma

Know your rights

If you were unemployed due to Hurricane Maria or Hurricane Irma, you may be eligible to obtain up to 52 weeks of federal "DUA" (Disaster Unemployment Assistance) benefits under a new federal law passed on October 5, 2018. These benefit funds are processed through the Department of Labor and Human Resources of Puerto Rico.

Update: The application deadline is now extended to July 24, 2019 for the special extension of Disaster Unemployment Assistance in Puerto Rico.

Who can apply?

The new DUA benefits may be available to any unemployed employee, business owner or independent contractor who lived, worked, or was supposed to work in areas affected by the hurricanes, and due to the hurricanes:

- Reached the end of their 26 weeks of regular unemployment insurance benefits; or
- Reached the end of their 26 weeks of federal DUA; or
- Failed to collect their full 26 weeks of federal DUA or regular unemployment insurance benefits while unemployed because of the hurricanes; or
- Never applied for DUA after the hurricanes, but can show "good cause" for failing to apply.

Are there requirements?

There are two main requirements for a person to qualify for the new DUA benefits:

- The person must have been unemployed between September 20, 2017 and September 22, 2018, as a direct result of Hurricane Maria; or between September 10, 2017 and September 15, 2018, as a direct result of Hurricane Irma.
- The person must help the Department of Labor and Human Resources determine their weeks of eligibility by answering certain questions, including, for example, whether he or she worked or received earnings during any of the weeks for which he or she is claiming DUA benefits.
- The person will not have to show that he or she searched for work for each week they are claiming the extra weeks of benefits.

When and how should I apply?

If you think you may be eligible for extended DUA benefits, be sure to apply. There is no cost or penalty for applying.

- You must act quickly! **To qualify, the person must meet the application deadline, which is now extended to July 24, 2019.**
- For people living in Puerto Rico, you may apply in person from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time) at any of the Labor Department's 11 local offices, which are listed here: https://www.trabajo.pr.gov/empleo_reempleo.asp. To help manage the large number of people who may apply, the Puerto Rico Labor Department is asking people to appear at the local office on certain days based on the last digit of their Social Security number: Monday (0 or 1), Tuesday (2 or 3), Wednesday (4 or 5), Thursday (6 or 7), Friday (8 or 9). **You may also apply by phone by calling the unemployment Call Center: 787-945-7900.**
- For people not living in Puerto Rico, **you may apply by phone by calling the unemployment Call Center at 787-945-7900 or 787-945-7898** between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (Atlantic Standard Time).
- Most people applying for the new benefits will have to provide the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources with their 2016 tax returns and other proof of wages and employment. This information must be brought to the local Labor Department office (it will not be accepted by mail or email). For people not living in Puerto Rico, you will be allowed to submit the necessary documents by mail or email as directed by the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources.
- The Department of Labor and Human Resources is supposed to identify everyone it believes would qualify for the new DUA benefits and send them letters informing them of how to apply for the benefits. However, because of the relocation of so many families since the hurricanes, the agency may fail to reach many people. Additional instructions on how to apply for the new DUA benefits are available on the Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resource's website (<https://www.trabajo.pr.gov/>) and the department's official announcements describing the program and the filing deadline extension to June 24, 2019. (https://www.trabajo.pr.gov/docs/Avisos/Extensi%C3%B3n_Beneficios_DUA.pdf)

What happens if the application is approved?

- The DUA benefit payments will be made by the Department of Labor and Human Resources "retroactively," which means that people will receive a lump-sum payment for all the eligible

weeks of unemployment between September 2017 and September 2018 for which they are approved.

More on disasters

- ▶ **Find more information related to your rights and claims here: www.ayudalegalpr.org/ayudaparadesastres**
- ▶ **Read this fact sheet in Spanish here: <https://nelp.org/publication/extension-especial-de-la-asistencia-federal-por-desempleo-tras-el-paso-de-los-huracanes-maria-e-irma/>**