

# QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT AMONG PUERTO RICANS AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES

Prepared for:



May 2025

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Key Takeaways

# Objectives and methodology

## Background

- In 2023 The Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce commissioned to Ipsos a quantitative research study among Puerto Rican living in the continental US and those who decided to move back to Puerto Rico recently.
- Quantitative results stand out several topics that should be attended by the public and private sector to make Puerto Rico a better place to live, for those in the island and those with the desire to return.
- Taking this in consideration, The Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce requested to Ipsos a new research proposal to conduct a qualitative depth dive assessment among Puerto Rico's residents.

## Business Objectives

1. Identify current perception of living in Puerto Rico
2. Understand which are the main pain points impacting their quality of life.
3. Understand perception and experience with critical topics as: healthcare, education, crime, cost of living, etc.
4. Identify the motivations to considering move to the continental US.

## Methodology

### Video Focus Groups | Puerto Rico & United States | From March 24th to May 8th

No.	Age	Gender	Income	Profile
1	18-24	M & F	NA	NA
2	18-34	M & F	NA	Technical carriers or sectors recruited in the US (Ex. Police, Nurses, Social Workers, etc.)
3	25-34	M & F	Less than \$35k annual	With university degree postgraduate
4	35-54	M & F	Less than \$60k annual	With university degree postgraduate
5	25-34	Females	Less than \$40k annual	Single moms / no university degree
6	30-45	M & F	NA	Teachers from public and private schools
7	25+	M & F	NA	Medical Students - Residence Year
8	25-50	M & F	NA	Lived in the US and returned to PR in the last 3 years.
9	65+	M & F	Middle +	Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage - Regular
10	65+	M & F	Low / Middle Low	Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage - Platino (VITAL)
11	25-34	M & F	NA	Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years
12	35-54	M & F	NA	Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years
13	55+	M & F	NA	Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years
14	NA	M & F	NA	Representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
15	NA	M&F	NA	Representatives of large enterprises

«The results of qualitative research cannot be extrapolated to the entire population due to sample selection, the inquiry method, and the sample size.»

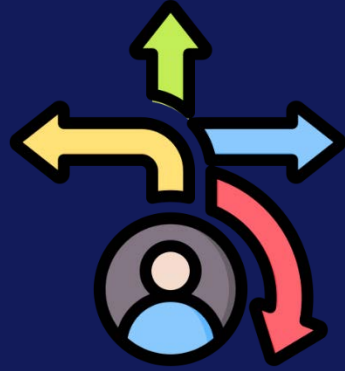


# Key Learning

**The study integrates insights from a diverse participant pool, encompassing both individual residents, small-medium and large enterprises within the island.**

**This report reveals a multifaceted social and economic landscape, marked by persistent challenges and noteworthy opportunities. Residents highlight critical issues such as economic instability, healthcare accessibility, and public safety concerns, alongside the deeply rooted cultural identity which remains a cornerstone of Puerto Rican life. Meanwhile, businesses face regulatory and infrastructural hurdles, yet they also recognize the potential for growth within sectors like technology, renewable energy, and tourism.**

**The motivations for migration to the continental US continue to center on economic and quality-of-life factors, with return migration often driven by familial and cultural ties. Overall, the report delineates areas for potential growth and the pathways needed to foster a more robust and resilient Puerto Rican socio-economic environment.**



The differences between targets are highlighted throughout the report by placing the icon corresponding to the respective target:



**General target**  
(students, returnees, teachers, elders, etc.)



**Business**  
(small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large enterprises)



# PUERTO RICO

## 02

General sentiment about living conditions  
Business climate perception

# Puerto Rico symbolizes home and is deeply tied to family connections. It holds a place of safety, comfort, and belonging



- **Cultural identity:** The island is related to a rich cultural heritage that includes language, music, food, and traditions, which participants consider an integral part of their identity.
- **Resilience:** Puerto Rico was often associated with resilience, highlighting the community's ability to face and overcome challenges together.
- **Natural beauty:** The island's natural beauty, including beaches, mountains, and climate, was a significant element of emotional attachment.
- **Warmth and joy of life:** Participants mentioned warmth, vibrancy, and a zest for life as key attributes of Puerto Rico's culture.



Puerto Rico despite been often described as a place/island full of life and energy, with deep cultural heritage and natural beauty, it is facing modern challenges.





# The positive perspective of the island is related to cultural background and its people, while the negative point of view links on the island administration that affects Puerto Ricans lives

## Positive things on the island:

- ✓ **Culture and traditions:** Rich cultural heritage, vibrant festivals, delicious food and traditions are seen as key strengths.
- ✓ **Community and family bonds:** The strong sense of community (close-knit communities) and familial support provides a significant positive aspect.
- ✓ **Natural beauty:** The island's landscape and climate are frequently praised. Beauty of the island (beaches), its natural resources, and the ability to connect with other countries as an island nation (and tourism opportunities).
- ✓ **Resilience:** Known for the community's ability to face adversity, this is celebrated as a cultural trait.

## Negative things on the island:

- × **Economic struggles:** High unemployment and low salaries are significant concerns. High cost of living, are often mentioned and perceived as economic fragility or instability.
- × **Healthcare challenges:** Issues include access to quality care and high costs. Lack of healthcare professionals (professional brain drain).
- × **Crime and safety concerns:** Many participants highlighted crime as a major issue impacting quality of life.
- × **Political instability:** Government corruption and inefficiency were noted concerns.
- × **Education system deficiencies:** Lack of resources and educational opportunities were frequently mentioned.
- × **Infrastructure:** Poorly maintained roads and unreliable utilities present daily challenges for residents.





## On the other hand, doing business in Puerto Rico symbolizes a constant challenge. Business climate perception reflects dissatisfaction with conditions they view as needing improvement

A mixed perception emerges as some SMEs express optimism due to reconstruction efforts and available funding, and some large enterprises observe a more stable business environment thanks to tax incentives and market access. However, others highlight persistent challenges and skepticism about long-term stability.

Challenges such as:

- **Economic instability:** Businesses describe the current environment as volatile, marked by political uncertainties and economic challenges that deter long-term planning.
- **Navigating bureaucracy:** The complexity and inefficiencies of regulatory processes are significant obstacles, consuming substantial time and resources for compliance. SMEs and large enterprises face significant bureaucratic processes and delays in obtaining necessary permits, affecting project timelines.
- **Infrastructure vulnerabilities:** Concerns about frequent power outages, unreliable telecom and disruptions in basic infrastructure are prevalent, especially impacting continuous operations.



Overall, while there are growth opportunities, SMEs express a critical need for reforms to enhance business conditions and invite higher levels of satisfaction within the current environment. For large enterprises, the availability of a skilled workforce and strategic positioning for accessing US markets are significant advantages that needs to remain.



## Doing business on the island highlights a positive aspect where cultural ties significantly influence business practices. SMEs focus on local market exploitation and community engagement, while large enterprises benefit from tax incentives and emphasize their ability to tap into a skilled workforce and access international markets

### Positive aspects of doing business on the island:

- **Both sectors**

- ✓ **Cultural heritage:** The rich cultural heritage of Puerto Rico plays a significant role in shaping business practices and consumer preferences. Understanding local traditions, values, and behaviors is crucial for businesses looking to increase market penetration and consumer engagement.

- **Both sectors (more emphasis on large enterprises)**

- ✓ **Tax incentives:** For large enterprises, Puerto Rico offers substantial tax incentives like Act 60, which benefit export services and attract investment, providing a significant financial advantage.
- ✓ **Skilled workforce:** The availability of a bilingual and skilled labor pool is a critical asset for both SMEs and large enterprises, particularly valuable in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, technology, and services.
- ✓ **Strategic location:** Puerto Rico's geographic location presents excellent opportunities for accessing U.S. and international markets without tariffs, making the region a strategic hub for commerce.

- **SME's**

- ✓ **Reconstruction opportunities:** SMEs are benefiting from increased investments in rebuilding efforts post-hurricane\*. This influx of funds has opened up contracts and projects that smaller businesses can participate in.
- ✓ **Community engagement and networking:** There is a strong sense of community support among local businesses, which fosters collaboration and partnerships. SMEs benefit significantly from strong community ties, networking opportunities, and the ability to harness localized market opportunities which help in establishing and growing businesses.
- ✓ **Niche markets opportunities:** SMEs are finding success by targeting niche markets and catering to local needs (especially in tourism and local production crafts), which larger corporations might overlook, and which are less competitive and have high demand.

\*Some business owners acknowledge opportunities related to economic aid and reconstruction efforts post-hurricane, which provide avenues for growth.

## While doing business on the island represents a positive side that vary depending on the size of the business, both sectors acknowledge that they face the same challenges as uncertainty around political stability and bureaucratic hurdles

### Challenges of doing business on the island:

- × **Economic uncertainty:** While improvements have been noted, concerns over political instability and the effectiveness of fiscal policy reforms hinder confidence in making long-term investments.
- × **Bureaucratic hurdles:** Complex regulatory requirements slow down business operations. Acquiring permits and licenses can be time-consuming and arduous for smaller entities. Despite having more resources than SMEs, large enterprises still face daunting bureaucratic processes, particularly in obtaining permits and licenses.
- × **Infrastructure issues:** The unreliability of public services like electricity and transportation impacts daily operations significantly. Frequent power outages and utility disruptions present significant operational risks, requiring continuous investment in backup systems.
- × **Access to capital:** Many SMEs face difficulties in securing affordable credit and financial support from local institutions.



Both business sector emphasize the need for more supportive policies that stabilize the economic landscape and reduce bureaucratic delays. They highlight the importance of addressing infrastructure issues to create a more conducive environment for sustainable business operations.





# QUALITY OF LIFE AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS

# 03





# Puerto Ricans evaluate their quality of life through a balance of economic, social, and cultural dimensions, with varying emphases depending on age and relational circumstances

'Good quality of life' for Puerto Ricans is frequently associated with life with stability, wellbeing, and happiness, combined with cultural and community richness. These elements are deeply intertwined with their cultural identity and the unique characteristics of Puerto Rican life.

## Good Quality of Life:

**Economic stability:** Good quality of life involves financial security and the ability to afford basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and education without undue stress or hardship.

**Access to quality healthcare:** The availability of timely, affordable, and comprehensive healthcare services is a crucial component, vital for peace of mind and physical wellbeing.

**Safety and security:** A safe living environment, free of crime, contributes significantly to the perception of a good quality of life.

**Strong family and community bonds:** Participants emphasize the importance of close-knit family relations and community support as central to their sense of wellbeing and fulfillment.

**Cultural richness and tradition:** The opportunity to engage in cultural activities, celebrations, and the ability to pass traditions to future generations are seen as enriching life aspects.

## Factors Affecting Quality of Life:

**Economic challenges:** High unemployment, low wages, and the high cost of living create financial stress. Younger adults' articulate challenges in securing stable, rewarding jobs, while older adults stress retirement security.

**Healthcare accessibility:** Issues with medical infrastructure, specialist availability, and medication costs directly affect quality of life. Especially concerning for elderly groups, who face frequent healthcare needs.

**Educational system weaknesses:** Underfunded schools and lack of resources compromise educational outcomes. Parents and teachers voice concerns about prospects for children and professional satisfaction.

**Crime and public safety:** High crime rates and insufficient police resources impact daily life and community trust. More pronounced concern among parents and young adults who prioritize safe environments for families.

**Government and corruption:** Political issues and corruption hinder effective governance and infrastructure improvements. A pervasive issue across all groups, especially among those contemplating long-term residency decisions.



However, there are differing perspectives that indicate significant contrasts between the experiences of Puerto Ricans living on the island and those who have migrated to the US, highlighting both the challenges and benefits perceived in each context



PUERTO RICO

ECONOMY



Residents frequently mention economic instability, low job opportunities, and inadequate wages as significant issues. There's a constant struggle with the high cost of living. Targets Affected: Young professionals, technical and lower-income groups.

HEALTH



Healthcare is often criticized for being inaccessible or too expensive, with long wait times for services. Targets Affected: Elderly (Medicare beneficiaries), families needing constant medical care.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY



Crime rates and public safety are major concerns and are often described as areas needing improvement. Targets Affected: Parents (concerned for children), young adults.

GOVERNMENT



There is significant distrust towards governmental effectiveness and widespread disillusionment due to corruption and inefficiencies. All participants acknowledge systemic issues, particularly impactful on economic and civic outlook.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM



Criticized for being underfunded and lacking resources, leading to concerns about the future work force. Targets Affected: Parents, educators concern over children's educational quality.



UNITED STATES

Puerto Ricans living in the US often highlight better job availability, higher wages, and improved economic prospects, though they mention a higher cost of living as a relative challenge. Targets Affected: Young professionals and skilled workers find more satisfactory employment.

Those in the US typically report better access to healthcare services, though concerns about systemic issues and cost remain. Targets Affected: All groups benefiting from more reliable healthcare systems.

Safety is generally perceived to be better, with more effective law enforcement and less day-to-day concern about crime. Targets Affected: Families and returnees appreciating safer environments.

Though not without criticism, governmental systems in the US are often viewed as more stable and reliable. Targets Affected: Migrants adjusting to new policies.

Generally viewed as offering more opportunities, better resources, and a wider array of educational pathways. Targets Affected: Student population, families seeking better educational outcomes.

**In addition to the structural changes encountered in the United States, one of the most intriguing contrasts is the struggle with dual identity. Many participants reported an ongoing challenge in balancing their identity between two cultures and locations. While living in the US offers economic and professional benefits, it often comes at a cultural or emotional cost, resulting in a continuous negotiation of identity**



**PUERTO RICO**

**Community:**

Strong community ties and family connections are deeply valued, often acting as a counterbalance to systemic issues.  
*Targets Affected: All groups see strong bonds as vital.*

**Cultural wealth:**

There's a strong appreciation for the island's cultural richness, which is seen as a core part of identity.



**UNITED STATES**

**Community:**

While community ties are missed, many find new networks and communities within the Puerto Rican diaspora. Although the discomfort of not being "with their people" was also a recurring theme.  
*Targets Affected: Families and single parents maintaining cultural ties.*

**Cultural wealth:**

Cultural ties remain important, with efforts to maintain traditions, although there's sometimes a sense of cultural dilution.  
*Targets Affected: Diaspora communities.*



**Now, a good business operation for both business sectors involves efficient use of resources, stability in processes, strong financial oversight, regulatory compliance, adaptability to market changes, excellent customer service, and strategic execution of business objectives. It supports sustainable growth by balancing operational efficiency with quality and innovation**

### Positive Influences on Business Operations for SMEs:

**Reconstruction efforts:** Post-hurricane reconstruction has opened up various projects, presenting business opportunities and contracts that positively influence business activities.

**Community collaboration:** Strong local community ties foster partnerships and collaborations among SMEs, enabling them to access new markets and client bases.

**Government incentives:** Some SMEs benefit from government incentives designed to stimulate local business growth, such as tax breaks and grants for innovation and expansion.

**Access to emerging markets:** The geographical location provides potential access to emerging Latin American markets, which SMEs can capitalize on by expanding their customer base and increasing sales beyond the island.

**Cultural richness and adaptability:** The diverse cultural background fosters creativity and adaptability, allowing businesses to innovate in product offerings and business strategies that resonate well with both local and international customers.

### Positive Influences on Business Operations for Large Enterprises:

**Strategic tax incentives:** Large enterprises benefit significantly from generous tax incentives, such as Act 60, which are designed to attract foreign investment and stimulate economic activity. These policies provide substantial savings on operational costs.

**Skilled and bilingual workforce:** The availability of a highly skilled, bilingual workforce is a major advantage for large enterprises operating in sectors like pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and technology. This allows companies to efficiently handle complex technical and international operations.

**Access to US and global markets:** Puerto Rico's strategic location and its status as a US territory offer seamless access to the US market without the complications of import/export tariffs, which is particularly beneficial for large enterprises engaging in extensive international trade.

**Integration with US legal systems:** Alignment with US legal standards provides a familiar and stable regulatory environment for large corporations, enhancing legal predictability and reducing operational risks.

**Established infrastructure for tech and manufacturing:** While challenges exist, large enterprises often have established supply chains and infrastructure that support manufacturing and tech operations, facilitating efficiency and productivity.







**Although both SMEs and large enterprises experience similar negative operational influences, the scale and resources of large companies might allow for better mitigation strategies, yet they remain significant concerns impacting the overall business landscape**



## **Negative Influences on Business Operations:**

**Regulatory and bureaucratic challenges:** Regulatory complexities pose significant hurdles for both SMEs and large enterprises, requiring them to spend excessive time and resources on compliance. This not only affects their ability to focus on growth and efficiency but also results in delays for project approvals and permit acquisitions, thereby impacting timelines and escalating costs.

**Economic instability and uncertainty:** Political and economic unpredictability hinders long-term strategic planning for businesses, causing hesitation in investments and expansion. Additionally, rising inflation and potential recession add uncertainty, complicating the navigation of Puerto Rico's fiscal health and global economic conditions. These factors impact cost structures and profitability, challenging businesses to manage increasing costs while staying competitive.

**High costs:** Both SMEs and large enterprises face high operating costs in labor, benefits, utilities, and imported materials, significantly burdening business operations. Rising electricity costs and anticipated utility rate changes, combined with ongoing infrastructure development, exacerbate these challenges. Like SMEs, large enterprises contend with increased raw material and logistics costs, which remain significant concerns.

**Infrastructure issues:** Inadequate infrastructure, especially unreliable electricity and internet services, along with poor road and public transport conditions, pose operational challenges that cause delays, increase costs, and disrupt business continuity. Even large enterprises, despite having more resources, face significant risks from frequent power outages and insufficient bandwidth, which significantly impact operational efficiency.

**Access to finance and credit:** Access to affordable credit remains a challenge for SMEs, limiting business growth and cash flow management due to high collateral demands, an issue less prevalent in the US. Large enterprises also face challenges in Puerto Rico's local financial environment, where restrictive lending terms and limited credit availability hinder operations, despite their broader access to global financial resources.

**In line with the aforementioned, businesses in Puerto Rico recognize that they must adapt to distinctive challenges and opportunities that the island and the United States offer to operate in the best way possible within their capabilities. Addressing these disparities can bolster Puerto Rico's competitive stance and improve its business climate**



**REGULATORY AND BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES**



**ECONOMY**



**INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

**ACCESS TO FINANCE AND CREDIT**



**HIGH COSTS**

**PUERTO RICO**



These challenges are often characterized by complex and time-consuming processes, with many businesses citing difficulties in navigating the regulatory landscape due to inefficiencies and extensive paperwork.

Economic instability is a prominent issue, exacerbated by political uncertainty and fiscal deficits. This situation impedes business confidence and investment. Large enterprises also shows cautious investment behaviors due to fiscal and political uncertainty.

Infrastructure in Puerto Rico suffers from issues such as unreliable power supply and inadequate public transportation, causing operational disruptions.

Businesses report difficulties accessing credit, with stringent requirements and high collateral demands from financial institutions. Large enterprises generally have more resources to seek financing outside Puerto Rico compared to SMEs, but they still face local challenges.

High operational costs, especially in utilities and regulatory compliance, are a significant burden on businesses.

**UNITED STATES**



Regulatory environments can vary significantly between states. Generally, the U.S. offers a more streamlined process, though certain industries face strict compliance standards

While certain periods have experienced economic downturns, the overall economic environment tends to be more stable and predictable, supported by strong fiscal policies and economic frameworks.

Generally, the U.S. boasts robust infrastructure supporting efficient business operations, though maintenance and upgrades depend on regional policies and funding.

Access to finance is generally easier with a plethora of financial products available, though regulations can vary between states and financial institutions. The U.S. offers broader financial options for businesses, irrespective of size.

Costs can vary widely. While major cities have higher operational costs, more affordable options exist in other regions, offering choices for businesses to minimize expenses.



There is a compelling intent among businesses in Puerto Rico to enhance digital transformation as a means to circumvent some of these operational challenges, particularly vital considering infrastructure and bureaucratic hurdles.



## Other relevant topics were identified regarding the business environment that present differences for large enterprises compared to SMEs in Puerto Rico

### 1. Risk tolerance and investment capacity:

- **Large enterprises:** These businesses typically have a greater capacity for risk-taking and investment due to their higher capital reserves. This means they can potentially weather economic instability better than SMEs and invest in infrastructure or technology advances that require significant upfront costs.
- **SMEs:** Often operate with slimmer margins and less access to capital, which impacts their ability to absorb shocks or make substantial investments in upgrading operations.

### 2. Impact of policy changes:

- **Large enterprises:** Policies such as tax incentive changes or business regulations can have a more substantial impact on their strategic planning and operations. Large enterprises often engage in lobbying or advocacy to influence such policies, whereas SMEs might not have the same level of engagement.
- **SMEs:** These businesses might experience immediate operational impacts from policy changes, possibly lacking the same influence to mitigate negative effects through adjustments or lobbying.

### 3. Global supply chain integration:

- **Large enterprises:** Often possess well-integrated global supply chains, which can mitigate local infrastructure and logistics challenges by leveraging international resources.
- **SMEs:** More reliant on local supply chains, making disruptions in logistics or increases in costs more impactful on their day-to-day operations.



# SOCIAL ISSUES FOR GENERAL TARGET

# 04





Among the various social challenges in Puerto Rico, economy and employment are the primary dominant factors impacting the lives of Puerto Ricans, while issues like migration and infrastructure reflect a response to national structural problems

PUERTO RICAN MAIN SOCIAL ISSUES

Migration	Infrastructure	Cost of Living	Crime and Public Safety	Education	Healthcare	Economy and Employment
Migration is a symptom of underlying issues, with participants noting that people leave due to economic and safety concerns, education opportunities, and healthcare access. Young professionals and graduates discussed this more, focusing on the 'brain drain' and the struggle to find opportunities.	Issues such as poor road conditions, unreliable utilities, and inadequate public transportation were mentioned, impacting daily life. This was slightly less emphasized compared to other issues but noted by those discussing broader socio-economic development.	The high cost of living, particularly in relation to incomes, is a common complaint, with many citing difficulties in affording basic necessities like housing, utilities, and food. Single parents and low-income groups are particularly affected, emphasizing the disparity between earnings and living costs.	Crime rates and public safety are ongoing issues, impacting quality of life and contributing to migration decisions. Broad concern across groups, but young adults and parents expressed heightened anxiety about safety for children.	There is widespread concern about the quality of education, including underfunded schools, outdated curricula, and lack of resources. Teachers emphasized the need for educational reform (including special education). Teachers and parents (including single moms) highlighted educational challenges more frequently, focusing on infrastructure and resource shortages.	Access to quality healthcare and the high cost of medical services and medications were major concerns. Long wait times and a shortage of specialists exacerbate the problem. Elderly participants, especially those with Medicare Advantage plans, were particularly vocal about healthcare access, while younger groups (including medical students) expressed concerns over healthcare quality.	The economy is considered unstable, with limited job opportunities and low salaries. Many participants across various age groups and backgrounds mentioned economic struggles as a pressing issue, with young adults and professionals particularly highlighting job market challenges and underemployment. This is a unanimous concern across all targets, though younger participants emphasize job market entry issues, while older groups express concerns over retirement security.



Electricity outages happen so often. How are we supposed to live like this?  
Teachers from public and private schools



The wait times to see a specialist are ridiculous. Sometimes it feels like you have to be dying to get an appointment.  
Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage - Platino (VITAL) - 65+ years





**Economy and employment as the main issue refers that salaries are very low for the high cost of living, which forces Puerto Ricans to prioritize rent, basic services, and food. Additionally, job opportunities are unstable, and there are no observable changes or improvements in this area, leading to frequent frustration and stress**

**Income and Budget Priorities:**

- Many participants mentioned that their **incomes are insufficient to cover basic living expenses**. There is little room for savings, and many rely on secondary jobs to make ends meet.
- About budget prioritization, residents often focus their budgets on essential expenses such as **housing, utilities, and food**, with healthcare and education frequently addressed as significant financial burdens.



*Even with a full-time job, it's hard to meet all the bills, let alone save anything.*  
Single Mom, No University Degree



*Most of my paycheck goes to rent and bills, and I have to cut down on other needs like healthcare.*  
Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage - Regular, 65+ Years

**Employment and Labor Market:**

- The lack of stable, well-paying jobs is a recurring theme, with many expressing **frustration over the limited career progression** or advancement opportunities available on the island.
- Participants seek more than a salary; they desire **job security, benefits**, and the **possibility of professional growth**. The quality of the **work environment and respect for labor rights** also emerged as important factors.



*It's not just about finding a job; it's about finding one that actually pays enough to live.*  
Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years



*I'm not just looking for any job. I need something stable, with growth potential, where I'm treated well.*  
Medical Students - Residence Year

**Taxes and Government Policies:**

- The perception is that taxes are high\*, and there is skepticism about how effectively those funds are used. Many express frustration **overpaying taxes without seeing corresponding improvements** in public services and infrastructure.



*We pay high taxes, but don't see the benefits when it comes to services or infrastructure improvement.*  
Teachers from public and private schools

\*Participants mentioned their perceptions of paying high taxes; however, specific percentages were not frequently detailed in the discussions





Economy refers that salaries are very low for the high cost of living, which forces Puerto Ricans to work multiple jobs, and food. Additionally, job opportunities are unstable, and there are no jobs in this area, leading to frequent frustration and stress.

# WATCH OUT

## Income and Budget Priorities:

Some participants discussed the stereotype that Puerto Ricans are unwilling to work. However, they largely refute it, attributing the issue to systemic challenges rather than personal laziness. They argue that **individuals are eager to work but are demotivated by a job market** that does not reward their effort.

## Employment and Labor Market:

Overall, it appears that Puerto Ricans are willing to work, but structural issues such as **inadequate job opportunities, poor remuneration, and the allure of better prospects abroad** significantly impact labor participation rates.

## Taxes and Government Policies:

People say we don't want to work, but the truth is the jobs aren't there for what we can offer. Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-25-34 years.



It's not that we don't want to work. It's that no one wants to pay a living wage. Single Moms / No University Degree

\*Participants mentioned their perceptions of paying high taxes; however, specific percentages were not frequently detailed in the discussions.



## **The study revealed several broader opportunities and solutions that Puerto Ricans suggest to enhance the general economy and employment landscape on the island:**



1. Creating more job opportunities: Participants emphasized the need for government and private sector initiatives to create well-paying jobs that align with the skills of the workforce. Incentives for businesses to operate in Puerto Rico could help.
2. Improving wages: There was a strong call for better wages that reflect the cost of living, with suggestions to enforce minimum wage laws more strictly and to encourage industries that offer better salaries.
3. Providing vocational and skills training: Many spoke about the importance of targeted vocational training programs that equip individuals with marketable skills, making them more attractive to employers and fitting the needs of emerging industries.
4. Supporting entrepreneurship: Encouraging small business creation and entrepreneurship was seen as a way to stimulate economic activity and offer employment. Reducing bureaucratic hurdles and providing financial support are crucial steps.

Overall, participants highlighted the need for tackling systemic issues such as corruption and inefficiencies in public service delivery to create a more enabling environment for economic participation, in other words addressing structural issues.





## Healthcare in Puerto Rico is characterized by its complexities like varied insurance coverage, limited access to specialized care, and the financial strain of high medical costs impacting quality and accessibility

### Health Insurance & Networks

- Participants reported varied insurance coverage. Many elderly participants (Medicare Advantage beneficiaries) had government-provided insurance. However, a noticeable portion of participants voiced having minimal insurance\* due to affordability issues.
- Participants often preferred networks that offered broader coverage and more extensive hospital and specialist options. Challenges arose when certain plans limited access to specialists or specific healthcare facilities.



**Since returning, accessing the care I need has been difficult. With government insurance, the wait times are long, and it's hard to find specialists who accept my plan.**

Lived in the US and returned to PR in the last 3 years-35-54

### Access to Medical Services & Healthcare Costs

- Access to services, especially specialized care, was identified as problematic, with reports of long waiting times and inadequate local options for certain specialties.
- Participants consistently mentioned that costs for medical services and prescriptions were prohibitively high, even for those with insurance, causing financial strain.



**It's challenging to find a primary care doctor who's accepting new patients, and getting referred to a specialist is even tougher.**

Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage - Regular, 65+ Years



25

### Perception of Quality in Healthcare

Participants associated quality healthcare with timely services, access to a range of specialists, advanced technology, and friendly, competent healthcare staff.



**Quality healthcare means you can get the help you need when you need it, without ridiculously long waits**

Technical Careers or Sectors Recruited in the US

While the issue of low natality was acknowledged in the focus groups as a notable concern, it may not have been highlighted as one of the principal problems faced by Puerto Rico. Low natality, while significant, presents as a more long-term demographic challenge rather than an immediate crisis.

\*Such minimal insurance plans typically include only basic services, providing limited access to specialists, covering only a fraction of medical expenses, or featuring high deductibles and copayments, which result in substantial out-of-pocket costs. These participants may find that their insurance does not adequately protect them from financial risk associated with significant medical services.



# Some differences in healthcare concerns were identified among certain targets primarily amidst medical students, beneficiary of Medicare Advantage, adults and professionals

## 1 Elderly Participants

Medicare beneficiaries primarily relied on government insurance. Focused more on access and affordability of medications and consistent care providers.

- Availability of physicians accepting Medicare and ensuring their prescriptions are cost-effective.
- High prescription costs are a significant concern, and there is a strong preference for insurance plans that provide more comprehensive coverage for medication.
- Importance is placed on having a regular healthcare provider who understands their ongoing health needs.

## 2 Younger Adults and Professionals

More likely to emphasize flexible and comprehensive insurance options that include preventative care without high out-of-pocket costs.

- Seeks insurance plans that offer flexibility in choosing healthcare providers and do not have restrictive networks.
- There is a strong emphasis on preventive care options like regular health check-ups, vaccinations, and wellness programs that are included in insurance without additional costs.
- Concerns about high deductibles and co-pays were frequently mentioned, with a preference for plans that minimize these expenses.

## 3 Medical Students

Concerned with training resources and infrastructure quality within health institutions, especially regarding advanced technology and learning opportunities.

- Medical students expressed concerns about the adequacy of training facilities and the access to modern technology and equipment.
- Some reported that facilities are outdated, impacting their learning experience and exposure to advanced medical practices.
- They highlighted the need for more hands-on learning experiences and access to a wider range of specialties during their training.
- Access to cutting-edge medical technology is seen as crucial for developing relevant skills required in a global healthcare environment.



## **Overall, the suggested solutions highlight a need for systemic reforms in healthcare funding, infrastructure, and service delivery:**



1. **Increase healthcare funding:** Participants across different groups suggested that the government should allocate more funds to improve healthcare infrastructure, expand services, and train healthcare professionals. Elderly participants emphasized the need for funding directed towards Medicare and senior healthcare services, while younger participants focused on preventive care and wellness programs.
2. **Improving access to specialists:** There was a call for increasing the number of specialists and reducing wait times. This could be achieved by incentivizing doctors to work in under-served areas or from abroad. Those living in rural areas or recently returned from the US emphasized the need for equitable distribution of specialists, while urban residents noted the importance of quick access to elective surgeries.
3. **Affordable healthcare options:** Many participants proposed the introduction of more affordable insurance plans and reducing the costs of medicine and medical services. Low-income groups and single parents were particularly vocal about the necessity of affordable healthcare to avoid financial burden.
4. **Modernization and use of technology:** Suggestions included the adoption of electronic health records and telemedicine to make healthcare delivery more efficient. Younger participants and medical students advocated for the integration of technology in healthcare to streamline processes.
5. **Public health campaigns and education:** Participants recommended increasing public health campaigns to promote preventive healthcare and health education. Teachers and educational professionals underscored the need to integrate health education in the school curriculum.

**The education system in Puerto Rico faces multiple challenges, including resource inadequacies, teacher shortages, and school closures, leading many to consider private and charter schools as viable alternatives, albeit often unaffordable**

## 1

## Resource Limitations and Infrastructure

Many participants noted that schools suffer from a lack of resources, including outdated materials (up-to-date textbooks and learning materials) and inadequate infrastructure (poorly maintained classrooms, insufficient seating, and lack of basic amenities like functional restrooms).



***The school building hasn't been renovated in years; it's falling apart and not a safe environment for the kids.***

Single Moms / No University Degree

## 3

## Closure of Schools

Participants expressed concern over the closing of schools, which they see as further limiting educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

Parents and single moms focused on the impact of school closings on accessibility and their children's future.



***The closest school is miles away after they closed the one in our neighborhood.***

Single Moms / No University Degree

## 2

## Availability of Teachers



There is a reported shortage of qualified teachers, leading to increased class sizes and reduced attention for students.

Teachers emphasized difficulties arising from resource constraints and lack of support from the government.



***It's a struggle to find enough teachers willing to work here because the pay doesn't match the workload.***

SJ Metro 18 to 24 Years

## 4

## Perception of Private and Charter Schools

Private and charter schools are generally perceived more favorably, as they are thought to offer better resources and educational quality compared to public schools.

On the other hand, young adults (SJ Metro) highlighted concerns about educational quality affecting their employment opportunities.



***Private schools seem to have more to offer, but they're not affordable for most families.***

Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-24-34 years

# WATCH OUT

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*It's a struggle to find enough teachers willing to do the job because the pay doesn't match the workload.*

*So Metro is 16 to 24 Years*

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*Private schools seem to have more to offer, but they're not affordable for most families.*

Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-24-34 years

The topic of **special education** did emerge as a noteworthy concern, particularly among participants who moved to the US for better educational opportunities for their children. **This issue is deeply linked to the broader educational challenges faced by Puerto Rico**, as it highlights several systemic deficiencies:

1. **Lack of specialized support:** Many participants indicated that Puerto Rico's public education system lacks adequate resources and trained personnel to support children with special educational needs. This results in families seeking better services abroad.
2. **Infrastructure and resources:** The same resource constraints affecting general education also impact special education. Schools are often ill-equipped with necessary tools, technologies, and materials to accommodate students with diverse learning needs.
3. **Policy and advocacy:** Participants expressed concerns that special education policies in Puerto Rico are not effectively implemented, leading to disparities in service availability and quality.

**\*The US was perceived to offer more comprehensive and specialized services, including tailored programs, specialized staff, and advanced facilities, which are appealing to families needing such support.**





**There are several opportunities that participants point to strength education on the island, but particularly seeking of an educational reform that will help the other solutions:**



1. Implement comprehensive educational reform: Participants suggested policy reforms focused on curriculum modernization, resource allocation, and accountability to enhance educational quality across all levels.
2. Increase funding for public schools: Additional investment in infrastructure, educational materials, and technology is needed to provide better learning environments and updated resources for students and teachers.
3. Support teacher training and retention: Developing programs for professional development and offering competitive salaries can help retain qualified teachers, reduce turnover, and improve teaching quality.
4. Expand special education services: Enhancing services for special education by recruiting trained specialists and ensuring schools are equipped to support diverse learning needs is essential.
5. Encourage public-private partnerships: These partnerships can facilitate resource sharing, expertise, and innovative educational initiatives that benefit both public and private schools.
6. Community involvement and advocacy: Involving parents and community organizations in decision-making processes can help ensure that educational reforms meet the needs of local communities.



## Crime and public safety have been identified as one of the main social issues, which have increased over the years

### High crime rates:

Participants across various groups noted high crime rates as a primary concern affecting their quality of life. This includes both petty crimes and more severe criminal activities. Elderly participants express concerns for their safety and the safety of their homes, urging for more reliable and visible police presence.

***"You can't even let your kids play outside without worrying about their safety. It's not like it used to be".***

Lived in the US and returned to PR in the last 3 years-25-50

### Neighbourhood safety concerns:

Individuals indicated that crime is a pressing issue within their communities, leading to a lack of trust in neighbors and a heightened sense of vulnerability. Parents and young adults focus on the safety of their children and the impact of crime on schools and neighborhoods.

***"We're always on edge in our neighborhood. Break-ins have become a common occurrence, and it feels like nothing's being done about it."***

Single Mom, No University Degree



Addressing crime and public safety concerns in Puerto Rico requires comprehensive strategies that involve boosting law enforcement capabilities, implementing community programs, and providing youth with constructive opportunities to curb their involvement in criminal activity.



### Inadequate law enforcement:

Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with law enforcement agencies, citing understaffing, lack of resources, and inefficiency as key issues undermining public safety.

Low-income areas report feeling more vulnerable due to less security presence and resources allocated to their communities.

***"The police are hardly around when you need them, and when they are, they lack the resources to handle the situation."***

Beneficiary of Medicare Advantage – Regular 65+

### Youth involvement in crime:

Several participants highlighted concerns about increasing crime rates among youth, suggesting a lack of productive activities and opportunities as contributing factors.

***"You see kids getting involved in crime because there are no opportunities for them. They need jobs, activities, something to keep them off the streets."***

Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-25-34



**Cost of living specifically addresses the affordability of everyday life for residents. It focuses on how much people need to spend on essential goods and services like housing, groceries, and utilities relative to their income. The cost of living impacts the economic well-being of individuals and families directly**

1

**High prices for basic necessities:**

Participants frequently discussed the high cost of essential items, including food, housing, and utilities, relative to their income levels. This disparity creates financial strain for many households, especially those with lower incomes.

2

**Housing costs:**

The cost of housing, whether rent or property taxes, emerged as a major concern. Many felt that affordable housing is scarce, and those available are often in disrepair.

3

**Utilities and services:**

High utility bills and recurring service disruptions are prevalent issues. Participants expressed frustration over unreliable electricity and water supplies, coupled with high fees.

4

**Transportation costs:**

Many highlighted the expense of private transportation due to high fuel costs and inadequate public transport systems. This further strains household budgets.



To address this issue there's some recommendations like implement financial assistance programs for low-income families to ease the burden of high living costs. Develop affordable housing projects and provide incentives for homeowners to offer lower rent options. Improve the reliability and management of public utilities to stabilize costs and prevent unexpected expenses. And enhance public transportation systems to reduce dependence on costly private transportation.



**Regarding infrastructure, there are issues that could be resolved through the modernization and maintenance of public services, which would improve the daily lives of Puerto Ricans and make better the coexistence of communities**



<b>Poor road conditions</b>	Participants frequently mentioned deteriorating road conditions, including potholes and inadequate maintenance, impacting daily commutes and safety.
<b>Public utility issues</b>	There was significant concern regarding the reliability of utilities such as electricity and water. Frequent outages and inconsistent water supply were common complaints.
<b>Public transportation shortcomings</b>	Public transport was described as inadequate, leading to reliance on private vehicles, which are costly and environmentally unfriendly.
<b>Reconstruction and recovery</b>	Participants discussed slow progress in reconstruction efforts post-natural disasters, feeling that recovery had not been prioritized effectively.



**Some opportunities**

- ➡ Increase funding and efficiency in road maintenance projects to repair and maintain roads more regularly to ensure safe and reliable transportation routes.
- ➡ Invest in modernizing and upgrading electrical and water infrastructure to reduce outages and ensure consistent service to residents.
- ➡ Expand and improve public transportation networks to provide reliable and accessible transportation options, particularly in urban centers and underserved areas.
- ➡ Implement transparent and efficient processes for reconstruction projects post-natural disasters, ensuring that affected areas are prioritized and that progress is communicated clearly to residents.



In the last few years, some participants noted minor improvements in certain areas but felt these were insufficient relative to broader infrastructure needs.



# SOCIAL ISSUES FOR BUSINESS

# 05





**For businesses, the main social issue is economy demonstrating that it is a structural problem that affects everyone regardless of the target. While there are other problems that directly affect them, the state of the island's infrastructure and security were also identified as recurring issues for both the general target and businesses.**

PUERTO RICAN MAIN SOCIAL ISSUES



**Economic Instability:** Businesses expressed concern over economic uncertainty, marked by fluctuating policies and limited access to sustainable fiscal support. The instability affects business planning and investment confidence, creating a challenging environment for growth.



**Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Inadequate infrastructure, notably unreliable utilities such as power and telecommunications, significantly disrupts daily operations. Both SMEs and large enterprises reports frequent service interruptions leading to increased operational costs and decreased productivity.



**Regulatory and Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Complex regulatory frameworks and slow bureaucratic processes present significant challenges. Obtaining permits and complying with regulations demand substantial time and resources, hindering business efficiency. Large enterprises despite having more resources than SMEs to manage these challenges, bureaucratic inefficiencies still delay project timelines and elevate compliance costs.



**Workforce and Talent:** A shortage of skilled labor and the ongoing brain drain were highlighted as significant issues. The lack of adequately trained personnel limits business expansion and innovation.



**Technological Gaps:** While SMEs have adopted some digital tools, there remains a gap in integrating advanced technology, affecting their competitiveness due to high costs and limited access to cutting-edge technologies. Although large enterprises do not face this gap as acutely, technology adoption and innovation remain crucial for maintaining their competitive advantage.



**Security and Public Safety:** Though not as prominently discussed as the top issues, concerns about crime and public safety were noted. These issues can impact business operations indirectly by influencing investment decisions and the overall business climate. Security concerns become more prominent for large enterprises, as incidents can have broader implications on reputation and operational continuity.



## The multifaceted nature of economic instability impacting businesses in Puerto Rico, underscore the need for more supportive fiscal policies, better credit access, and innovative strategies to manage rising costs

### Current economic situation

Participants describe the current economic environment as unpredictable, marked by fluctuating market conditions and political uncertainty that complicate strategic planning. Rising inflation affects purchasing power and operational budgets, leading businesses to struggle with cost management as prices rise. Large enterprises, given their broader scope, may focus more on strategic alignment and future-proofing due to their long-term investment plans.

### Production costs and profit margins

Businesses in Puerto Rico face rising production costs, especially in energy, materials, and import tariffs, which squeeze profit margins. To address these challenges, they adopt cost-cutting measures like implementing more efficient energy practices. Although these strategies often have limited success for SMEs, large enterprises can invest in energy-efficient technologies and optimize supply chain logistics due to their greater resources. Their larger scale enables better negotiation with suppliers and the capacity to leverage global resources, providing more options for effective cost management.

### Changes in demand and future investments

The market is characterized as unstable, with shifting consumer demands challenging inventory and production planning. Economic instability has prompted businesses to adopt cautious approaches towards new investments, deferring expansion plans until market conditions improve. However, large enterprises, with more resources and comprehensive data analytics capabilities, may better anticipate demand shifts and adjust their strategies accordingly.

### Fiscal policies and credit access

Both SMEs and large enterprises in Puerto Rico encounter challenges associated with high taxes and inconsistent fiscal policies, which impact business growth and strategic planning. Frequent regulatory changes create an unpredictable environment. Access to credit remains difficult, with stringent requirements presenting barriers, particularly for SMEs lacking capital and collateral. Though large enterprises often have better access to financing due to their size, they still face challenges within Puerto Rico's financial system, prompting them to seek options abroad. Overall, reforms in fiscal policies and improvements in credit access are necessary to support business growth across all sectors.

### Cost of doing business

For both SMEs and large enterprises in Puerto Rico, the cumulative effect of high taxes, utility costs, and regulatory compliance significantly raises the overall cost of doing business, affecting competitiveness both locally and internationally. While large enterprises have more resources to manage these expenses, they also face additional factors such as higher logistical and operational costs due to their scale, which further impacts their cost structures.



Infrastructure **deficiencies significantly affect business operations in Puerto Rico, with various areas such as telecommunications, energy, transportation, and general infrastructure quality being sources of concern**

## 1 Telecommunications

Participants noted frequent disruptions and slow internet speeds, which impact their ability to compete effectively and maintain communication with clients and partners. Though large enterprises often possess more resources to invest in backup and alternative connectivity solutions.

Impact on Business: Unreliable telecom services hinder digital operations and complicate tasks that require fast and stable internet connections.



***Our internet goes out at the worst times. We're constantly losing time and money trying to compensate for these service issues.***

SMEs Business

## 2 Energy

Businesses face regular power outages and high electricity costs, creating instability in operations and increasing overhead expenses. Large enterprises often have the capital to mitigate disruptions through investing in generators and alternative energy sources.

Impact on Work: Power interruptions disrupt workflows, leading to potential data losses and reducing productivity, especially in sectors reliant on continuous power.



***Though we have installed backup systems, it's an unnecessary and expensive overhead.***

Large Enterprise

## 3 Transportation

Poor road conditions and inadequate public transportation options increase logistical costs and delay supply chains. Large enterprises while they face similar challenges in logistics, their larger scale allows for potential investments in private transportation networks or more robust logistics strategies.

Impact on Business: Movement of goods and staff becomes unpredictable, affecting efficiency and client commitments.



***Transportation is a bottleneck. Deliveries are delayed, and employee commutes are a daily hassle.***

SMEs Business



## General Infrastructure Support

Businesses stress the need for government interventions to modernize infrastructure, including incentives for private investments in infrastructure improvements.

Participants suggest public-private partnerships to bridge the gap in resources and expertise necessary to upgrade infrastructure systems effectively.



Infrastructures may affect business operations in Puerto Rico, with various areas such as telecommunications, transportation, and general infrastructure quality being sources of concern.

# WATCH OUT

The topic of **adapting to climate change** emerge. Climate change poses a significant risk to industries such as agriculture and tourism in Puerto Rico. Businesses in these sectors are particularly vulnerable to climatic events like hurricanes, flooding, and rising sea levels, which can disrupt operations and pose long-term sustainability challenges.

Companies may need to **invest in climate-resilient infrastructure** and adopt sustainable practices to mitigate risks. This could involve diversified strategies for disaster recovery and strengthening supply chain resilience.

However, there is potential for businesses to innovate by developing solutions that improve sustainability and environmental adaptability, such as eco-tourism initiatives and climate-smart agricultural practices.

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Impact on Business: Unreliable telecom services hinder digital operations and complicate tasks that require fast and stable internet connections.

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SMEs Business

Businesses face regular power outages and high electricity costs, creating instability in operations and increasing overhead expenses. Large enterprises often have the capital to mitigate disruptions through investing in backup power and alternative energy sources.

Impact on Work: Power interruptions lead to data losses and reducing productivity. Continuous power outages are a significant concern.

*Though we have installed backup systems, it's an unnecessary and expensive overhead.*

Large Enterprise

Poor road conditions and inadequate public transportation options increase delivery times and disrupt supply chains. Large enterprises while they have more resources to invest in their larger scale allows for potential investments in private transportation networks or more robust logistics strategies.

Impact on Business: Movement of staff and materials is often unpredictable, affecting efficiency and client commitments.

*Transportation is a bottleneck. Deliveries are delayed, and employee commutes are a daily hassle.*

SMEs Business

Businesses stress the need for government interventions to modernize infrastructure, including incentives for private investments in infrastructure improvements.

Participants suggest public-private partnerships to bridge the gap in infrastructure expertise necessary to upgrade infrastructure systems.



**Overall, regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles are seen as a major obstacle to business efficacy, impeding growth and innovation. Simplifying regulations and embracing digital solutions are commonly proposed remedies to enhance the business environment**

- Businesses often describe the **regulatory environment as overly complex**, with redundant and sometimes contradictory requirements making compliance difficult and time-consuming.
- Companies consistently face an overload of forms and documents to process, which can **delay operational timelines**.
- Obtaining the necessary permissions to operate is frequently cited as a significant hurdle, requiring excessive documentation and multiple approvals. These processes are not only **time-consuming** but also **unpredictable in terms of how long they take**, which complicates business planning and project launches.
- Certain laws are seen as **outdated or irrelevant** (regulatory framework in Puerto Rico), yet they continue to place unnecessary burdens on businesses.



- Participants suggest that staying compliant demands resources that could be better used in business development and innovation.
- Participants advocate for streamlining processes through digitization, reducing the number of required permits, and updating outdated laws to simplify compliance. They suggest increased transparency and dialogue between businesses and regulators to facilitate understanding and cooperation. Participants suggest that staying compliant demands resources that could be better used in business development and innovation.



# WATCH OUT

As part of the regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles, the topic of **environmental regulations** was discussed among participants. Environmental regulations impact business operations through compliance requirements which can be **extensive and costly**. These regulations aim to protect Puerto Rico's natural resources but can pose challenges to economic activities that are resource-intensive.

Companies must navigate **complex environmental laws**, which may necessitate investments in technology and processes to reduce environmental footprints. **These costs can be significant, especially for smaller enterprises with limited resources**. But on the positive side, compliance with environmental regulations encourages businesses to adopt more **sustainable practices**, reducing long-term operational risks and potentially opening avenues for green certifications and eco-friendly branding.



**Complying with environmental laws is costly and requires constant adjustments in our processes to minimize our impact.**



**SMEs Business**

Participants suggest that staying compliant demands resources that could be better used in business development and innovation. They suggest increased transparency and dialogue between businesses and regulators to facilitate understanding and cooperation. Participants suggest that staying compliant demands resources that could be better used in business development and innovation.



**We face challenges in meeting stringent environmental requirements, which often seem outdated and create unnecessary hurdles.**

**Large Enterprise**

## REGULATORY AND BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES

Overall, regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles are seen as a major obstacle to business efficacy, impeding growth and innovation. Simplifying regulations and embracing digital

business environment.

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Certain laws are seen as outdated or irrelevant (regulatory framework in Puerto Rico), yet they



Addressing the workforce and talent issues in Puerto Rico requires a concerted effort to align educational outcomes with market needs, retain talent, and provide continuous professional development opportunities



- Participants noted a significant skills gap in the available workforce, particularly in technical and specialized fields (engineering, IT, healthcare, and skilled trades). This gap makes it challenging for businesses to find qualified candidates.
- The availability of skilled labor is limited, partly due to the 'brain drain' phenomenon, where educated and skilled workers migrate to the US for better opportunities.
- There is a strong need for more robust training and development programs to enhance the skills of the current workforce. Participants emphasized the importance of vocational training and partnerships with educational institutions.
- Participants suggest several changes to improve workforce development, including enhancing education systems, providing incentives for skill-building programs, and fostering partnerships between businesses and educational institutions.



Participants did mention that certain institutions are providing support in terms of workforce development and training. Specifically, the **Chamber of Commerce in Puerto Rico** was highlighted as being involved in offering resources and training opportunities for businesses. Participants acknowledged the role of such organizations in facilitating training programs that aim to bridge the skills gap and improve the qualifications of the local workforce.



**The issue of workforce and talent unveils two other problems: brain drain and education system. These do not directly impact the operation of small and medium enterprises; however, they do notice the consequences that each of these problems carries along with them**



#### **Brain Drain:**

The migration of skilled workers to the mainland US, resulting in difficulties in finding qualified local talent, is a consequence of workforce and talent challenges. This issue exacerbates the scarcity of skilled labor. The migration of skilled workers to the US mainland presents a substantial concern for businesses, which struggle to find and retain local talent with the requisite skills and motivation.



#### **Education System:**

Seen as not adequately preparing the local workforce, it contributes to the challenges in talent acquisition and is linked to workforce readiness and development issues. There is a belief that the education system does not adequately prepare young people for the workforce, contributing to the scarcity of skilled labor and impacting future workforce readiness.



**Tackling these technological gaps requires a holistic approach involving upgrading infrastructure, providing training and resources for digital transformation, and fostering an environment supportive of technological innovation**

### **Involvement of technology in daily operations**

Large enterprises often have a more robust integration of technology in their daily operations than SMEs. However, there remains significant potential for expanded digitalization, especially in process automation and advanced data analytics.

### **Level of digitalization**

While large enterprises are generally ahead in digital transformation compared to SMEs, they also encounter limitations. These include high implementation costs and a persistent need for skilled professionals capable of managing complex digital projects.

### **Specific needs and barriers**

- Needs: Companies need affordable access to up-to-date technology and digital training for employees.
- Barriers: For SMEs-High costs, insufficient support infrastructure, and limited access to cutting-edge technology are major barriers. Large enterprises- scaling technology infrastructure efficiently and overcoming high initial investment costs.

### **Adoption levels**

Some sectors have shown good levels of technology adoption, particularly those dealing with e-commerce and fintech (tourism and hospitality too-for SMEs) and sectors like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and technology (for large enterprises).



*We are continually integrating more tech into our processes, but the full leap into automation is still a way off.*

Large Enterprises

*Technology helps us streamline processes, but we're not where we need to be yet, especially compared to other markets*

SMEs Business



## The focus on security and public safety underscores the broader impact of crime on both personal and business levels, highlighting a key area where improvement is necessary to foster a more conducive environment for commerce in Puerto Rico

<b>Prevalence of crime and safety concerns</b>	Both SMEs and large enterprises encounter significant concerns around security and public safety. High crime rates, including theft and vandalism, directly affect business operations, resulting in additional costs for security measures such as surveillance systems and private security personnel.
<b>Effect on employee well-being</b>	The safety of employees, particularly those in high-crime areas or working night shifts, remains a critical concern for both sectors. This impacts employee morale and productivity.
<b>Public safety infrastructure</b>	Inadequate public safety infrastructure and a lack of visible police presence exacerbate security concerns, with businesses calling for improved policing effectiveness, community engagement, and timely interventions to enhance safety.
<b>Impact on business decisions</b>	High crime rates influence strategic decisions related to the location of business operations and investments, affecting trade timings and risk assessments for establishing operations in certain areas.



***My team feels uneasy when they must stay late. Their safety is always on my mind***  
SME's Business



***Our employees are anxious when working late, and it affects their performance and job satisfaction***  
Large Enterprises





## **There are several opportunities that both SMEs and large enterprises point to for implementing strategic reforms and innovations to strengthen Puerto Rico's business ecosystem**



1. Regulatory reforms: Participants strongly advocated for reducing bureaucratic delays and simplifying the regulatory framework to enhance ease of doing business. This is crucial for both SMEs and large enterprises to streamline operations and facilitate faster decision-making and project implementation.
2. Infrastructure investments: Focus on large-scale infrastructure projects that enhance infrastructure quality, particularly energy reliability and transportation networks, which can benefit large enterprises and SMEs by ensuring consistent operations and reducing logistical costs.
3. Skills and workforce development: For SMEs-strengthening partnerships with educational institutions to align workforce skills with industry demands, reducing the skills gap. Develop targeted programs for high-skilled sectors that large enterprises rely on, such as technology and pharmaceuticals. Collaborate with universities to create specialized training programs that align with industry demands.
4. Policy incentives: Propose more targeted incentives for both local and foreign businesses to invest and expand in Puerto Rico. This strategy should include designing tailored tax benefits and fiscal incentives to attract foreign direct investment and encourage the growth of existing large enterprises, while streamlining tax filing processes and compliance to enhance operational efficiency.

In addition to the recommendations provided, another significant change that could improve the business climate in Puerto Rico would be **fostering innovation and entrepreneurship**. Encouraging a culture of innovation through support programs, incubators, and access to funding for startups could spur economic development and diversify the local economy. Additionally, creating a stable political environment through **transparent governance and effective communication** with the business community could further enhance confidence and investment.



# MIGRATION AND RETURNING

# 06

**Overall, migration is primarily driven by the pursuit of economic opportunities and improved quality of life. However, emotional and familial bonds as well as the time spent abroad significantly influence whether individuals consider returning or continuing their lives elsewhere**



## 1 Economic opportunities

Across the board, a primary reason for migrating is seeking better job opportunities and higher salaries. Many participants indicated that the job market in Puerto Rico does not offer enough opportunities, particularly for skilled and educated workers. This economic motivation is driven by low wages, limited career advancement, and a high cost of living in Puerto Rico. For many, migrating represents a chance to improve their quality of life and financial stability.

## 2 Quality of life & services

Access to better healthcare, education, and safety are significant factors influencing the decision to migrate. Participants often mentioned superior healthcare services, higher-ranked schools, and a perception of higher safety levels in the United States as incentives for migration.

## 3 Family and social ties

Some individuals migrate to join family members who already reside abroad or to provide better opportunities for their children (educational and healthcare). This reason reflects a traditional pattern of migration where networks and family ties play a supportive role in the transition process.





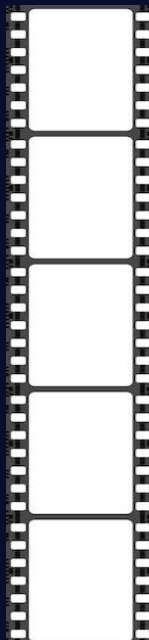
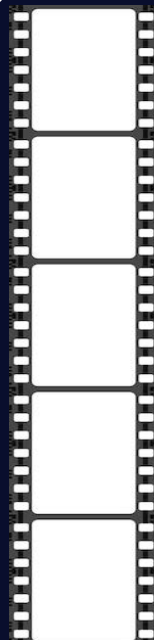
## Among other reasons for migrating to the United States, it was particularly notable how government handling of scandals and natural disasters (such as Hurricane Maria) accelerated the decision of Puerto Ricans to migrate



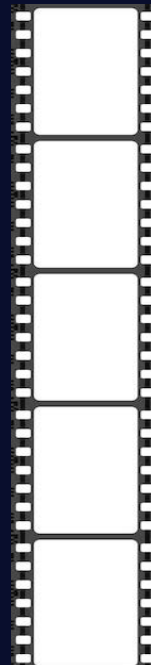
- Hurricane Maria, which struck in September 2017, played a significant role in accelerating migration from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States. The hurricane caused extensive damage to infrastructure, left many without power or access to basic services for extended periods, and resulted in a humanitarian crisis that the local government struggled to manage. As a result, many residents moved to states such as Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania seeking better living conditions and opportunities. The migration post-Maria was largely driven by the devastation's impact on job availability, healthcare, education, and overall quality of life.
- Another compelling reason for migration from Puerto Rico is the impact of political uncertainty and governance issues. Many migrants express concern over the local government's handling of fiscal crises and corruption scandals, which undermine public trust and contribute to a pessimistic outlook on the island's future. This lack of confidence in political leadership spurs individuals, particularly those seeking stability and long-term security, to look for opportunities elsewhere.



## In the participants' own words...



Lived in the US and returned to PR in the last 3 years



Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years

Press play in  
every video







## The migration dynamics are characterized by navigating long-term stability, immediate pressures, and emotional pulls that influence Puerto Rican decisions to leave and return



### Those who have left for a longer duration

Tend to have established lives in the United States, often citing advanced career positions and deep integration into local communities. They usually weigh economic stability and the quality of life heavily over cultural ties.



### Those who have left recently

Oftentimes speak to the immediate economic pressures that pushed their decision to migrate, such as post-natural disaster recovery or recent job loss. They are still in transitional phases and may maintain hopes of returning if circumstances in Puerto Rico improve.



### Returnees

Individuals who have returned to Puerto Rico often cite familial ties and a strong emotional connection to their homeland as core reasons for coming back. Many express a sense of fulfillment in contributing to their communities despite the economic disadvantages compared to the US.

# To understand the migration dynamics and the potential interest in returning, we need to highlight the complex interplay between economic, social, emotional, and cultural influences



For the participants who have migrated to the United States, there are certain elements that may be considered important if they were to evaluate returning to Puerto Rico, such as:

- **Cultural retention and identity:** For those who have been away longer, maintaining cultural practices and connections is sometimes a balancing act. This can influence their eventual interest in returning to Puerto Rico if they feel a strong pull towards reclaiming their cultural heritage more fully.
- **Community integration and support networks:** For those who have left recently, the loss or lack of established community networks abroad can increase their desire to return. They may find it challenging to replicate the social and familial support they had back home.
- **Policy and governance changes in Puerto Rico:** Participants often mentioned that significant improvements in governance, such as corruption reduction and better public services, would play a crucial role in their decision to return. Observing positive changes from afar can reignite interest in moving back.
- **Health and lifestyle:** For individuals who have left for health-related reasons, improvements in the healthcare infrastructure in Puerto Rico could attract them back.
- **Emotional well-being:** The emotional well-being associated with living close to family and in familiar environments often outweighs economic considerations for potential returnees. This emotional aspect continues to be a strong factor driving their interest in returning.



***I miss the feeling of being surrounded by family and friends. If jobs were more stable back home, I'd seriously consider moving back.***

*Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-55+ Years*



***Living in the US has its perks, but there's always that part of me that feels out of place. Puerto Rico is home.***

*Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the past 10 years-25-34 years*



**Now, the decision to return is strongly influenced by cultural and emotional factors, regardless of the time lived in the U.S.**



# For those who have return, the main reasons Puerto Ricans choose to come back to the island reflect a mix of personal, cultural, and aspirational factors



**Family and emotional ties:** The strongest reason for returning is the deep familial and emotional connections that bind individuals to Puerto Rico. Many return to be closer to family, support aging parents, or to raise their children in a culture they deeply value.

*"No matter where we go, Puerto Rico is home. I needed to be closer to my family; they are my support system."*

Puerto Ricans who have returned to the island within the last 3 years



**Cultural identity and belonging:** A profound sense of cultural identity and belonging plays a crucial role. Individuals express a desire to immerse their families in their cultural heritage and traditions.

*"It feels different living elsewhere; there's something about the culture, the people, that's irreplaceable for me."*

Puerto Ricans who have returned to the island within the last 3 years



**Desire to contribute to local development:** Some returnees are motivated by a sense of responsibility and ambition to contribute positively to the island's recovery and progress, particularly in the wake of natural disasters like Hurricane Maria.

*"I wanted to use my skills to help rebuild my island and make it a better place for the next generation."*

Puerto Ricans who have returned to the island within the last 3 years

**Improved conditions or opportunities in specific sectors:** Some return due to improved opportunities in certain sectors, such as government incentives for new businesses or specialty programs targeting education and healthcare.

*"The new educational programs launched here made it worthwhile to come back. There are government initiatives now that really support teachers, and that's what convinced me to return and contribute to improving our schools."*

Teachers from public and private schools

**Preference for lifestyle and climate:** A preference for the local lifestyle, including the climate, slower pace of life, and community-oriented living often acts as a draw for those returning.

*"The warmth, the beaches, the way of living—it's what makes life truly enjoyable for me and my family."*

Puerto Ricans who have returned to the island within the last 3 years



**It is clear that all the issues raised point to what Puerto Ricans envision for their island's prosperous, equitable, and secure future. Six main points were observed that are considered needing improvement to build an ideal vision for the country**



- 1. Economic prosperity and stability:** Participants aspire for a stable economy that offers ample job opportunities, fair wages, and potential for growth. There is a strong desire for economic reforms that can elevate the living standards across the island.
- 2. Quality healthcare access:** There is a universal hope for improved healthcare systems with better access to quality medical services and reduced costs, especially for those with specific health needs.
- 3. Educational excellence:** Participants wish for a robust educational system with modern facilities, technology, and inclusive programs that prepare children for the future.
- 4. Safe and secure communities:** A significant hope is for improved public safety, where communities are free from crime, allowing people to live without fear and fostering a sense of security.
- 5. Cultural and environmental preservation:** Emphasizing the preservation of cultural heritage and natural beauty, participants hope for policies that protect the environment and uphold the rich traditions of Puerto Rico.
- 6. Efficient governance:** Many wish for transparent, efficient governing bodies free from corruption, working steadily towards the development of Puerto Rico.





# SECTOR-SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

# 07



**In the study, we have representation from various sectors that contributed to a holistic understanding of the business climate in Puerto Rico. Among the SME's and large enterprises, the study included the following sectors:**



**Retail and Consumer Goods:** Participants included owners of small retail stores and businesses dealing in consumer goods like clothing shops and local product distributors. Also, companies managing large supermarket chains and food distribution networks.



**Manufacturing and Production:** Participants included representatives from manufacturing sectors, including food production and electronics assembly. Represents enterprises involved in the packaging and distribution of pharmaceutical products (manufacturing).



**Automotive:** Enterprises involved in the sale and distribution of vehicles, including both cars and industrial vehicles.



**Education:** Representative from the main private university in Puerto Rico.



**Technology and IT Services:** Companies involved in providing IT solutions, software development, and digital services were present in the discussions.



**Hospitality and Tourism:** This included businesses in the hotel industry, tour operators, and restaurants reliant on the tourism sector.



**Construction and Real Estate:** Companies involved in construction projects and real estate development were also part of the focus group.



**Healthcare Services:** Some businesses operated in the area of health services and medical supplies.

## Now, there is a role of organizations and associations in advancing business growth in Puerto Rico

Participants mentioned that some **local business** associations and **international partners** are actively engaging in initiatives to address the challenges faced by SMEs and large enterprises, such as providing training sessions, advocacy for policy reforms, navigating complex regulatory environments, fostering collaboration, and leveraging collective influence for policy changes.

**Mostly for SMEs**, the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce and various industry-specific associations - Puerto Rican Manufacturers Association (PRMA), Puerto Rico Hotel & Tourism Association (PRHTA), Puerto Rico IT Cluster (PRITC)- are noted for their efforts in supporting business growth and development. **For large enterprises** they often engage with sector-specific international associations - International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) or International Association for Automotive Manufacturers - that offer strategic insights and global networking opportunities, helping them stay competitive.



Both sectors recognize that the Chamber of Commerce in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican Manufacturers Association (PRMA) have played an important role in supporting business operations on the island.



# Charting the path forward, we explored the challenges, growth opportunities and strategies for businesses in Puerto Rico



- **Optimistic Sectors:** Participants view sectors such as technology, renewable energy, and healthcare as having substantial growth potential. These sectors are driven by local needs and broader global trends, offering opportunities for innovation and expansion.
- **Challenges:** Despite these opportunities, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed. Businesses face regulatory, financial, and infrastructural hurdles, which demand strategic solutions to navigate effectively.
- **Strategic Adaptation:** Companies are focusing on innovation and digital transformation to capitalize on these growth opportunities. Forming strategic partnerships and integrating new technologies are seen as keyways to enhance competitiveness and overcome current barriers. Large enterprises are particularly focused on forming partnerships and utilizing their scale to expand into emergent industry sectors.











***The future lies in getting ahead in tech and green energy sectors. They hold promise if we can tackle current barriers.***

SMEs Business

# Zooming in on the specific sectors that were included in the study, each sector faces unique challenges but also benefits from distinct opportunities for growth and development



 <b>Healthcare</b>	 <b>Technology</b>	 <b>Construction</b>	 <b>Manufacturing</b>	 <b>Retail &amp; Consumer Goods</b>	 <b>Hospitality</b>	 <b>Automotive</b>	 <b>Education</b>
<p>Growth prospects exist in the healthcare sector due to an aging population, although businesses face challenges with rising costs and dealing with health insurance companies.</p> <p>Pharmaceutical: Although not discussed in detail, pharmaceuticals are mentioned as an industry receiving substantial government incentives.</p>	<p>While the tech sector is relatively advanced in digitalization, there is perceived insufficient innovation compared to other markets, and companies face new challenges posed by artificial intelligence.</p>	<p>Consistent demand exists in the sector, but businesses face rising material costs, supply chain delays, and employee retention issues.</p>	<p>Puerto Rico is seen as having potential in manufacturing thanks to local talent, though businesses deal with issues of employee commitment and high material costs.</p>	<p>Restaurants are affected by reduced consumer spending due to inflation and shifting dining habits. Businesses adapt by expanding menus and focusing on attracting new customers.</p>	<p>The hospitality sector is noted for its recovery and steady demand growth as tourism activities increase post-natural disasters. This provides significant opportunities for growth and expansion. And the need for robust infrastructure and labor market strategies to support sustainable growth.</p>	<p>The market is competitive, with numerous brands vying for consumer attention, creating pressure on pricing and differentiation strategies. There's potential growth in the demand for electric vehicles as environmental concerns and regulations increase. Enhancements in infrastructure can facilitate vehicle logistics and after-sales support, bolstering sector growth.</p>	<p>The sector faces challenges in securing funding and maintaining competitiveness with international educational standards. Opportunities exist to collaborate with industries to develop joint training programs that can address skill gaps.</p>



# KEY TAKE AWAYS



**The research underscores the urgent need for a strategic approach to addressing Puerto Rico's core challenges. The island's economy struggles with an unstable climate, limited job opportunities, and significant infrastructural deficiencies. Healthcare, education, and public safety remain pressing concerns that impact residents' quality of life. For businesses, overcoming bureaucratic barriers and navigating economic uncertainty are paramount challenges.**

## **1 Economic Instability and Growth Opportunities**

Puerto Rico faces significant economic instability characterized by a lack of stable job opportunities, high operational costs, and fiscal uncertainties. There is a critical need for strategic economic policies that encourage diversification across sectors such as technology, tourism, and renewable energy. By facilitating industry growth, there is potential to create sustainable employment and boost economic resilience.

## **2 Infrastructural Deficiencies**

The persistent issues with infrastructure, particularly within utilities, transportation, and telecommunications, continue to hamper both daily living and business operations. Investments in modern and reliable infrastructure are essential to support economic activities and enhance quality of life for residents and efficiency for businesses.

## **3 Healthcare and Education**

Access to quality healthcare and a robust education system remains a challenge for Puerto Rican residents. Addressing these areas is crucial for improving public health outcomes, enhancing workforce readiness, and ensuring long-term socio-economic stability. Reforms that align educational curricula to market needs and ease healthcare access would contribute significantly to individual and community well-being.

## **4 Bureaucratic Barriers and Regulatory Improvements**

For businesses, navigating bureaucratic obstacles and inconsistent regulatory environments is a significant challenge. Simplifying processes, reducing administrative burdens, and fostering a transparent regulatory framework can help improve the business climate and attract both local and foreign investment.

## **5 Cultural Identity and Community Engagement**

Maintaining cultural identity and strong community ties is vital for social cohesion and resilience. Empowering local initiatives and fostering community involvement are important for preserving Puerto Rico's rich cultural heritage while promoting inclusive growth and development.



# Recommendations

Despite the various recommendations provided throughout the report, there are general recommendations worth mentioning to seek improvements in the lives of Puerto Ricans and businesses.

- 1. Industry Diversification and Growth:** Encourage the development of sectors such as technology, renewable energy, and tourism, leveraging Puerto Rico's unique geographical and cultural assets. Participants highlighted the potential for Puerto Rico to become a leader in renewable energy, which could create jobs and reduce dependency on costly imported fuels.
  - **For Individuals (e.g., Returnees, Teachers):** Focus on creating local job opportunities that align with their skills and interests, enhancing vocational training, and supporting entrepreneurial ventures. Creating a business-friendly environment could attract multinational companies and generate jobs.
  - **For SMEs:** Focus on niche markets and community collaboration to harness localized opportunities.
  - **For Large Enterprises:** Leverage existing resources to spearhead initiatives in emerging sectors like technology, renewable energy, and pharmaceuticals. Utilize Puerto Rico's strategic location for expansion into new global markets, while investing in research and development to foster innovation.
- 2. Infrastructure and Sustainability:** Prioritize robust infrastructure development, including transportation, utilities, and broadband access, alongside environmental sustainability initiatives to drive long-term economic stability.
  - **For Individuals (e.g., Single Mothers, General Residents):** Improve accessibility to reliable public transport, utilities, and internet services to boost quality of life and reduce living costs. Developing infrastructure projects can create immediate jobs and improve the efficiency of transportation and utilities, which in turn aids economic activities.
  - **For SMEs:** Develop public-private partnerships (government and community entities) to fund and maintain infrastructure projects that ensure consistent and reliable services, reducing operational bottlenecks.
  - **For Large Enterprises:** Focus on sustainable practices by incorporating corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that emphasize environmental sustainability.
- 3. Educational Reforms:** Reform education systems to better align with market demands, enhancing workforce readiness and addressing skill gaps critical for economic growth.
  - **For Individuals (e.g., Teachers, Parents):** Reform curricula to focus on skill development and practical knowledge necessary for the current job market, enhancing student readiness.
  - **For SME's and Large Enterprises:** Collaborate with educational institutions to ensure training programs align with industry demands, helping to bridge the skills gap and improve workforce readiness.



## Recommendations

4. **Policy and Governance:** Streamline regulatory processes and increase transparency to attract local and foreign investments, fostering a business-friendly environment. There is a call for better governance, reduction of bureaucratic obstacles, and transparency to encourage local and foreign investments.
  - **For Individuals (e.g., Migrants, Residents):** Simplify bureaucratic processes to access services and benefits, ensuring fair and effective governance that protects individual rights.
  - **For SMEs:** Streamline regulatory requirements to improve ease of doing business, reduce compliance costs, and promote competitive practices at both local and international levels.
  - **For Large Enterprises:** Advocate for streamlined policies through engagement with policymakers, aligning corporate interests with national economic goals. Lead collaborative efforts to reduce bureaucratic obstacles, encouraging a stable and transparent investment climate.
5. **Community and Cultural Initiatives:** Support local cultural initiatives that strengthen community engagement, celebrating Puerto Rico's rich heritage while promoting unity and resilience.
  - **For Individuals (e.g., Returnees, Community Groups):** Promote cultural heritage projects that support community identity and enhance social cohesion.
  - **For SMEs and Large Enterprises:** Encourage SME participation in widespread cultural and community initiatives to foster goodwill and local engagement, benefiting businesses reputationally. Support heritage celebrations and community development by engaging in sponsorships and partnerships with local organizations to strengthen social ties and enhance corporate reputations.



# THANK YOU

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