



RIGHT TO LIVE WITHOUT A BLOCKADE

The impact of US sanctions on the Cuban population and women's lives

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OXFAM REPORT — MAY 2021

Right to Live without a Blockade reveals the impact of nearly six decades of sanctions imposed by successive US governments on the Cuban population. It focuses on the human dimensions, presenting testimonies that illustrate the consequences of the blockade on the daily lives of those in Cuba, women in particular. The report also includes historical data and information on the measures applied. In the context of a global pandemic, it is more urgent than ever to change this US policy toward Cuba. Oxfam calls for the normalization of US-Cuba relations.

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Cover photo: Yunisleydis Duvergel (aged 31), transportation organizer. She witnesses every day how gasoline scarcity makes transportation difficult for the Cuban population. “I think it is much harder for women, as they generally have the weight of domestic responsibilities; not being able to rely on transportation generates greater stress.” According to the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in its resolution 74/7, entitled “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba” (2020), in 2019, the US fined 27 companies, 54 ships, and 3 individuals for transporting fuel to Cuba. None of those entities or individuals sanctioned were from or under the jurisdiction of the US, illustrating the extraterritorial nature of the US embargo against Cuba. Photo by Claudio Peláez Sorgo.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

5	PROLOGUES
10	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
19	INTRODUCTION
	CHAPTER 1
23	A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLOCKADE
24	US-CUBA RELATIONS (2009-2021)
26	MAIN ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE OBAMA AND TRUMP ADMINISTRATIONS
33	DOMESTIC CHANGES AND RELEVANT EVENTS IN CUBA, 2008-2021
36	SOME TRUMP ADMINISTRATION SANCTIONS AGAINST UNITED STATES AND THIRD-PARTY COMPANIES
	CHAPTER 2
39	CONSEQUENCES OF THE MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ON CUBA
41	Health Service Exports
43	Tourism and Remittances
48	Biotech
53	Education
56	Technology
58	Agriculture
63	Non-State Sector
	CHAPTER 3
73	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
82	NOTES

PROLOGUES

WHY OXFAM IS CALLING FOR AN END TO THE US EMBARGO AGAINST CUBA

Oxfam began working in Cuba in 1993 at a time of economic crisis on the island. Since then, Oxfam has accompanied the Cuban people in communities across the country, supporting their initiatives to bolster food security and sovereignty, strengthen gender justice, build resilience to climate change, and reduce disaster-related risks. Our experiences and relationships on the ground provide us with a firsthand understanding of the impact of US policies intended to block not just trade, but also cross-border engagement and social, cultural, and scientific exchanges with the island.

As an international development organization working to end the injustice of poverty, Oxfam considers current US policy toward Cuba a severe obstacle to development for the Cuban population. The web of US laws and regulations, referred to as an embargo but experienced by the island as a blockade, impedes its 11 million people from freely engaging with the US and beyond, and is a barrier to the full exercise of Cubans' rights.



ELENA GENTILI

Oxfam Country Director for Cuba

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Gentili'.

As a rights-based organization committed to fighting inequality and promoting gender justice, Oxfam has been working in Cuba with local and national partners to empower women and close the gender gap. We have seen the impact of the blockade on women and how it adversely affects their family lives and livelihoods, thereby limiting progress toward a more just and inclusive society.

In our humanitarian work in Cuba, including the response to the health emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, Oxfam has witnessed how the US embargo limits Cubans' capacity to recover from these setbacks and curtails access to needed inputs, medicines, technologies, and materials to rebuild. And in this increasingly digital age, the US blockade restricts people's ability to access digital platforms and resources, which have become even more crucial tools for international cooperation, communication, and knowledge exchange, as well as for family relations during the pandemic.

Today, the US embargo hinders Cuba's efforts to stop the spread of the pandemic. Over the last year, Oxfam has worked with its partners in Cuba to help supply needed materials, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 test kits, and to build public awareness about COVID-19 and its prevention, with a focus on the differentiated needs of women and vulnerable communities. In our global response to the pandemic, Oxfam is calling for a people's vaccine that is free and accessible as soon as possible to everyone, everywhere. Cuba has developed five vaccine candidates, which are in late-stage trials as of this writing. These vaccines, in addition to protecting its own population, could soon help many other countries, save lives, and help stem the pandemic's spread. Yet the island's access to equipment and materials to speed up mass vaccination is obstructed by the US embargo.



ABBY MAXMAN

Executive Director of Oxfam America

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abby Maxman'.



LAUREN RAVON

Executive Director of Oxfam Canada

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauren Ravon'.

Oxfam joins many other voices around the world speaking out against the outdated and unjust blockade that the US continues to maintain against Cuba. Now, in the context of a global pandemic that has unleashed unprecedented health and economic crises across the world, we believe urgent action is needed to normalize US-Cuba relations and put an end to the US embargo.

This paper seeks to contribute toward that end. We set out to report on what Oxfam has seen in our work on the ground in Cuba—the real human impact of the US blockade. Our focus is on recent years because of the harsh measures enacted by the Trump administration—which are still in effect—following initial positive steps taken by the Obama administration, steps that were welcomed by large majorities in the US and across the island. Based on Oxfam’s experiences, our reflections on the daily realities of women and men in Cuba aim to move US leaders to change course on US policy to effectively normalize relations with Cuba and put a definitive end to the embargo.

Crises beget opportunities. We believe there is an historic opportunity for the US, led by the Biden administration, to set a new US policy of respectful and constructive engagement with Cuba. Oxfam calls for an end to the US embargo to rectify the injustices enacted against Cuban women and men who strive for their right to live without a blockade.

Oxfam is calling for a people’s vaccine that is free and accessible as soon as possible to everyone, everywhere. Cuba has developed five vaccine candidates, which are in late-stage trials as of this writing. These vaccines, in addition to protecting its own population, could soon help many other countries, save lives, and help stem the pandemic’s spread. Yet the island’s access to equipment and materials to speed up mass vaccination is obstructed by the US embargo.

RETURN TO A PATH OF DIALOGUE

The comprehensive US sanctions on travel and trade with Cuba were first imposed as part of a Cold War foreign policy that viewed Cuba through a narrow ideological lens. Today, the world has changed, and progressive thinkers on international relations reject such a polarized approach to foreign policy. Nevertheless, the debate in Washington about Cuba continues to focus on geopolitical issues and simplistic understandings of Cuban reality.

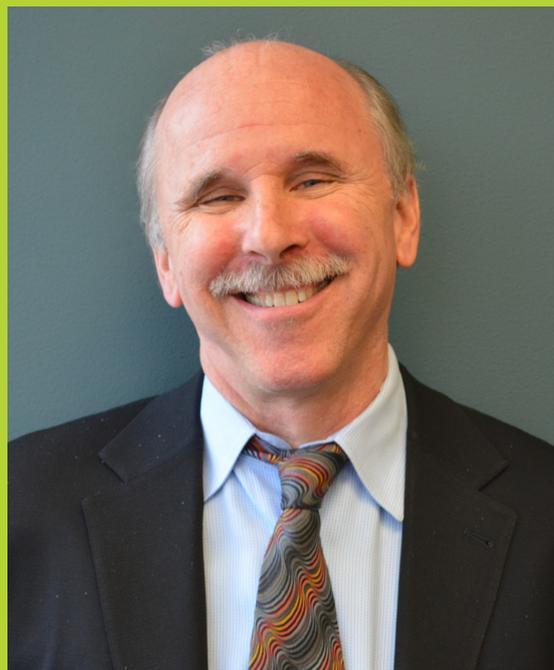
This Oxfam report is particularly valuable in that it moves the debate away from abstract discussions about Cuba and geopolitics, or Cuba as a political symbol, toward concrete understandings of Cuban realities and the daily lives of the Cuban people, contextualizing the ways in which the embargo has affected them by imposing suffering and limiting opportunities.

This discussion is especially important right now, when the harsher sanctions of the Trump administration and the impact of the COVID pandemic combined have battered the Cuban economy, contributing to shortages in daily life and difficult economic circumstances.

As the Biden administration and the US Congress, as well as others in the international community, consider a new approach to Cuba, they would do well to take to heart the message of this report, and its reminder that the US embargo continues to be a counterproductive policy that is compounding human suffering for the Cuban people, with a disproportionate impact on Cuban women.

Reversing the Trump executive orders, returning to a path of engagement, and normalizing relations will alleviate the suffering of the Cuban people and will be a more productive way for the US to relate to Cuba, find our commonalities, and discuss our differences.

WOLA has long advocated for normalization of US-Cuban relations and lifting the embargo. We have partnered with Oxfam in the past and are pleased to do so in support of this report.



GEOFF THALE

President, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoff Thale".

WHO DOES THE US ×BLOCKADE× AGAINST CUBA AFFECT?



CUBANS LIVING
ON THE ISLAND

11,209,628



5,633,640

WOMEN



5,575,988

MEN

**38% OF THE POPULATION OVER AGE 15
HAS FAMILY LIVING OUTSIDE OF CUBA. THESE US
SANCTIONS ALSO AFFECT FAMILY TIES WITH THE CUBAN
COMMUNITY LIVING ABROAD.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

US-Cuba relations have been constrained since 1959 by a series of restrictions unilaterally imposed by successive US government administrations. The “embargo,” as the United States calls it, or the “blockade,” as it is known in Cuba, imposes strict limits on the Caribbean nation, with extraterritorial reach that hamstring its relationships with third-party countries and detracts from the wellbeing of Cuban women and men. With over 25 years of work in the country, Oxfam aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the real damage that these sanctions cause, especially for people in the most vulnerable situations.

The main focus of this study is to examine the human dimension of the blockade. The text references historical data, current policies, and testimonies—especially from women—to describe **what the blockade means on a daily basis for those living in Cuba**. The evidence shared in this report and Oxfam’s experience in the country working with communities, cooperatives, local actors, partner organizations, and allies confirms that the US blockade deepens the economic crisis and hampers access to inputs, medical technologies, medical equipment, and other essential basic items.

A more just society is unattainable without full, unencumbered self-determination for women and girls. It is essential to recognize what policies and practices restrict their rights. The blockade reinforces the patriarchal system and runs roughshod over women’s different needs, potential, opportunities, and autonomy.

These US policies produce real damage and violate the rights of Cuban citizens and obstruct local economic, social, and environmental development. They hinder access to medicine for specific treatments, as well as to inputs for production of COVID-19 diagnostic tests and to equipment and materials to produce and apply Cuban vaccines.

The “embargo,” as the United States calls it, or the “blockade,” as it is known in Cuba, imposes strict limits on the Caribbean nation, with extraterritorial reach that hamstring its relationships with third-party countries and detracts from the wellbeing of Cuban women and men.

Oxfam opposes the US blockade against Cuba, a policy that runs contrary to the most urgent need today: saving human lives and protecting citizens' rights. It is time to globalize cooperation between countries and focus on collaborative solutions to the current health crisis, back emerging private initiatives in Cuba, and support institutions providing social services to families, including those that prevent and respond to multiple forms of gender-based violence and that help meet caregiving needs.

A commitment to greater empowerment of Cuban women is central to Oxfam's work, so they may develop their capabilities and exercise leadership to pursue their goals and fully exercise their rights free from the obstacles exacerbated by the blockade. Advancing women's rights is particularly relevant at this singular moment when a woman is Vice President of the United States for the first time in history.

The findings of this report support Oxfam's call for normalization of relations between the US and Cuba. Doing so would benefit the 11 million people living on the island and their relatives living abroad, as well as people in the US.

Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas



Without the blockade, the quality and yield of the seedlings would be even better and would support family income, the national economy, food security, nutrition education, and sustainable environmental management.

Dayanis Alonso
(31 years old)

Proyecto AP00COP



SUMMARY

TO PROMOTE A NEW “THAW” BETWEEN THE US AND CUBA:

OXFAM CALLS ON THE US GOVERNMENT

To take action to normalize relations with Cuba and to immediately suspend those measures of the blockade that impede the timely acquisition of materials and inputs needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba—including for domestic production of vaccines and medical treatments.

In particular, we urge the Biden administration to:

- ➔ Return to the path laid out by the Presidential Policy Directive of October 2016 for “United States–Cuba Normalization” as a starting point to rebuild the relationship, and follow through on statements made in this regard during the presidential campaign;
- ➔ Remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and suspend the application of Title III of the Helms–Burton Act;
- ➔ Repeal the National Security Presidential Memorandum on strengthening the policy of the US toward Cuba, issued in 2017;
- ➔ Remove the restrictions on remittances and travel imposed by the Trump administration in order to help Cuban families, the emerging non-state sector, and the national economy; and
- ➔ Reestablish diplomatic services, enabling staffing levels needed in both embassies to facilitate consular services and a bilateral dialogue on topics of mutual interest.

Furthermore, Oxfam urges members of the US Congress to end the US embargo and related constraints on economic, social, and political relations with Cuba.

OXFAM ENCOURAGES THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT

To continue implementing the transformations enshrined in the new Constitution, approved in 2019, in order to guarantee human rights, social justice, and the enjoyment of freedom, solidarity, wellbeing, and individual and collective prosperity as described therein.

The economic and monetary transformations underway in Cuba should consider the diversity of productive forces and address economic inequalities, as well as others that may emerge as a consequence of these changes. Oxfam underscores the need to implement, urgently and in an articulated manner, strategies and policies that ensure independence in the importation of goods and inputs by fostering local production and supporting municipal self-sufficiency and decentralization, agroecology practices and local consumption, as well as urban, suburban, and family farming.

The Cuban authorities should continue promoting and reorienting local potential toward new and more dynamic economic activities, such as non-agricultural cooperatives and SMEs (small and medium enterprises). This requires expanding and enhancing the legal framework for the private sector and cooperatives, while designing programs and incentives that recognize and reduce existing and potential inequalities, especially those that affect women in their multiple intersectionality.

Within the framework of the National Program for the Advancement of Women (March 2021), Oxfam advocates for greater empowerment for rural women and encourages the Cuban government to prioritize strengthening and expanding comprehensive care and social protection systems for all, promote shared responsibility, and highlight the need to reduce and redistribute caregiving work.

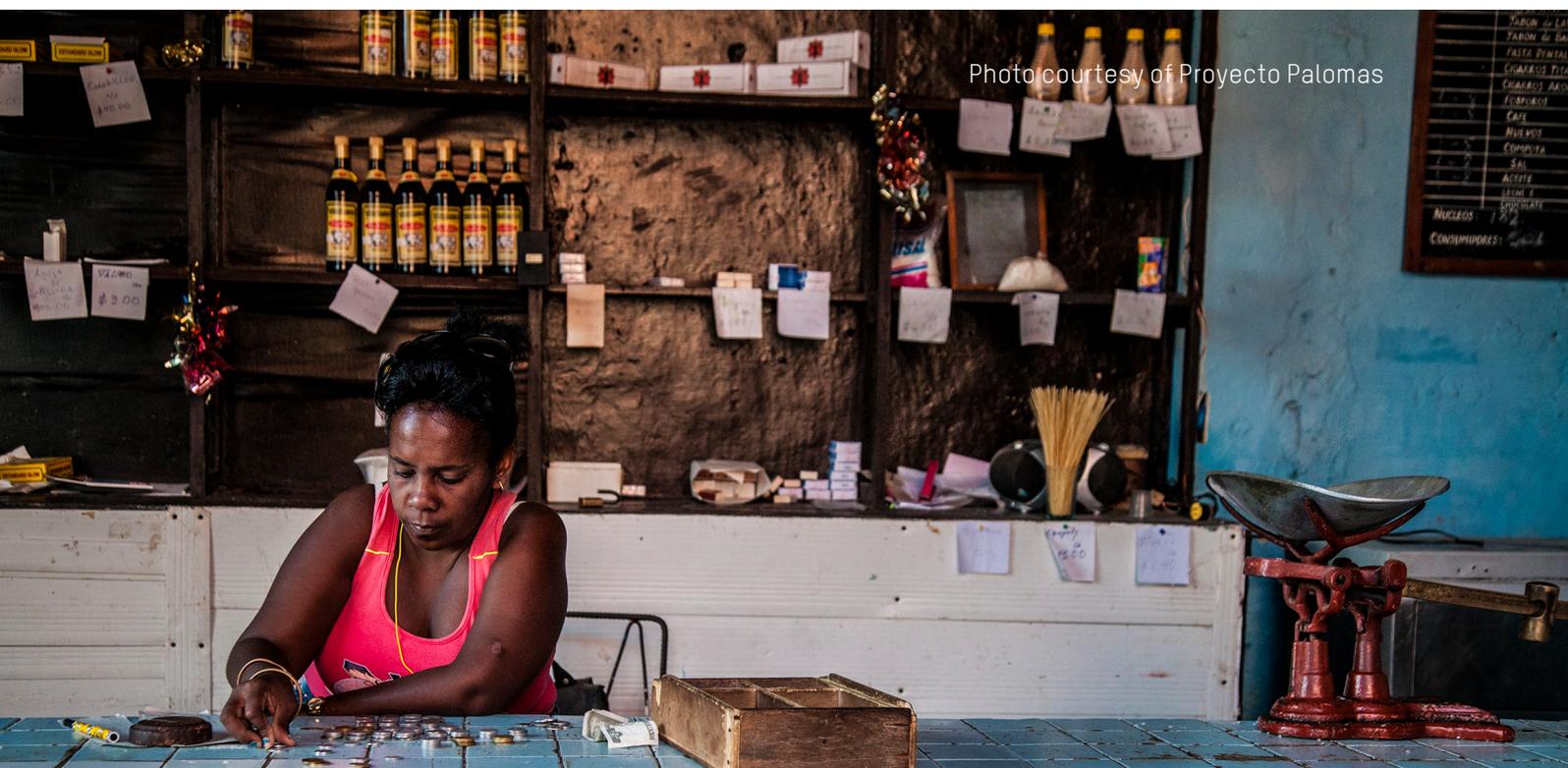


Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas



Photo: Carla Valdés

WITH REGARD TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, OXFAM CALLS UPON UN MEMBER STATES AND INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES

To join together in a more proactive policy against the blockade. We encourage South-South cooperation and spaces for dialogue and understanding, especially in the context of multilateral organizations and integration mechanisms in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Oxfam urges the European Union (EU) to reinforce its dialogue with the new US administration to lift the blockade against Cuba as part of the EU's new program cycle and renewed emphasis on the importance of its beyond-the-border objectives involving foreign policy, climate change, digital inclusion, and social and economic sustainability. The upcoming resolution in the United Nations General Assembly on the need to end the US embargo against Cuba is an opportunity to create spaces for dialogue between the parties, which the EU should facilitate, along with other governments.

Furthermore, it is important to continue informing analysis and discussion in the public arena and at international fora on the damage the blockade has caused for people on the island, including the effects on international organizations that provide aid to Cuba.

OXFAM ENCOURAGES INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, NETWORKS, AND ACTORS

To speak out for ending the blockade. We also encourage Cuban and US organizations to work towards a joint agenda that fosters “people-to-people” engagement and exchange around common challenges, such as the current health crisis and the identification of effective treatments for COVID-19 and other advancements in medicine, climate change adaptation, renewed cultural and academic cooperation, and new business strategies.

Oxfam calls on US civil society groups to advocate firmly and persistently to lift the blockade and expand exchanges with Cuba through collaboration and travel, recognizing common ground and areas for learning. We encourage Cuban civil society to undertake joint initiatives to document the impact of the blockade on the sectors it targets and affects, especially the communities in Cuba facing the greatest social vulnerability.

It is essential to broadly disseminate this evidence within US society and take action in Cuba to address inequalities and promote the realization of all human rights, with an emphasis on the rights of women.

Ending the blockade, an unjust policy that has spanned nearly six decades, will further a constructive dialogue that engages diverse voices, fosters transformations on the island, and contributes to resilient, rights-based development with social justice.

CUBA HAS A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL COOPERATION AND HAS ITS OWN VACCINES FOR COVID-19. ENCOURAGING RATHER THAN RESTRICTING CUBA’S CAPACITY TO CONTRIBUTE ITS EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND SPECIALIZED STAFF TO THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO THE HEALTH CRISIS IS A MORAL DUTY FOR HUMANITY AND PART OF THE COMMITMENT TO A MORE EQUAL WORLD, WITH GREATER OPPORTUNITIES AND FULL RIGHTS FOR ALL.



We suffer because of medicine shortages. The pharmacies are empty because it's hard for our country to get the raw materials. For example, the materials used to make sanitary napkins aren't good quality, and that causes problems for women during their menstrual cycles.

Indira Pino
(26 years old)

Photo: Claudio Peláez

60 YEARS OF US SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA

**IMPOSSIBLE TO
QUANTIFY**

**ONGOING STRESS +
UNMET NEEDS + LIMITED
FAMILY CONTACT + MATERIAL
SHORTAGES + OBSTACLES
TO ACADEMIC, SCIENTIFIC,
AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE
+ OBSTACLES TO THE FULL
ENJOYMENT OF RIGHTS
+ LIMITING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR AUTONOMY AND OPTIMAL
DEVELOPMENT + REINFORCING
PREEXISTING INEQUALITIES
+ IMPEDING LIFE GOALS
AND PLANS + TIME INVESTED
IN FINDING SOLUTIONS
TO PROBLEMS CAUSED BY
THE BLOCKADE = LOWER
QUALITY OF LIFE**

INTRODUCTION

US-Cuba relations have been constrained since 1959 by a series of restrictions unilaterally imposed by successive US administrations. These measures began essentially as economic and trade limitations, but have since diversified to constitute a series of regulations enshrined in laws, decrees, and administrative norms that affect nearly all sectors of Cuban society.

The “embargo,” as the US calls it, or the “blockade,” as it is known in Cuba, imposes strict limits on the Caribbean nation, with extraterritorial reach that hamstring its relationships with third-party countries and detracts from the wellbeing of Cuban women and men. The push to lift the blockade is fundamentally a demand to respect the human right to a full and dignified life.

Nonetheless, debate around the US blockade against Cuba tends to focus on international political considerations, geopolitical factors, and entrenched agendas set almost six decades ago. Commonly, the debate around Cuba and its future within US power circles is circumscribed by the political benefits regime change on the island could represent for certain powerful interest groups. The scope and severity of the blockade’s impact on the daily lives of women and men, their families, and their communities are seldom discussed.

The rights of Cuba’s most vulnerable—women, children, older adults, diverse populations, and people with disabilities—have suffered the brunt of the harm over the last 60 years. This report presents evidence of the losses that Cuban society and its people have suffered at the hands of this policy that has been sustained by successive US administrations. These losses to and impacts on the island’s population have intensified in recent years with measures imposed by the Trump administration, and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting the flow of humanitarian aid as well as access to supplies for large-scale vaccine production.¹

The rights of Cuba’s most vulnerable—women, children, older adults, diverse populations, and people with disabilities—have suffered the brunt of the harm over the last 60 years.

The main focus of this study, however, is to examine the human dimension of the blockade. The study references historical data, current policies, and testimonies—especially from women—to describe what the blockade means on a daily basis for those living in Cuba. With this study, Oxfam aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the real damage that these sanctions cause, especially for people in the most vulnerable situations.

The voices and faces of private sector entrepreneurs, farmers, activists and community leaders, academics, journalists, and biotechnology researchers, among others, reveal the direct consequences, uncertainty, and frustration elicited by the blockade. It also presents their hopes for real change that would enable them to maximize their individual and family development, and fully enjoy their rights.

Emphasizing the blockade's impact on women's rights and their realities is rooted in the certainty that a more just society is unattainable without full, unencumbered self-determination for women and girls. To achieve this goal, it is essential to recognize what policies and practices restrict their rights. The blockade reinforces the patriarchal system and runs roughshod over women's different needs, potential, opportunities, and autonomy.

The year 2021 poses important challenges as the world deals with the pandemic and the accompanying economic crisis. This context is unique and challenging for Cuba and its people. The nation's historic leadership has changed, and a new Constitution (approved in 2019) has come into force. The new Constitution recognizes, for the first time since 1976, the right to private property and the role of the market in the economy. Additionally, this Constitution expands the range of human rights and protection guarantees for the island's inhabitants. Furthermore, Cuba is now accelerating internal changes, including the recent economic and social strategy to stimulate the domestic economy and weather the global crisis. This process entails reforms to monetary and exchange policy, the gradual elimination of subsidies and gratuities, and a transformation of the income structure.

The voices and faces of private sector entrepreneurs, farmers, activists and community leaders, academics, journalists, and biotechnology researchers, among others, reveal the direct consequences, uncertainty, and frustration elicited by the blockade.

Given this complex context, coupled with results from the recent US elections, the Cuban government is reexamining the possibility for constructive and respectful relations with its northern neighbor, expressing its political will for action to achieve greater wellbeing for the Cuban people. During his presidential campaign, Joe Biden rejected the damaging policies of the Trump presidency and promised his administration would improve relations with the Caribbean island.

Now is the time for US foreign policy to stop infringing on people's rights. The Biden administration has the opportunity to reestablish bilateral relations with Cuba and repeal the measures imposed by its predecessors, expand and diversify the scope of a new *détente* between the countries, and work with Congress to finally and definitively lift the blockade.

It's hard to maintain a balanced diet in these times. At a certain age, you need to have a balanced diet but you aren't up to going out to look for what you need with all of the shortages.

Isabel Moreno
(87 years old)

Photo: Claudio Peláez





THE EMBARGO AGAINST
CUBA IS ONE OF THE MOST
EXPANSIVE SERIES OF
SANCTIONS IMPOSED BY
THE UNITED STATES
AGAINST ANY COUNTRY
IN THE WORLD,
INCLUDING COUNTRIES
THAT THE US GOVERNMENT
HAS DESIGNATED
AS SPONSORS OF
TERRORISM.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLOCKADE

The timeline below shows the cumulative burden of regulations that have evolved since the blockade's initial implementation in 1962, and the consequential erosion of the rights of people living on the island:

July 1960

The Eisenhower administration canceled the Cuban sugar quota. This measure slashed the original quota by 700,000 tons, equal to 95 percent of total sugar exports.

October 1960

The US government blocked most exports to Cuba using executive powers granted by the Trading with the Enemy Act.

January 1961

During President Eisenhower's final week in office the State Department issued an order prohibiting US citizens from traveling to Cuba without special permission.

February 3 1962

The blockade against Cuba was formalized through Presidential Proclamation No. 3447, signed by President John F. Kennedy.

1977

President Jimmy Carter relaxed and eventually eliminated the travel restrictions. Carter also allowed the sale of products to Cuba through US subsidiaries in third-party countries.

1982

The Reagan administration reversed the measures adopted by President Carter. That same year, the US included Cuba on its list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, arguing that the island provided military support to national liberation movements in Latin America.³

The 1990s

As Cuba weathered an economic crisis due to the collapse of its financial relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, other legislative measures were passed to increase pressure on the island.⁴ The Torricelli Act (formally entitled the Cuban Democracy Act) and the Helms-Burton Act (formally entitled the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity LIBERTAD Act) were passed by the US Congress in 1992 and 1996, respectively. These laws include provisions to restrict trade and investment between Cuba and third-party countries. While the Clinton administration loosened some of the travel restrictions, the George W. Bush administration reinstated them, including strict limits on family travel and remittances.

US-CUBA RELATIONS (2009-2021)

The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by stricter economic sanctions imposed by Washington, in the context of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of trade mechanisms between Cuba and the Eastern Bloc countries, such as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).⁵ Intensified sanctions, combined with the profound economic crisis on the island after the abrupt loss of the majority of its trading partners, led to a significant deterioration in living conditions for the Cuban population.

Under President Barack Obama, US foreign policy began to move toward normalizing relations with its Caribbean neighbor and away from the opinions of certain interest groups concentrated mainly in South Florida. This move toward normalization provided a propitious context for change. Measures announced on April 13, 2009 lifted restrictions on family travel and remittances sent by Cubans residing in the US to their country of origin.⁶ Moreover, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and reopening of embassies in both capitals, announced on December 17, 2014, was an historic milestone with significant political impact from both practical and symbolic standpoints. Subsequently, the US government promoted 23 cooperation agreements with Cuba, mostly geared toward relaxing specific components of the blockade.⁷ All of this would change with President Donald Trump's arrival in the White House.

Moreover, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and reopening of embassies in both capitals, announced on December 17, 2014, was an historic milestone.

Photo: Cubadebate



**Dra. María
Guadalupe Guzmán
(68 years old)**

Virologist and Director,
Reference Center for Research
and Diagnosis, IPK



“[During the second Obama administration] there was an opening for scientific relations and exchanges among scientists, participation in scientific events and identification of collaborative research projects between the two countries, even the possibility of tripartite studies with other nations. All of that changed with Trump. Personally, I’ve had to decline invitations to participate in scientific meetings and events due to visa restrictions. Additionally, getting a license for US scientists to travel to Cuba is difficult, which limits the possibilities for fruitful bilateral collaboration. Without the blockade we would have been able to complete four arbovirus research projects that have been approved by the National Institutes of Health but were suspended due to these measures by the Trump government. These projects are funded, and the US partners are interested in proceeding.”



MAIN ACTIONS TAKEN

THE OBAMA AND TRUMP ADMINISTRATIONS



BARACK OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

- > Cuba is removed from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.
- > President Barack Obama visits Havana.
- > The “wet foot/dry foot” immigration policy ends.⁸
- > The US abstains for the first time from voting on the United Nations (UN) resolution against the blockade (no country votes against the resolution).⁹
- > 12 categories of travel are resumed to allow US citizens to visit Cuba without requiring specific advance permission.¹⁰
- > Cruise ships registered under the US flag are authorized to dock in Cuban ports.



DONALD TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

- > Travel, remittances, and exchanges between the two countries are restricted.
- > The license for “educational activities” is modified, limiting the definition of student and faculty travel, and eliminating “people-to-people” travel for educational (but not academic) purposes.
- > The State Department eliminates the possibility for Cuban citizens residing on the island to receive five-year B2 visas to visit the US.
- > Alleged sonic incidents provoke the withdrawal of US diplomatic personnel from the embassy in Havana and the corresponding closure of the consular section.

- > US airlines are authorized to make direct flights to Cuba.
- > US telecommunications companies are authorized to export to Cuba.
- > Exports of goods and services related to energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmental protection are authorized.
- > US financial institutions are allowed to provide direct financing for authorized exports to Cuba. US banks can open corresponding accounts with Cuban institutions to facilitate authorized transactions.
- > US financial institutions are permitted to use credit and debit cards in Cuba.
- > US companies in certain sectors are authorized to domicile in Cuba and employ local staff.
- > US medical companies are allowed to undertake joint projects with Cuban counterparts.
- > US companies are authorized to import, trade, or sell Cuban medicines approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- > US academic institutions are authorized to sign cooperation agreements in areas of mutual interest, principally through Memorandums of Understanding, and participate in bilateral dialogues with Cuban institutions.

- > As a consequence of this closure, US visas are no longer issued on the island. Cuban residents must travel to third countries to obtain a visa.
- > US passenger ships, recreational vessels, private aircraft, and cruise lines are prohibited from traveling to Cuba.
- > In April 2019, the agreement signed four months earlier between Major League Baseball and the Cuban Baseball Federation is canceled. This agreement would have allowed players from the island to play in the major leagues.
- > Title III of the Helms-Burton Act is activated for the first time.¹¹
- > The List of Restricted Entities¹² is created, and a campaign is launched against Cuban international medical cooperation.
- > Thirty-five Venezuelan cargo ships are sanctioned for transporting oil to Cuba.¹³
- > Cuba is once again placed on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

As a consequence of the new context created during the Obama administration, commercial flights by US airlines to Havana and other destinations in Cuba resumed for the first time in over a half-century. More US visitors traveled to Cuba as a result—638,365 in 2018. This uptick had a direct impact on revenue for Cuban businesses linked to tourism.¹⁴

Furthermore, the ceiling on quarterly remittances that US residents can send to individuals and entities on the island was raised. The Obama administration also issued general licenses for maritime transportation between the countries involving cargo, passenger, and recreational vessels, including cruise ships, which is a strategic market for the island's tourism sector. Penalties for banks and international financial institutions, as well as companies and individuals, doing business with Cuba were not lifted. But international loans to the island increased, in large part due to the successful renegotiation of overdue official debt. Cuba also saw an increase in foreign investment, which contributed to a 4.4 percent increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015.¹⁵

IN AN UNPRECEDENTED STATEMENT THAT WAS PART OF HIS ANNUAL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS JUST PRIOR TO HIS VISIT TO HAVANA ON MARCH 20, 2016, OBAMA CALLED THE BLOCKADE A “FAILED POLICY” AND ASKED CONGRESS TO LIFT THE EMBARGO.¹⁶

Nonetheless, as soon as President Trump arrived at the White House, he pledged to reverse the steps taken by the previous administration and imposed over 240 sanctions to reinforce the blockade and turn back the rapprochement from previous years. His 2017 memorandum returned to the confrontational policy with his country's Caribbean neighbor.¹⁷ This document prohibited individuals and companies under US jurisdiction (including licensed travelers visiting Cuba) from performing business and financial transactions with a list of Cuban entities—some administered by foreign firms. The initial list included 179 entities; others were added on September 29, 2020, bringing the total to 227 (including banks, hotels, and government agencies).

One of the most recent inclusions on this restricted list was the Cuban company processing remittances to the island—the main agent for Western Union. In November 2020, the company had to suspend delivery of remittances, closing 407 payment posts across the country. This restriction was extremely harmful to Cuban residents and their families in the US and around the world, as it deprived many Cuban households of essential income during a time of health crisis and economic tensions exacerbated by the pandemic.¹⁸ The suspension of cash transfers through Western Union coincided with the Trump administration's elimination of unlimited remittances.¹⁹

The Trump administration unleashed a cascade of travel prohibitions long before COVID-19 limitations paralyzed transit across the Florida Straits.²⁰ These limitations included the prohibition of “people-to-people” travel, a sub-category of educational activities not of an academic nature.

FROM 2017 TO 2019 THE TOURISM-BASED PRIVATE SECTOR



LOST OVER US \$ 300 MILLION



Source: *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019*, (ONEI), 2020.

Further restrictions were imposed on transportation, including prohibitions against passenger boats, recreational vessels, and cruise ships, banning them from docking or making temporary stopovers in Cuba. In 2019, 4,275,558 international travelers visited Cuba (498,538 from the US), representing a 10.2 percent drop from the previous year.²¹ This drop had a profound effect on the private sector linked to tourism.

Additionally, by activating Title III of the Helms-Burton Act in May 2020, after a 22-year moratorium, the Trump administration fortified the blockade and heightened uncertainty for foreign businesses with regard to their investments in Cuba.²²

Leaders again raised their voices in the United Nations in favor of lifting the US blockade, the consequences of which complicate humanitarian aid for the Cuban people and hinder the ability of the country's healthcare system to fight the pandemic.²³

A report by UN Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan to the UN General Assembly on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights called for lifting or suspending unilateral sanctions against all countries where these sanctions are applied; the report specifically referred to the US blockade against Cuba.²⁴

The Special Rapporteur mentioned the impossibility of using Zoom services on the island to hold virtual meetings and seminars that could train medical staff and implement telemedicine services. The UN expert also noted that the US company hired by Chinese businessman Jack Ma to transport COVID-19 medical materials to Cuba refused to do so, citing blockade regulations.

IN LATE MARCH 2020, JACK MA, THE FOUNDER OF ALIBABA, ANNOUNCED A SHIPMENT TO 24 COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN TO FIGHT COVID-19:



2 MILLION
MASKS



400,000
RAPID
DIAGNOSTIC
KITS



104
VENTILATORS

CUBA WAS SLATED TO RECEIVE



100,000
MASKS



10,000
DIAGNOSTIC
KITS

WITH THE REFUSAL OF THE US VESSEL TO TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS TO CUBA, ALIBABA REALLOCATED THIS SHIPMENT TO OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION.

**THIS IS AN
EXAMPLE OF
THE OBSTACLES
CREATED BY THE
BLOCKADE,
EVEN WITHIN
SPECIFIC
HUMANITARIAN
AID OR ACTIONS**

CUBA LOST A DONATION
VALUED AT

US\$1,698,69



Cuban researcher Lisset Robaina calculated that Cuba lost a donation valued at US\$1,698,693, based on the amount of aid that reached a country (Dominican Republic) with similar characteristics: 15,000 diagnostic kits, 4 ventilators, and 50,000 masks.

Douhan also reported that the Swiss companies IMT Medical and Acutronic Medical Systems were prevented from sending medical equipment to Cuba after they had been acquired by the US company Vyair Medical Inc. The report also addressed the extraterritorial nature of the blockade: Swiss banking entities were prevented from making monetary transfers to Cuba, rendering it impossible for MediCuba-Suiza and the Suiza-Cuba Association to collaborate with Cuban medical entities. In addition, the UN Special Rapporteur's report raised concerns about US government calls for other countries to decline humanitarian assistance from Cuba.²⁵ Since the onset of the global pandemic, the US has focused on vilifying Cuba's Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent, a specially-trained and equipped team responding to global disasters and epidemics.

In spite of this, the Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent gained a lot more visibility and recognition in 2020. Authorities from several countries requested Cuban medical assistance to fight the pandemic, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in European countries such as Italy, Andorra, and in the French territory of Martinique.

AS OF MARCH 2021, 56 BRIGADES FROM THE HENRY REEVE EMERGENCY MEDICAL CONTINGENT, 55.4 PERCENT OF WHOM ARE WOMEN, HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO FIGHTING THE PANDEMIC IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES.²⁶ ACCORDING TO REPORTS FROM THE CUBAN MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, A TOTAL OF 24 BRIGADES CONTINUE TO OPERATE IN COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD.²⁷

Photo: Jorge Luis Baños / IPS





WE ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE RISKS FOR THE RIGHT TO LIFE, HEALTH, AND THE OTHER CRITICAL RIGHTS OF THE MOST VULNERABLE SECTIONS OF THE CUBAN POPULATION, INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OLDER PERSONS, WHO ARE AT MUCH HIGHER RISK OF/WHEN CONTRACTING THE VIRUS OR OF NEGATIVE EFFECTS FROM THE VIRUS.

Joint statement by seven UN experts: Ms. Alena Douhan, Mr. Saad Alfarargi, Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, Ms. Agnes Callamard, Mr. Livingstone Sewanyana, Mr. Obiora Okafor, and Mr. Nils Melzer.²⁸

DOMESTIC CHANGES AND RELEVANT EVENTS IN CUBA (2008–2021)

During President Obama’s two terms, the Cuban government began to adopt a series of measures to loosen restrictions on the non-state sector, incorporate Cuba into various regional cooperation mechanisms, and offer new opportunities for foreign investment. It is important to highlight that this opening and the progress made toward updating Cuba’s economic model was stimulated by a context of reduced hostility from Washington and the gradual return to normalized bilateral relations.

July 2008: Law Decree 259 is enacted, granting usufruct rights of idle state lands to individuals and boosting cooperativism in the private agricultural sector.

August 2010: Then-President Raúl Castro announces the decision to expand self-employment regulations, which broadens opportunities for private sector development in Cuba.

April 2011: The VI Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, held in Havana, approves the Social and Economic Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution. The document details programmed, nationwide reforms and recognizes the need to develop forms of non-state property ownership.

November 2011: Private home sales to individuals is authorized for the first time. This decision laid the foundation for the emergence of a real-estate market and private businesses in a number of sectors, including hospitality, gastronomy, and rental of private vehicles for tourism.

December 2012: The government authorizes the creation of non-agricultural cooperatives, a new form of non-state production that allows individuals to offer services in transportation, gastronomy, fishing, personal and household services, raw material recovery, production of materials, and construction.

January 2013: New migration legislation comes into effect, eliminating a group of procedures and permits that Cubans had to obtain in order to travel abroad.

December 2014: Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama announce the decision to reestablish diplomatic relations between Cuba and the US and begin negotiations to normalize relations between the two countries. In March 2016, President Obama visits Cuba and declares his government's support for private entrepreneurs. President Obama also speaks with representatives from that sector.

January 2015: The state telecommunications company ETECSA announces the creation of Wi-Fi zones around the country with the goal of expanding internet access for the Cuban population.

December 2016: For the first time in its history, Cuba hits a record of four million foreign tourists. This includes 284,552 tourists from the US, three times the number of US visitors to the island in 2014 when relations began to warm between the two governments.

April 2018: Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez takes office as President of the Councils of State and of Ministers, replacing Raúl Castro.

December 2018: Cuban authorities announce the suspension of certain controversial and restrictive regulations on private sector work. Some of the most important changes include authorization for private entities to engage in multiple activities, elimination of capacity limits for food establishments, and implementation of tax incentives.

February 2019: The new Constitution of the Republic of Cuba is approved by referendum. It recognizes private property as an actor in the national economy, expands the framework of citizen rights, and prioritizes gender equality, among other changes.

July 2020: The Council of Ministers approves the Economic and Social Strategy to stimulate the economy and tackle the global crisis caused by COVID-19. This strategy document serves as a roadmap for accelerating economic changes such as monetary unification and advancement of the private and cooperative sectors to spur production.

July 2020: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs publishes its annual report on the blockade's impact on Cuban society, in which it denounces the strengthening of the blockade during the pandemic. The report refers in particular to the extraterritorial scope of the blockade, which prevents the Cuban government from procuring mechanical ventilators, facemasks, diagnostic kits, and protective goggles, suits, and gloves, as well as reagents and other inputs needed for COVID-19 treatment and control.

August 2020: Clinical trials begin for Soberana 01, the first COVID-19 vaccine candidate produced in Cuba, Latin America, or the Caribbean. According to Cuban scientific institutes, the island's entire population is projected to be vaccinated with the domestic vaccines over the course of 2021.²⁹

October 2020: The Council of Ministers approves the proposed National Program for the Advancement of Women (PAM by its Spanish acronym). The document, submitted by the Federation of Cuban Women, is understood as the State's official agenda to foster gender equality in Cuba and will institutionalize policies to that end.³⁰

December 2020: During Ordinary Session VI of Cuba's parliament, the National Assembly of People's Power, the director of the Cuban company BioCubaFarma denounces the blockade for preventing the projected scale-up of production of Cuban COVID-19 vaccine candidates (Soberana 01, Soberana 02, Soberana Plus, Abdala, and Mambisa).³¹

December 2020: Cuba updates the Foreign Investment Law approved in June 2014 to include, for the first time, majority participation of foreign investors in certain mixed-capital companies created on the island, especially in the fields of tourism, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and wholesale commerce.³²

December 2020: The "Tarea Ordenamiento" (Reorganization Task) is announced to begin in 2021. This decision initiates the monetary reorganization process that includes a new exchange rate, the removal of Cuban convertible pesos (CUC) from circulation,³³ the elimination of excessive subsidies and undue gratuities, and modification of income distribution.

February 2021: An unprecedented expansion of private sector activity is authorized, allowing Cubans to pursue over 2,000 activities as independent workers, compared to a previous list of only 127 options.³⁴

March 2021: The Cuban State promotes foreign investment by the Cuban community living abroad.

SOME TRUMP ADMINISTRATION SANCTIONS

AGAINST UNITED STATE AND
THIRD-PARTY COMPANIES³⁵

 2017

JUNE 8: The Office of Foreign Assets Control at the Treasury Department (OFAC) sanctions the American Honda Finance Corporation with a penalty of US\$87,255 for approving 13 car rental agreements between the Cuban embassy in Canada and a Honda dealership in Ottawa.

JUNE 26: OFAC imposes a US\$148,698 fine against the US company American International Group for providing insurance coverage for several merchandise shipments to or from Cuba.

SEPTEMBER 26: OFAC prohibits a donation to a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Cuba because the vessel transporting the cargo belonged to the US shipping company Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd.

NOVEMBER 17: OFAC imposes a US\$291,825 fine against the Belgian company BCC Corporate S.A. for issuing credit cards used to make purchases in Cuba.

 2018

OCTOBER 5: OFAC fines the bank JPMorgan Chase US\$5,263,171 for making unauthorized transactions and providing services to clients on the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list from 2008 to 2012.

NOVEMBER 19: The financial and banking corporation Société Générale S.A., headquartered in France, agrees to pay a total of US\$1,340,231,916.05 to OFAC for processing 796 transactions that involved Cuba.





2019

FEBRUARY 14: OFAC fines the German company AppliChem GmbH US\$5,512,564 for 304 apparent violations of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations.

APRIL 9: OFAC fines Standard Chartered Bank, a banking and financial institution headquartered in the United Kingdom, for apparent violations of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations.

APRIL 11: OFAC imposes sanctions against British companies Acteon Group Ltd. and its operating company, 2H Offshore Engineering, for US\$227,500 and US\$213,866, respectively.

APRIL 15: OFAC sanctions UniCredit Bank Austria and the Italian UniCredit Bank SpA.

JUNE 13: OFAC sanctions US companies Expedia Group Inc., Hotelbeds USA Inc., and Cubasphere Inc. for alleged violations of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations.

SEPTEMBER 9: OFAC updates the Cuban Assets Control Regulations, limiting family remittances to US\$1,000 per quarter, and suspends donation remittances (non-family) as well as transfers related to Cuba originating and sent from outside the US (known as “U-turn” transactions).

OCTOBER 1: OFAC fines General Electric US\$2,718,581 for 289 apparent violations of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations.

DECEMBER 9: OFAC announces a US\$170,535 settlement with the Allianz Global Risks Insurance Company, headquartered in Chicago, to avoid civil litigation. OFAC also announces a US\$66,212 settlement to avoid civil litigation with the company Chubb Limited, headquartered in Switzerland, for transactions and other operations related to travel insurance to Cuba.



2020

FEBRUARY 26: New regulations for the US company Western Union enter into force and eliminate the possibility of sending remittances to Cuba from third countries. Later in the year, Western Union closes operations in Cuba due to the inclusion of its Cuban counterpart on the list of prohibited entities.

JUNE 5: The Treasury Department declines to renew the license allowing Marriott International to operate a hotel in Cuba and prohibits the company from doing future business in the country.

NOVEMBER 18: The Department of Transportation denies a request from the charter companies Skyway Enterprises, Inc. and IBC to operate humanitarian cargo flights to Cuba.

DECEMBER 30: OFAC imposes sanctions against the US company BitGo.



**Marta Deus
(32 years old)**

Founder of Deus
Expertos Contables
and Mandao



“To limit remittances is to limit private sector growth; this money has served to finance businesses directly or from abroad. For those who work in the private sector and engage with tourism, these past months have not been the best. The number of US visitors to Cuba continues to decline, along with small entrepreneur revenue.”



CHAPTER 2

CONSEQUENCES OF THE MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ON CUBA

The Cuba policies enacted by the Trump administration, which sought to reverse steps taken by his predecessor, had a significant impact on revenue for the island, including from service exports, tourism, remittances, biotechnology, and agriculture.³⁶ The policies also had a direct impact on education, while the emerging private sector saw its scope and profits affected as well. Health service exports were hit particularly hard due to the US campaign against Cuban medical services, a stance adopted by certain governments in the region who terminated their contracts with Cuban specialists and undercut the revenue these contracts generated.

The blockade affects all Cubans. I have allergies and high blood pressure, and it's getting harder to get the medicine I need. The vendors often won't sell the raw materials because of the blockade.

**Mercedes García
(85 years old)**

Photo: Claudio Peláez



HEALTH SERVICE EXPORTS

Exporting health services is currently the leading source of revenue for Cuba, accounting for an estimated 54.5 percent of total service exports, which in turn represent 71 percent of the country's total exports.³⁷ The national healthcare system employs 7 percent of the Cuban workforce, making it one of the most important sources of employment on the island. In 2019, there were a total of 479,623 healthcare professionals, 71 percent of them women.³⁸ During the first year of response to the pandemic, there were 2,738 women healthcare professionals in the 56 brigades of the Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent sent to 40 countries.³⁹ Women also represent the majority of healthcare professionals in Cuba's medical missions to over 60 countries,⁴⁰ and they outnumber their male colleagues among the specialists who continue to serve the most severe cases of COVID-19 in Cuban hospitals.

These are the same women who lost part of their income when medical brigades were withdrawn from countries in the region after a sustained smear campaign by the Trump administration against Cuban medical cooperation. When they returned home, the women found themselves facing a second pandemic: shortages and long lines to buy food and cleaning products. The blockade impacts women inside and outside of hospitals. It affects women as they care for the sick and as they care for their children and older family members. This work, generally performed by women, has overloaded Cuban women as they bear the brunt of reproductive and care work needed to sustain daily life. The blockade limits women's ability to perform daily tasks and directly compromises their full enjoyment of their rights.

WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN THE HEALTH SECTOR



70%

SCHOOLS
OF MEDICINE



71%

NATIONAL
HEALTHCARE
SYSTEM



88%

NURSING

Sources: *Anuario Estadístico de Salud 2019*; (MINSAP), 2020, *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019* (ONEI), 2020.

Photo: courtesy of the interviewee



**Dra. Berta
Lidia Castro
(70 years old)**

President of the Cuban
Society of Pediatrics



“I have suffered a lot from the intensification of the blockade, the Helms-Burton Act, and the growing difficulty to procure health resources. As professionals, those of us who care for children with serious diseases, especially the youngest, face dire situations as we don't always have the resources we need to treat them most effectively, with less pain or a faster solution.

We rise to the challenge of finding solutions to mitigate pain, reducing the risk of complications or side-effects, and promoting an effective response to treatment with our knowledge, effort, and care. But all of this causes stress and possibly even physical and psychological harm to pediatric healthcare workers. The obstacles imposed by the blockade violate the Convention on the Rights of the Child and pose barriers to Cuba's progress towards meeting the Millennium Summit commitments. Now we must overcome these barriers to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, especially the goals on maternal and child health.”



TOURISM AND REMITTANCES

Economic sectors suffering from Trump administration measures include tourism and remittances. Tourism, the second-leading source of income for the Cuban economy, brought in US\$2.645 billion in revenue in 2019 from 4.2 million tourists.⁴¹ This amount represents a 9.3 percent drop from the previous year, due in large part to the tightening of the blockade.⁴² The restrictions imposed by the Trump administration in 2019 on individual travel and the mooring of US ships in Cuban ports cut the number of US tourists by 28 percent (139,827 fewer visitors) compared to the previous year.⁴³

This so-called smokeless industry contributes 10 percent to the country's GDP and generates a half-million jobs in the public and private sectors.⁴⁴ Official sources calculated revenue of US\$3 billion from this activity for the first time.

A significant portion of the private sector linked to tourism was also severely affected. In 2019, this sector earned US\$373 million, equivalent to 14 percent of total international tourism revenues in the country.⁴⁵ Given that women make up the majority of service staff in private accommodations, it is easy to see how women suffered most from the drop in tourism.

One private entrepreneur affected was Niurys Ysabel Higuera, a 44-year-old Havana resident and owner of the busy restaurant Atelier. Higuera reports that the damage is widespread. It is not limited to the state sector but affects the private sector as well: "These measures demolish the private sector." She explains that her restaurant "depends on tourism and foreigners who live and work in Cuba. In the United States there are wonderful people, beautiful people who I love...Many of them want to improve the relations with our country and don't support what their government is doing." At the same time, restrictions on flights to Cuba led to a dramatic reduction in Cuban-American visitors and limited families' rights to reunite.

Photo: Ibet García

Mareelén
Díaz Tenorio
(54 years old)

Psychologist



“The impact is enormous when the blockade obstructs or hinders family ties. Many families’ aspirations and needs for contact are curtailed, which is directly related to the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. This has serious implications for their emotional health and psychological balance. The pain and unfulfilled emotional needs accumulate and sever these essential human bonds.”



In terms of remittances, the closure of Western Union offices in Cuba in November 2020 represented a serious loss of income for Cuban families. Research groups from Columbia University estimated at the time that around 700,000 of the more than 2.3 million Cuban immigrants or their descendants in the US sent remittances to Cuba every year. Western Union transferred between US\$900 million and US\$1.5 billion to the island.⁴⁶ Even without consensus among national and foreign specialists on the amount, and the forms and channels through which remittances find their way to Cuba,⁴⁷ it is clear that the measures taken in 2020 led to a drop of between 30 and 40 percent in remittances sent through channels other than Western Union that year.⁴⁸ There was an estimated US\$470 million reduction in remittances to Cuba during the first five months of 2020 compared with the previous year, a 30.4 percent fall.⁴⁹

In September 2019, the Trump administration capped remittances at US\$1,000 per quarter per person, with the additional condition that the money had to be sent to a single close relative in Cuba. Considering that many Cuban immigrants support more than one family member, it is clear that this measure has affected not only individuals but also extended family units. This situation is complicated by the fact that many families on the island are large; households often include grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives under the same roof.

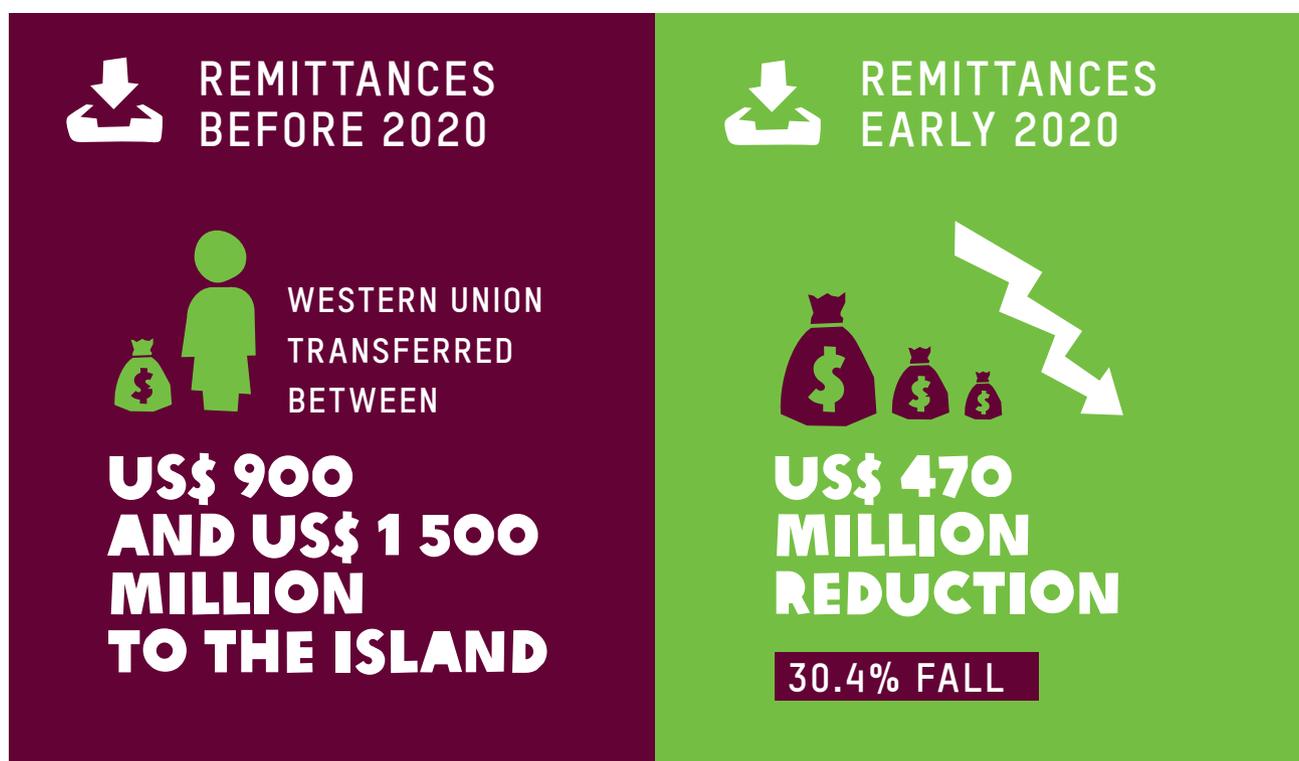


Photo: courtesy of the interviewee



Daisy Rojas
(66 years old)

Havana



“I went to the Western Union office every month, I stood in a long line and picked up the money. Now my other son who lives in Cuba has to help me, and I don’t want to be another burden for him, as he has a large family. It’s terrible to have to travel to Mexico or Colombia and stay there for days without any certainty of being given a visa. It’s an expense that my son can no longer pay.”



AS IS THE CASE IN OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, REMITTANCES TO CUBA CONTRIBUTE TO SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RECIPIENT FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT OVER 20 PERCENT OF THE CUBAN POPULATION IS AGED 60 OR OVER.

The restrictive measures imposed by the US government came on top of the financial problems that many Cubans living in the US were facing due to pandemic-related job losses or layoffs that reduced their earning capacity and savings. For Daisy Rojas, a 66-year-old Cuban living on the outskirts of Havana, this meant “huge chaos.” Daisy lost her job due to the pandemic lockdown, and her only source of income was money her eldest son sent from Miami.

The difficulties that Cuban families have faced are not only a result of money transfer restrictions; it is also difficult to maintain contact with relatives on the other side of the Florida Straits. Daisy regrets the closure of the US consulate in Havana. Before 2017, she traveled to Miami on several occasions to see her son and grandchildren. “My son has suffered greatly with this situation. I haven’t seen my grandchildren in a long time. People in Miami suffer with these measures, too. Family separation is a terrible thing.”



Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas

BIOTECH

Science is another strategic area for the Cuban economy where women make up the majority: according to the Cuban Academy of Sciences, women account for 53 percent of workers in the sector. Women are on the front lines of the COVID-19 response at scientific research laboratories and in other academic milieu. Many of the scientists working on the clinical trials for Cuba's COVID-19 vaccine candidates are women.

One woman who stands out in this scientific world is Dr. Dagmar García Rivera, Research Director at the Finlay Vaccine Institute, an institution producing cutting-edge research.⁵⁰ According to Dr. García, the blockade has a drastic effect on Cuba's vaccine industry. She reports that procuring the reagents and materials to produce COVID-19 vaccines is a daily challenge: "We have to buy the materials, and we need financing to do it. That's why we call it a blockade, because it's a US policy toward Cuba that imposes economic and financial restrictions." Dr. García leads research activities and supervises over 70 specialists and a number of research projects in the field of vaccines. "It's a huge responsibility in a complex environment. The technical challenges are enormous, and we face restrictions acquiring reagents and inputs. That's why we have to be clear on the goal. Our team is made up mostly of young people and women, and we are committed to science in our country and motivated by the work we do."



Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas

**Dr. Dagmar
García Rivera
(56 years old)**

Research Director at
the Finlay Vaccine
Institute (IFV)

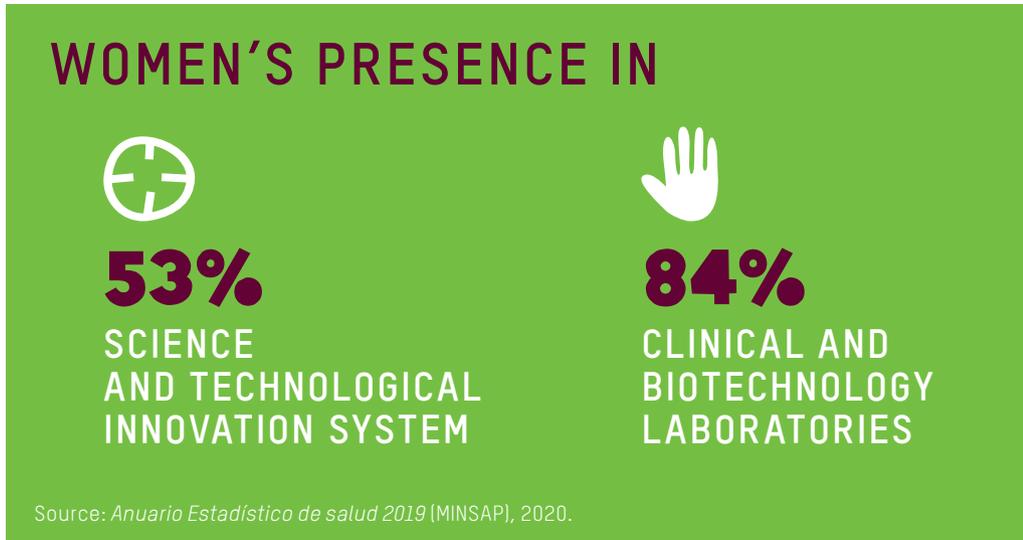


“We have to buy the materials, and we need financing to do it. That’s why we call it a blockade, because it’s a US policy toward Cuba that imposes economic and financial restrictions.

The technical challenges are enormous, and we face restrictions acquiring reagents and inputs. That’s why we have to be clear on the goal. Our team is made up mostly of young people and women, and we are committed to science in our country and motivated by the work we do.”



For Cuban scientists, the blockade’s practical restrictions require tireless, innovative efforts to find alternatives for acquiring the necessary materials and resources to continue their research and produce results. For women in the scientific sector, this often means long working hours that disrupt the balance between work, family life, and personal time.



THE FINLAY VACCINE INSTITUTE UNDERTOOK 15 TRANSACTIONS FROM APRIL 2019 TO MARCH 2020 TO IMPORT US MERCHANDISE THROUGH THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES.





THE DIFFICULT ROAD FOR VACCINES⁵¹

Manufacturing vaccines requires cultivation mediums to reproduce microorganism pathogens. The calf serum or bovine albumin used for this purpose in Cuba is purchased mainly in New Zealand or Germany.

This product, sold by BIOCLOT New Zealand (Christchurch), takes 24 days and 17 hours to reach Havana. Shipments sold by BIOCLOT GmbH, Germany (Aidenbach) take

 **18 DAYS AND 18 HOURS TO ARRIVE.**

If this same product could be procured from Boca Raton Biotech Company in the US, for example, the shipment would arrive in

 **JUST 17 HOURS.**



Photo courtesy of Vanguardia

“THE BLOCKADE AFFECTS US DIRECTLY, AND THAT’S NO LIE.”

**Humberto Toscano
(60 years old)**

Drag queen
Villa Clara



Humberto was at the forefront of the transformista movement in Cuba in the 1990s, when it was a taboo issue. In 1991, Toscano created the company Futuro while living at one of the country’s sanatorium for people with HIV. “I wanted to bring together all of the transformistas from the province of Villa Clara to have a space to perform. Once I was discharged from the clinic, I worked with others organizing the company and received support from many people. I created my own persona, Samantha. I participated in many shows as Samantha and traveled with six other transformistas to various provinces around the country to share our art.”

Humberto admits that living with the disease now is quite different than it was in the early 1990s. “I was afraid then, but now patients have much more rigorous healthcare support.” Humberto shares that therapy for people with HIV in Cuba includes two antiretroviral medicines: kaletra and dolutegravir, both of which are provided at no cost by the healthcare system. “We have to take these two pills daily, and sometimes the pharmacy may run out of one or another, because there is a shortage in the country. Luckily, when that happens, the doctors prescribe an alternate treatment. The same thing happens with the blood tests for T-cell counts that we have to get every six months. There are often shortages of reagents. I haven’t been able to get the test for over two years for that reason.”

“We also need a balanced diet for increased quality of life, and they can’t always make sure we get it. I know that the State makes an effort to provide the medicine for us—I think the UN helps with that—but the blockade affects us directly, and that’s no lie. I can only hope that someday there is no more blockade so that we can improve our quality of life and we won’t have to face uncertainty and shortages.”



EDUCATION

Education is among the sectors with the largest percentage of women in the workforce. Of the slightly more than half a million people employed in this sector, women accounted for an estimated 60 percent in 2019. Cuba, an island with just over 11 million inhabitants, operates 10,626 schools.⁵²

Of the 22 universities in the country, 14 are headed by women, meaning that women occupy 63 percent of the top posts.⁵³ The education and future of Cubans are, in large part, in the hands of women. Any adversities created by blockade restrictions have a direct effect on women's professional development.

For example, Georgina Alfonso, Director of the Philosophy Institute, shares her perspective on how restricting US citizens from traveling to Cuba affects professional exchange opportunities: "There has been more interest since 2006. Exchange visits were held between universities and our Institute for US professionals and students, the majority of whom were Black, of African descent or Latino origin."

The blockade has hamstrung academic exchange between the University of Las Tunas (in the eastern part of Cuba) and the Cuomo Foundation,⁵⁴ both of which participate in the international project RENERT.⁵⁵ A US\$444,000 grant was allocated for renewable energy sources in the Eastern region of Cuba affected by drought, but the funds have been withheld by the bank due to US blockade regulations.

Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas



Photo: courtesy of the interviewee

**Georgina
Alfonso
(54 years old)**

Researcher and
Director of the
Philosophy Institute



“With Trump (administration), these exchanges were canceled or scaled back, along with other exchange programs with civil society organizations, women’s groups, and non-formal or popular education teachers from many countries, preventing them from gaining a first-hand understanding of our reality.”



One of the impacts of the pandemic on the education sector has been the nearly universal migration to digital platforms. In Cuba, despite making progress toward enhanced access to information technology, the blockade has slowed the use of new technologies, forcing Cuban education authorities to resort to older methods (e.g., television) to broadcast daily classes to over 1.7 million students.⁵⁶ These challenges come in a country with one of the region's highest school enrollment rates, and the only one in Latin America to meet all of the Education for All (EFA) objectives set in the year 2000.⁵⁷

Access to computers or other new generation technology devices is limited. The potential market to acquire these technologies—ironically only 90 miles away—is out of reach for Cubans due to the blockade. The situation is similar in the case of the island's internet connectivity since the blockade prohibits access to the submarine fiber-optic network that surrounds the island. Instead, the country is forced to use a satellite link or the Alba-1 connection, limiting broadband connectivity.⁵⁸

Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas



TECHNOLOGY

Restrictions on digital technology access also affects entrepreneurs, who have seen their potential severely curtailed as a result. Claudia Cuevas is the 28-year-old co-founder of an app-based transportation service provider. She says, “I remember when we were just a group of friends without a permanent internet connection, and we had to go to the park to use the Wi-Fi there. We only had an offline map of Havana. Our idea was to create an app for getting around the city. Clients would get price quotes from various drivers and decide on which to hire based on car, price, and driver rating.” Claudia recounts that they had no reference of similar businesses when they began. After traveling to Europe on an academic exchange, she had the opportunity to see other options and solutions. “After 2018, I learned about Uber and Lyft, and later we started receiving proposals from companies like that to sell us their software.”

Claudia explains that startup funding allowing her to access services and tools came from friends and relatives outside of Cuba. “This help was so valuable. In Cuba we can’t access services from US-based companies, due to the blockade. I’m sure technology is one of the sectors most affected by the US sanctions. Imagine if we could log in directly to web development tools and applications or join international payment systems without being rejected because we live and operate in Cuba.”

For Claudia, it is important to underscore that it is nearly impossible to access any task management or social media tools or software from the island, where their use is blocked by US regulations.

“THERE ARE FACEBOOK OPTIONS TO PROMOTE OR RUN A BUSINESS, FOR EXAMPLE, BUT THESE ARE RESTRICTED FOR US. IF CIRCUMSTANCES ALLOWED AND WE COULD ACCESS MORE FUNDING, WE WOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERTAKE OTHER PROJECTS. I RECENTLY BEGAN WORKING WITH A TEAM ON A FOOD DELIVERY APP. THIS APPLICATION HAS BEEN EXTRAORDINARILY HELPFUL DURING THE PANDEMIC, AND THAT’S VERY SATISFYING FOR US.”

Photo: Jorge Luis Baños / IPS



**“OUR PERSONAL
AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL
INCLUSION ARE ALSO
BLOCKED.”**

**Geudis Vega
(39 years old)**

National Association
of the Blind



"The lastest version of the screen reader software JAWS (Job Access with Speech), which enables visually impaired people to interact with computers, debuted in October 2020. Because it is a program developed by a US company, our country cannot acquire a license to use it, thus prohibiting blind or visually impaired Cubans on the island from being able to fully benefit from application upgrades and improvements. As a result, people with visual impairments can only use open access software known as NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) to interact with computers, and even though it has improved somewhat, it doesn't have the comprehensive functionality of JAWS. We face a similar situation with various cellphone applications that enable a blind person to detect and identify his or her surroundings.

Cubans with disabilities are deprived from accessing Apple equipment and software, which are very efficient in enabling social inclusion and personal autonomy. As an example, iPhones have a screen reader and magnifier for people with limited vision. Apple also makes watches, smart glasses, and other devices.

Similar situations occur with other technical aids such as canes, braille typewriters, human-computer interaction (HCI) programs, and other equipment that provide autonomy, and improve quality of life and health. These include, among others, aids for balance, color identifiers, light detectors, thermometers, and glucose readers. Many of these assistive technologies include small synthesizers that allow a blind person to use them without help from another person.

Assistive technologies and devices are sold in stores of some organizations of disabled people that can import them from the US, but they are expensive. The only way for visually impaired Cubans to acquire them is with help from family and friends".



AGRICULTURE

Without a doubt, agriculture is one of the sectors hit hardest by the blockade, with direct effects on national food security and the economy. Beyond internal challenges and excessive bureaucracy, the restrictive US policies have led to insufficient domestic food production (in terms of quantity, variety, quality, and safety), higher prices for imports to cover food needs, and inadequate technology to improve productivity.

Data on the challenges for Cuban agriculture reveal that in 2019, the sector had access to only 71 percent of the diesel fuel approved for the year; only 7.4 percent of the area needing irrigation received it; and a lack of fertilizer affected between 15 and 45 percent of cultivated land. In 2020, only 28 percent of all cultivated land was able to be fertilized. This situation could greatly improve with adequate investment and access to technology.⁵⁹

These difficulties were compounded by limited access to international markets due to the blockade, ongoing natural resource degradation, high dependence on fossil fuels, and severe losses in the agriculture sector as a result of extreme weather events and climate change.⁶⁰

NINETY PERCENT OF CULTIVATED LAND IN THE COUNTRY IS MANAGED BY INDIVIDUAL FARMERS AND AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES, WHICH ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAJORITY OF DOMESTIC PRODUCTION.

Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas



IN CUBA, ONLY 33% OF ARABLE LAND HAS GOOD OR VERY GOOD YIELDS. FOR THE OTHER 67%, ADDITIONAL WATER, FERTILIZER, OR PESTICIDES ARE NEEDED TO BOOST PRODUCTION.⁶¹



792,400

WORKERS EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE

15.8% of the total five million Cubans employed



135,900

WOMEN EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE

Women account for 13% of the 532,735 cooperative workers and 33% of the 307,504 members of agricultural businesses



12,102

WOMEN LANDOWNERS

AGRICULTURAL CONTRIBUTION TO GDP: 3.6%



6,400,000

AGRICULTURAL LAND HECTARES⁶²



3,100,000

CULTIVATED AREA HECTARES⁶³

80%

STATE PROPERTY
70% IS MANAGED THROUGH NON-STATE ARRANGEMENTS

20%

PRIVATE PROPERTY

Source: *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019*, (ONEI), 2020.

The blockade is also an obstacle for international cooperation projects that could benefit the agricultural sector, as Alina Beltrán, President of the Cuban Association of Agriculture and Forest Technicians (Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales; ACTAF) reports. She explained that her organization “received several proposals during the Obama administration from US organizations and scientists that were interested in collaborating on aid projects, technical assistance, trainings, and exchanges. These initiatives were cut short by Trump.” Beltrán, a 49-year-old agricultural engineer, explains: “The blockade affects our collaboration projects and donations from NGOs to finance Cuban agriculture development, including mainstreaming gender equity and equality, capacity-building, and strengthening agricultural cooperatives.”

Something similar is occurring with the Project to Support Agricultural Cooperation in Cuba (APOCOOP), led by the National Association of Small Farmers (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños; ANAP), with support from Oxfam and the Swiss Aid Agency (COSUDE).⁶⁴ All of the cooperatives participating in the project face difficulties such as lack of fuel, inputs, and fertilizer.

Photo: Proyecto APOC00P



**“THE PROJECT WAS
VERY IMPORTANT FOR
THE COMMUNITY.”**

**Martha Orsell
(56 years old)**

Farmer
Las Tunas



In the eastern town of Dumañuecos, Martha is an agricultural engineer who has an agreement with the sun. Every morning, she wakes up before dawn and runs to the fields to cover one of her most precious treasures: a magical house that produces food for everyone. “The nursery center for agamic (asexual) plant reproduction is there to supply vegetables for the entire municipality,” she explains proudly.

“Before we had the nursery center, we had to make seedbeds directly in the ground, and many of the seedlings would die or be damaged by pests or disease due to bad weather. Too much water can harm the plants. Not enough water, too. Las Tunas is a province that has suffered greatly from droughts.”

Martha sighs and notes: “If the blockade didn’t exist, we would be more efficient, have more crop variety, more milk production for children and older adults in the community, and we would be able to benefit more women by increasing employment in the nursery centers.”

She knows that normalization of relations between the governments of Cuba and the US could open up new opportunities for exchanges and trade between the two countries. “We want to add 11 irrigation systems to enable cultivation of fruit trees. We want to have all the land under cultivation. That would allow us to produce better-quality products for export. Four of our members are beginning to export limes, Persian lemons, avocados, onions, and plantains. This means opportunities for local families. Regrettably, the blockade closes the big US market to us.”



In a cooperative in the western province of Artemisa, Dayanis Alonso leads a seedling production initiative. Alonso, who is 31 years old and holds a degree in accounting and finance, believes that “if the visits from foreign delegations had continued, we would have been able to exchange experiences.” She adds that the limitations imposed by the Trump administration directly impacted her work: “We have insufficient resources. We have a lot of trouble finding certified seeds, working materials, more advanced technologies, and trays for planting.” Alonso adds that “without the blockade, the quality and yield of the seedlings would be even better and would support family income, the national economy, food security, nutrition education, and sustainable environmental management.”

The possibilities are ripe for cooperation between Cuba and the US in this area. Currently, Cuba imports 80 percent of its food (39 percent of the kilocalories and 55 percent of the protein),⁶⁵ which represents an expense of nearly US\$2 billion. This dependence on foreign trade is an area of enormous potential for the US agricultural export market, which may be interested in selling its production just 90 miles off of its coast.

The proximity between US and Cuban ports—which would reduce transportation costs considerably and streamline delivery times—represents a logistical and competitive advantage for the US. Nonetheless, the blockade creates important legislative barriers that limit US farmers’ ability to sell to the island. Eliminating these restrictive measures would benefit both US agriculture, a sector with millions of jobs, and the Cuban people, who could have access to quality food products.⁶⁶

Photo: Carla Valdés





Photo: courtesy of the interviewee

“IT’S HARD HAVING CELIAC DISEASE IN CUBA.”

Dayana Darias
(23 years old)

Journalist
Villa Clara



Dayana fondly remembers her childhood in a small town on the outskirts of Santa Clara city in central Cuba. Dayana was born with celiac disease.⁶⁷ She knew she couldn’t eat the same things that other children ate because of her disease—just like her father—but she didn’t pay it much heed.

“When a child has celiac disease in Cuba, the State makes sure you have a special diet, but only until you are 14 or 15 years old. On many occasions, though, by the time the provisions came to my town they would be in poor condition and inedible. Now I live in the city of Santa Clara and I have a document that identifies me as a person with celiac disease, which lets me buy products from the only bakery in the central provinces that sells food made with sorghum flour for people who can’t eat gluten. Sometimes the supply is limited and there’s not much variety. Often, by the time I get to the bakery to buy something, there’s nothing left. They prioritize children, and I can understand that.”

Dayana explains that people with celiac disease need to maintain a healthy diet, with no junk food. But she also notes that it can be hard to stay on a healthy diet in Cuba due to the shortage of products in stores and farmers’ markets.

“I have a very basic diet. I can’t have sausages or pasta or a lot of rice. We don’t have many options... And in restaurants, they can’t offer food for people with celiac disease because they don’t have gluten-free products. It can be hard to find the right products for us in the supermarkets. It’s a tough situation. Without the blockade, maybe the country would be able to import more products that we could consume.”



NON-STATE SECTOR⁶⁸

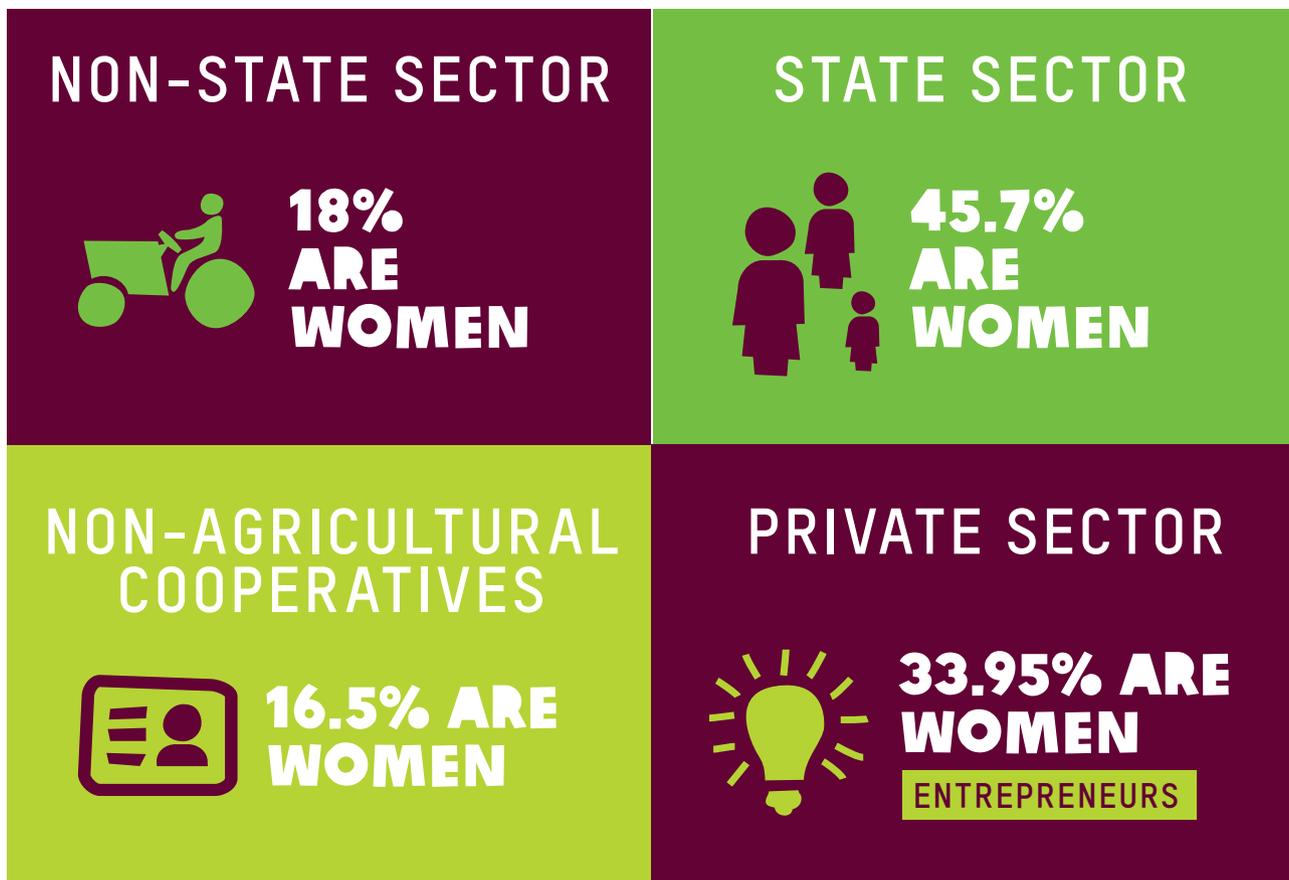
The increasing importance of the non-state sector to the Cuban economy since 2010 can be seen in job creation as well as its contribution to GDP.⁶⁹ Non-agricultural cooperatives experienced notable growth in terms of their workforce, jumping from 2,300 people in 2013 to over 16,100 people in 2018.⁷⁰ Those engaged in private sector jobs for that year, meanwhile, exceeded a half-million Cubans, (632,950 total), representing 32 percent of the Cuban labor force.⁷¹

The recognition of private property in 2019 intended to help identify and better harness production possibilities, while contributing to the socioeconomic development and wellbeing of the country. According to regulations already in place, in addition to working as self-employed entrepreneurs, Cuban individuals will be able to establish medium, small, and microenterprises that will be recognized with legal standing.⁷² With this step, the Cuban government is opening the door to approving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a measure experts believe will be implemented this year, especially given the recent and significant expansion of authorized areas for private work.

Private sector work took off in Cuba in 2010. Just one year later, licenses for self-employment increased by 72 percent.⁷³ Nevertheless, by 2013, women entrepreneurs still only accounted for just over 30 percent of total private workers, a percentage that has changed little since. Barriers to entry for women include limited access to resources and startup capital. Furthermore, the private sector continues to be highly volatile, particularly for businesses greatly dependent on international tourism.

Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas





The explosion of the small private business sector and cooperatives has been, without a doubt, one of the great drivers of remittances to Cuba. Opening markets for purchasing consumer goods in freely convertible currencies provides further impetus for remittances.

Assuming 25 to 30 percent of these remittances would be invested in private businesses, specialists argue that remittances would represent around US\$625 million invested annually. This represents 40 percent of the US\$1.6 billion per year of committed foreign investment.⁷⁴

This sector of the economy has slowed in recent years. The backslide can be traced to Trump administration measures including travel restrictions and a corresponding drop in tourism, as well as caps on remittances, all within a context of increased economic volatility due to the global pandemic. An in-country study entitled the Business Confidence Survey conducted in 2020 by Cuba Standard revealed that over 60 percent of entrepreneurs felt that the harm caused by the pandemic to their businesses in the last year was equal to the consequences of the US blockade.⁷⁵

According to entrepreneur Hilda Zulueta, the impact of Trump's measures has been devastating: "Even before Western Union money transfers were shut down, the impact on the private sector was clear." Hilda and her two college-educated daughters, Odaimis and Mady, took on the challenge of working in a traditionally masculine trade: leatherwork. They sell products for her Zulú brand (handbags, wallets, mobile phone cases, belts, and

leather shoes) in their own store. Mady explains that from the start, sales to US tourists were essential to their family business, especially sales to visitors on historic downtown city tours and to cruise ship passengers. Hilda recounts that her daughter Odaimis, who is currently living in Spain, works hard to send materials that are difficult to find or are unavailable in the domestic market. Hilda's story shows the generational dimension of the blockade and its multidimensional effects on family dynamics. This story is common in the Cuban private sector and highlights how the Trump administration's restrictive policies endanger the country's nascent private economy.

The tenor of relations with the US government has played an important role in the evolution of the private business and cooperative sectors in Cuba. Before the arrival of Donald Trump to the White House, many businesses benefited from their direct link to US tourism and the income it generated.

The US State Department dealt a serious blow to the private sector when it prohibited Cuban citizens living on the island from receiving five-year B2 tourist visas to visit the US. Not only did this policy harm Cuban families, it also hurt Cuban entrepreneurs who used this visa to travel to buy materials. Termination of the five-year visas went even further than just limiting entry of Cuban entrepreneurs into the US; B2 visa holders had also been able to travel to other countries such as Mexico, Panama, and Haiti without needing additional visas.



Photo: Carla Valdés



Under Obama, I had two or three Airbnb experiences per week. When hostilities began under Trump, it dropped to two or three per month, and of course that had an impact on our lives and our stained-glass business.

**Adriana de la Nuez
(30 years old)**

Photo: Claudio Peláez

A report published by the Cuban private consulting agency AUGE⁷⁶ in May 2020 shows how the intensification of the blockade under the Trump administration, exacerbated by the global health crisis, impacted this sector:

- 1 Total loss of revenue caused by an inability to work, either due to their own decision to temporarily suspend services under pandemic lockdown conditions or as the result of a government decision;
- 2 Reduction in sales for those businesses remaining open;
- 3 Interruption of normal internal work dynamics, and unstable procedures and ways of working;
- 4 Increased stress and reduced efficiency and flexibility;
- 5 Reduction in wages and benefits for employees in the case of businesses that stayed open;
- 6 Staff layoffs as a result of businesses closing their doors or substantial revenue loss;
- 7 Loss of clients, projects, contracts, agreements, and commitments for services that had been negotiated and signed or were active or imminent prior to the pandemic.



Photo courtesy of Proyecto Palomas

Photo: El Confidencial



**Oniel Díaz Castellanos
(40 years old)**

Co-founder of AUGE, a specialized consulting group for entrepreneurs



AUGE is a consulting group that specializes in advisory services for entrepreneurs in the country's private sector. Since its start in 2014, AUGE has diversified its services to cover regulatory aspects, marketing, strategic communications, graphic design, and even digital events to promote and connect businesses. "In just six years, we have gained over 90 clients including restaurants, software producers, and Airbnb services... We are waiting for the government to implement SME regulations to incorporate as a company. We are ready to take that step and provide our services for state companies and foreign businesses located in Cuba."

Oniel sees great potential in the domestic private sector but believes there are still obstacles that are out of the hands of the Cuban government: "Without the blockade, there would be more private businesses. And the more businesses, the better for us."





DATA ON THE NON-STATE SECTOR IN CUBA

32% OF THE CUBAN LABOR FORCE



605,908
PRIVATE WORKERS



18,100
NON-AGRICULTURAL
COOPERATIVES



451,800
AGRICULTURAL
COOPERATIVES

The private sector manages more tourism lodging than two of the most important foreign hotel groups in Cuba.



Private Sector
26,224

Meliá Hotels
14,661

Iberostar Hotels
7,881

Source: Report from the Cuban private consultancy firm AUGE, 2020, *Impacto sobre el sector privado de la política hacia Cuba de la Administración Trump.*

People living in vulnerability in Cuba, whether due to their age, sex, sexual orientation or identity, place of residence, educational level, skin color, or physical or mental condition or ability, require additional efforts to engage in development processes and thrive.

IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF WOMEN, JOURNALIST LIRIANS GORDILLO, A SPECIALIST AT EDITORIAL DE LA MUJER, WRITES: “THE BLOCKADE DOESN’T PRODUCE THE GENDER INEQUALITY THAT PERSISTS IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY THROUGH SEXIST STRUCTURES, PRACTICES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOCIAL NORMS. BUT IT DOES DEEPEN THESE INEQUALITIES AND MAKE MORE DIFFICULT THOSE ROLES TAKEN ON BY WOMEN, SUCH AS TASKS RELATED TO REPRODUCTION, HOUSEHOLD WORK AND CAREGIVING.”

Cuban women spend approximately 35.20 hours per week on household work and family care, and women are the heads of nearly half (46 percent) of households on the island.⁷⁷ These dynamics occur in a population that is undergoing a rapid aging process, and the number of family members per household has dropped over time. This increase in the number of older people in turn increases the probability of households having more dependents (especially older adults) and decreases the family support networks to help in caregiving.⁷⁸

Clearly this situation was aggravated by the pandemic and distancing measures adopted in the country, as some sectors turned to telecommuting to keep people home as much as possible. Women carried the heaviest load in this new scenario: in addition to domestic and household work, women took on responsibilities for their children’s home schooling, washing clothes that had been exposed outside the home, disinfecting surfaces and objects, sterilizing cloth masks, and other cleaning and food preparation tasks now that the family was spending more time at home.

Many women who worked in the private sector lost their jobs or were laid off as they waited for business to resume. These women were left with no other option but to stay home, without an income, and assume caregiving and support for children’s education, with all the extra burden this change entailed and the corresponding loss of their economic autonomy.

This scenario is part of a systemic situation that reinforces gender inequality, affects women’s independence, and limits their participation in economic activities in the country. Women’s return to their homes, including economic dependence for some, exposes them to situations of violence. These conditions are a breeding ground for abusive, unsatisfactory, or unhealthy domestic relationships. The dynamics represent a step backward for some Cuban women in terms of their economic development, personal growth, and support networks.

Workwise, the COVID-19 outbreak set women in Cuba back by nearly a decade, as occurred in most other countries of the region. Many women work in professions at greater risk of change and job loss, such as commerce, hospitality, manufacturing, and domestic services.⁷⁹ Even within this scenario, the contributions of Cuban women are undeniable. In just over a year of the pandemic, their creativity, innovation, and search for alternatives are constants in their daily lives.



Source: *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019*, (ONEI), 2020.

Photo: Conner Gorry



“I GOT USED TO SAVING EVERYTHING...”

Lidice López
(50 years old)

Independent artist and founder
of Lila Artesanías
Havana

“

“I’ve been a member of the Cuban Association of Artists and Craft Workers since 1998. I had to drop out of university to provide for my family, and I didn’t have many options. So I went to work: I sat at the sewing machine and started to sew. The reason I work with recycled materials is because everything is scarce. When I had my workshop and sold my designs at artisan fairs, sometimes I could buy fabrics at the stores. Often, other artists would travel and bring materials back to sell. But there were always some lulls because I didn’t have materials to work with. So I got used to saving everything, absolutely everything that was left over from my work. This kind of business requires serious investment. Given the prices and the time it took to get fabric, I decided that I would start to produce items without having to buy anything. It’s great because as I’m creating, I am also—in some small way—helping to clean up the planet. Later I switched and began to sew facemasks for the COVID-19 effort. My masks are made of swatches of fabric that I have been saving since I started to sew in the ‘90s. Today that is what supports my family.

People in Cuba need help from our friends and relatives living abroad who are able to help out in one way or another. That was true in my case, for something as important as sewing machine needles. I’ve found some needles here, but the quality is very poor. They break or go blunt, and you have to replace them, otherwise they rip the fabric. The best needles are the Singer brand, from the United States. Because of the blockade, they can’t be sold here in Cuba. During the normalization under Obama, I had US clients that would come to my workshop to buy my pieces and recycled products. Things were a little better then. Another limitation under the blockade has been with Etsy, the online store for craft producers. There is no way for me to send my creations to customers in the United States. I also can’t charge a credit card if someone makes a purchase from the United States. The blockade causes these problems for shipping and credit cards, which limit my business.”

”

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many reasons to advocate for lifting the US blockade, particularly in the context of a pandemic, when avoiding a deeper economic crisis and protecting people, especially those who face greater vulnerability, are a shared responsibility. After nearly six decades of sanctions, four years of even more restrictive measures, and now a global health crisis, change in US policy toward Cuba is urgently needed.

This report documents how the US blockade concretely affects Cuban men and women, showing how its severe consequences limit the potential for key sectors in the country, including the private sphere. Based on solid evidence, it condemns the blockade's direct effects on the daily lives of Cuban women, who endure the brunt of this hostile policy that diminishes their opportunities for autonomy and development. US sanctions reinforce preexisting inequalities related to women's participation in the workforce, income stability, and balancing their daily tasks. Failure to recognize the differentiated impact of the blockade on women has perpetuated gender gaps and impeded women from realizing their goals.

Right to Live without a Blockade illustrates how US policies produce real damage that obstructs the ability of Cuban citizens to access basic products and violates their right to a life with dignity. These policies are an obstacle for local economic, social, and environmental development. They hinder access to medicine for specific treatments, as well as to inputs for production of COVID-19 diagnostic tests and even inputs for the vaccine candidates developed in Cuba, all in a context defined by urgent health and economic needs due to the pandemic.

After more than five decades of hostilities, the Obama administration took important steps to loosen some of the measures imposed by its predecessors and moved toward reestablishing bilateral relations between the countries. Obama showed that it was possible to explore alternatives that could normalize relations and produce mutual benefits, although his administration was not able to push through all the actions necessary to ensure sustainable changes. The Trump administration strove to reverse the positive strides of its predecessor, increasing restrictions and imposing obstacles that are still in place today, with severe consequences for individuals, families, and communities on the island.

Oxfam opposes the US blockade against Cuba, a policy that runs contrary to the most urgent need today: saving human lives and protecting citizens' rights. It is time to globalize cooperation between countries and focus on collaborative solutions to the current health crisis, support healthcare systems and science, back emerging private initiatives in the country, support institutions providing social services to families, prevent and respond to multiple forms of gender-based violence, and help meet caregiving needs.

Cuba is in the midst of its deepest economic crisis of the last 30 years. Although the country has been able to sustain its social spending and protections to respond to the pandemic, lifting the blockade would directly benefit individuals, foster domestic socioeconomic changes already underway, increase economic opportunities, and multiply the possibilities for participatory citizenship of Cuban women and men.

IN THIS CONTEXT, OXFAM ADVOCATES FOR GREATER EMPOWERMENT OF CUBAN WOMEN SO THEY MAY DEVELOP THEIR CAPABILITIES, EXERCISE LEADERSHIP TO PURSUE THEIR GOALS, AND FULLY EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS, FREE FROM THE OBSTACLES EXACERBATED BY THE BLOCKADE. ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IS PARTICULARLY RELEVANT AND POWERFUL AT THIS SINGULAR MOMENT WHEN A WOMAN IS VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY.

The new administration under President Joe Biden has the opportunity to continue the trail blazed by President Obama to build a mutually beneficial future for both countries. Despite the challenging global scenario created by COVID-19, Cuba's recent opening to new opportunities for foreign investment, trade, and exchange of goods and services could be a tipping point toward dismantling the blockade; clearly a potential win-win for business sectors in both countries.

Some important stakeholders in the US private sector are interested in establishing bilateral business relations; by requesting licenses to access the Cuban market, they become advocates for change in US policy toward the island. In this regard, the US-Cuba Business Council, a member of the US Chamber of Commerce, works to strengthen the business and commercial relationship between the two countries, and the US Agriculture Coalition for Cuba seeks collaborative action for improved agricultural trade relations and is committed to actively engaging for an end to the embargo.

Oxfam reiterates the call to normalize relations between the US and Cuba. Doing so would benefit the 11 million people living on the island and their relatives living abroad, as well as people in the US. In fact, surveys continue to show that a majority of people in the US—including within the Cuban-American community, particularly youth—support a greater diplomatic opening toward Cuba and an end to the embargo. Opportunities abound for improving relations between the two countries in areas of mutual interest such as agriculture, tourism, biotechnology, education, manufacturing, and many other fields.

Normalizing relations with the US could improve our conditions to provide medical care, as well as our personal lives as women, mothers, and wives.

Dr. Amary Yumar
(40 years old)
Neonatal doctor
Sancti Spíritus

Photo courtesy of the interviewee



TO PROMOTE A NEW “THAW” BETWEEN THE US AND CUBA WITH THE GREATEST BENEFICIAL EFFECTS FOR CUBAN MEN AND WOMEN, OXFAM RECOMMENDS:

TO THE US GOVERNMENT:

Oxfam urges the Biden administration to take all actions within its power and without delay to normalize relations between the US and Cuba. Among the first steps, we encourage the administration to:

- 1 Return to the path laid out by the Presidential Policy Directive of October 2016 for “United States–Cuba Normalization” as a starting point to rebuild the relationship between the two countries, and follow through on statements made in this regard during the 2020 presidential campaign;
- 2 Remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and suspend the application of Title III of the Helms–Burton Act;
- 3 Repeal the National Security Presidential Memorandum on strengthening the policy of the US toward Cuba of 2017;
- 4 Remove the restrictions on remittances and travel imposed by the Trump administration in order to help Cuban families, the emerging non-state sector, and the national economy; and
- 5 Reestablish diplomatic services, enabling staffing levels needed in both embassies to facilitate consular services and a bilateral dialogue on topics of mutual interest.

In response to the current global health crisis and in recognition of international humanitarian principles, **Oxfam calls on the US government to immediately suspend those measures of the blockade that impede the timely acquisition of materials and inputs needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba**—including for domestic production of vaccines and medical treatments. This important humanitarian action would comply with the recommendation of UN Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan, who called for lifting, or at least suspending, any impediments that hamper the ability of States to effectively fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to definitively lift the blockade, US Congress must take action to eliminate all previously established restrictions. We urge members of Congress to end the US embargo and related constraints on economic, social, and political relations between the US and Cuba.

TO THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT:

Oxfam encourages the Cuban government to continue implementing the transformations enshrined in the new Constitution, approved in 2019, in order to guarantee human rights, social justice, and the enjoyment of freedom, solidarity, wellbeing, and individual and collective prosperity as described therein.

THE ECONOMIC AND MONETARY TRANSFORMATIONS UNDERWAY SHOULD CONSIDER THE DIVERSITY OF PRODUCTIVE FORCES IN THE COUNTRY AND ADDRESS EXISTING ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES, AS WELL AS OTHERS THAT MAY EMERGE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THESE CHANGES.

Oxfam underscores the need to implement, urgently and in an articulated manner, strategies and policies that ensure independence in the importation of goods and inputs by fostering local production and supporting municipal self-sufficiency and decentralization, agroecology practices and local consumption, as well as urban, suburban, and family farming. This is a strategic approach for the Cuban economy and is especially important to guarantee food sovereignty, with greater leadership by Cuban women.

Within the framework of the National Program for the Advancement of Women (March 2021), Oxfam advocates for greater empowerment of rural women, who are underrepresented as landowners and in paid employment. It is also essential for the Cuban government to prioritize strengthening and expanding comprehensive care and social protection systems for all, in concert with the existing service network, promote shared responsibility, and highlight the need to reduce and redistribute the caregiving work that falls disproportionately on women, as well as ensure care for the caregivers.

Oxfam also encourages the Cuban authorities to continue promoting and reorienting local potential toward new and more dynamic economic activities, such as non-agricultural cooperatives and SMEs. This requires expanding and enhancing the legal framework for the private sector and cooperatives, while designing programs and incentives that recognize and reduce existing and potential inequalities, especially those that affect women, in their multiple configurations and levels of severity.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

Oxfam calls upon UN member states and on international aid agencies to join together in a more proactive policy against the blockade. We encourage South-South cooperation and spaces for dialogue and understanding, especially in the context of multilateral organizations and integration mechanisms in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Oxfam urges the European Union (EU) to reinforce its dialogue with the new US administration to lift the US blockade against Cuba as part of the EU's new program cycle and renewed emphasis on the importance of foreign policy, climate change, digital inclusion, and social and economic sustainability. The blockade hinders EU objectives and cooperation with the island in several areas, including those described in this report. In the context of the global pandemic, international cooperation among countries is needed now more than ever to ensure that no one is left behind, as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The upcoming resolution in the United Nations General Assembly on the need to end the US embargo against Cuba is an important opportunity to create spaces for dialogue between the parties, a role that the EU should assume, along with other governments.

In these times of COVID-19, it is important to promote professional exchanges between Cuba and the US, as well as at the global level, around experiences in battling the pandemic, similar to efforts undertaken during the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014.

Oxfam recommends continuing informed analysis and discussion in the public arena and at international fora on the damage the blockade has caused for vulnerable populations on the island, including the effects on international organizations that provide aid to Cuba.



Photo: Alessandro Masoni

TO CIVIL SOCIETY:

Oxfam encourages civil society organizations, networks, and other international actors to recognize the urgency of this moment and speak out to call for an end to the blockade. We particularly encourage Cuban and US organizations to work toward a joint agenda that fosters “people-to-people” engagement and exchange around shared challenges, such as the current health crisis and the identification of effective treatments for COVID-19 and other advancements in medicine, climate change adaptation, renewed cultural and academic cooperation, and new business strategies.

IN PARTICULAR, WE CALL ON US CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS TO ADVOCATE FIRMLY AND PERSISTENTLY TO LIFT THE BLOCKADE AND EXPAND EXCHANGES WITH CUBA THROUGH DIALOGUE, COLLABORATION, AND TRAVEL, RECOGNIZING COMMON GROUND AND AREAS FOR LEARNING. ONLINE EXCHANGE HAS BEEN ONE WAY IN WHICH TO DEMOCRATIZE KNOWLEDGE AND PROMOTE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP. NONETHELESS, SEVERAL VIRTUAL PLATFORMS ARE STILL BLOCKED FOR PEOPLE LIVING ON THE ISLAND. THIS SITUATION MUST CHANGE.

Oxfam encourages Cuban civil society to undertake joint initiatives to document the impact of the blockade on the sectors it targets and affects, especially communities in Cuba facing the greatest social vulnerability. Additionally, we urge broad dissemination of this evidence within US civil society, to politicians and to US society at large. We welcome actions in Cuba that address existing inequalities and the realization of all human rights, with an emphasis on closing the gender gap that affects a diverse range of women.



ENDING THE BLOCKADE, AN UNJUST POLICY THAT HAS SPANNED NEARLY SIX DECADES, WILL FURTHER A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE THAT ENGAGES DIVERSE VOICES, FOSTERS TRANSFORMATIONS ON THE ISLAND, AND CONTRIBUTES TO RESILIENT, RIGHTS-BASED DEVELOPMENT WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE. ENDING THE BLOCKADE WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE ON THE PATH TOWARD JOINT SOLUTIONS TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC.

CUBA HAS A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL COOPERATION AND HAS ITS OWN VACCINES FOR COVID-19. ENCOURAGING, RATHER THAN RESTRICTING, CUBA'S CAPACITY TO CONTRIBUTE ITS EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE, AND SPECIALIZED STAFF TO THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO THE HEALTH CRISIS IS MORE THAN JUST A GESTURE OF GOODWILL. IT IS A MORAL DUTY FOR HUMANITY AND PART OF THE COMMITMENT TO A MORE EQUAL WORLD, WITH GREATER OPPORTUNITIES AND FULL RIGHTS FOR ALL.

NOTES

NOTES

- 1 According to the most recent annual report submitted to the United Nations General Assembly (reports have been issued continuously since 1992 and have been approved by a majority of member states), Cuba lost the equivalent of US\$5,570.3 million due to the blockade from April 2019 to March 2020, an increase of US\$1,226 million from the previous period. Annual losses due to the blockade surpassed US\$5 billion for the first time, not including COVID-19-related impacts that occurred after the close of the reporting period. See Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (MINREX), 2020, *Informe de Cuba en virtud de la resolución 74/7 de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, titulada Necesidad de poner fin al bloqueo económico, comercial y financiero impuesto por los Estados Unidos de América contra Cuba*, Havana, <http://www.minrex.gob.cu/es/informe-de-cuba-en-virtud-de-la-resolucion-747-de-la-asamblea-general-de-las-naciones-unidas>. At the outset of the pandemic, Oxfam called for lifting the blockade to “prevent a worsening of the economic crisis and protect the most vulnerable.” Oxfam, 2020, *El bloqueo de Estados Unidos contra Cuba agrava la crisis por COVID-19 en la isla*, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/node/12203>.
- 2 United States Government. Accountability Office (USGAO), 2007, *Economic Sanctions, Agencies Face Competing Priorities in Enforcing the U.S. Embargo on Cuba*, Washington DC, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-08-80#summary_recommend.
- 3 Inclusion also prohibits listed countries from receiving economic aid from the US, restricts access to “dual use” items (that may have military or civilian applications), and blocks loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The list also limits countries’ eligibility for international aid programs and restricts business and financial dealings in which US entities or their subsidiaries participate. Sanctions extend to individuals and countries that trade with state entities from the countries listed.
- 4 This pressure is currently enshrined in 26 legal instruments, most of which are federal laws. Five of these include the majority of the legally enforceable acts: The Export Administration Act of 1979, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 (including the Torricelli Act), the Helms-Burton Act, the Commerce Department and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1999, and the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 (TSRA). The TSRA authorizes certain exports to Cuba but requires cash in advance for these transactions, which prevents private export financing and restricts tourism travel to the island. It is worth noting that under these laws, the President retains a measure of authority to soften some trade and travel restrictions. Nonetheless, eliminating the blockade requires congressional approval to repeal the Helms-Burton Act and some provisions from the TSRA. Several senators introduced new legislation toward this end in February 2021, the U.S.-Cuba Trade Act of 2021. See *Wyden Introduces Bill to End Cuba Embargo and Establish Normal Trade Relations*, <https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/wyden-introduces-bill-to-end-cuba-embargo-and-establish-normal-trade-relations>.
- 5 The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was an economic cooperation organization formed around the USSR by different socialist countries, with the goal of fostering economic and trade relations among its member states.
- 6 B. Obama, 2009, *Memorandum Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Cuba*, White House, Washington DC, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/memorandum-promoting-democracy-and-human-rights-cuba>.

- 7 MINREX, 2017, *Instrumentos bilaterales adoptados entre Cuba y EE.UU. después del 17 de diciembre de 2014*, Havana, <http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/es/articulo/instrumentos-bilaterales-adoptados-entre-cuba-y-eeuu-despues-del-17122014>.
- 8 The “wet foot/dry foot” policy was a US immigration regulation resulting from a 1995 revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 that granted special privileges to Cuban migrants. This policy allowed migrants from the island to enter the country simply by touching US soil (regardless of how they arrived), while denying entry to Cuban migrants intercepted in US territorial waters. In January 2017, the Obama administration ended the “dry foot” exemption and directed Cuban migrants seeking entry into the US to be treated in the same way as any other migrant. See *U.S. Policy on Cuban Migrants: In Brief*, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44714.pdf>.
- 9 The resolution “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba” has been overwhelmingly adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 28 consecutive occasions from 1992 to 2019. In 2016, for the first and only time, the US abstained from the vote on the resolution.
- 10 The 12 authorized travel categories, formalized by Congress in the TSRA law, are: family visits; official business of the US government, foreign governments, and certain intergovernmental organizations; journalistic activities; professional research and professional meetings; educational activities; religious activities; public performances, clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions, and exhibitions; support for the Cuban people; humanitarian projects; activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes; exportation, importation, or transmission of information or informational material; and certain authorized export transactions. Previous administrations interpreted these categories very restrictively. The Obama administration ended individual licensing requirements for these categories. This led to a significant expansion of US citizen travel, particularly “people-to-people” travel. See <https://cu.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/traveling-to-cuba/>.
- 11 Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996, allows US citizens to sue companies from third countries that do business with nationalized property in Cuba. Every US president had used his statutory authority to suspend Title III, until Donald Trump allowed the provision to go into effect for the first time on May 2, 2019.
- 12 Federal Register, September 29, 2020, *Updating the State Department’s List of Entities and Subentities Associated with Cuba (Cuba Restricted List)*, <https://www.federalregister.gov/updates/2020/09/29/2020-21449/Updating-the-state-departments-list-of-entities-and-subentities-associated-with-cuba-cuba-restricted>.
- 13 BBC, 2019, *Crisis en Venezuela: EE.UU. anuncia sanciones a 35 cargueros usados para transportar a Cuba petróleo del país sudamericano*, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47835166>. See also DW, 2019, *EE.UU. sanciona a 34 barcos y dos empresas por enviar petróleo de Venezuela a Cuba*, <https://www.dw.com/es/eeuu-sanciona-a-34-barcos-y-dos-empresas-por-enviar-petrleo-de-venezuela-a-cuba/a-48233399>.
- 14 During the Obama years, cultural and educational exchanges grew significantly. The number of US visitors without family ties in Cuba went from just under 100,000 trips to over 600,000 from 2014 to 2017, growing by over 600 percent. Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información (ONEI), 2020, *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019. Capítulo 15: Turismo*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/15_turismo_2019.pdf.

- 15 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2016, *Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe*, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/40326/1600548EE_Cuba_es.pdf?sequence=117&isAllo wed=y.
- 16 B. Obama, 2016, *President Obama's Final State of The Union Address*, <https://www.npr.org/2016/01/12/462831088/president-obama-state-of-the-union-transcript>.
- 17 D. Trump, 2017, *National Security Presidential Memorandum on Strengthening the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2017/06/16/national-security-presidential-memorandum-strengthening-policy-united>.
- 18 GDP shrank in 2020 for the second consecutive year, this time by 11 percent, due to declines in foreign trade, international tourism, and foreign exchange revenue. The country only received 55 percent of projected foreign currency, and only acquired 60 percent of expected imports. See J. L. Rodríguez and S. Odriozola, 2020, *Impactos económicos y sociales de la COVID-19 en Cuba: Opciones de políticas*, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Havana. See also ECLAC, 2020, *Enfrentar los efectos cada vez mayores del COVID-19 para una reactivación con igualdad: Nuevas proyecciones. Informe Especial No. 5 COVID-19*, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45782/1/S2000471_es.pdf.
- 19 These restrictions on remittances also limited who can receive money in Cuba and set a ceiling of just US\$1,000 per person per quarter. According to a US consulting firm, remittances represent the main source of direct income for the Cuban people (50.81 percent), followed by income from self-employment (33.57 percent), and public sector worker salaries (15.3 percent). See E. Morales, 2019, *Remittances, an investment route for Cubans?* Havana Consulting Group, <http://www.thehavanaconsultinggroup.com/enUS/Articles/Article/69>.
- 20 Starting in September 2017, the Trump administration withdrew most of its diplomatic corps accredited in Havana, issued travel safety warnings, and later suspended the issuance of visas from its consular office. Cubans subsequently had to resort to requesting visas in a third country, which exponentially increased costs, time between request and acceptance, and hassle for travelers. President Trump also limited the number of Cuban diplomats accredited in Washington, which hampered issuing Cuban visas for US nationals. The argument put forth in February 2017 justifying these measures was the accusation that the Cuban government conducted "sonic attacks" against US diplomats in Havana. According to US government statements, the auditory distress of embassy staff was detected in late 2016 during the Obama administration, although no statements blaming Cuba were made at that time. A State Department document declassified in 2021 indicates that the accusation by the Trump administration was not based on any solid investigation. See *U.S.-Cuba: Secrets of the 'Havana Syndrome'*, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/cuba/2021-02-10/secrets-havana-syndrome-how-trumps-state-department-cia-mishandled-mysterious-maladies-cuba>.
- 21 ONEI, 2020, *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2019: Capítulo 15: Turismo*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/15_turismo_2019.pdf.
- 22 Immediately, countries with antidote legislation officially came out against the measures. On April 17, 2020, a Joint Statement was issued by European Commission's High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and its Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malström, on the US decision to apply Title III of the Helms-Burton (LIBERTAD) Act. See European Commission, April 17, 2019, *Statement*, Brussels, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/cuba/61183/node/61183_en. The

next day, the Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister, Chrystia Freeland, made a similarly unambiguous statement. These high-ranking officials subsequently issued a joint statement on behalf of the European Union and Canada. On May 8, the Mexican Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Economy published a joint statement against the activation of Title III and in defense of any of their citizens who may be affected. See <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/position-of-the-mexican-government-on-ending-suspension-of-title-iii-of-the-helms-burton-act>. It is still not clear how the US courts may respond to suits filed against foreign businesses that acted in accordance with the law in their home countries. These rulings could have a disastrous impact on foreign investment in Cuba.

- 23 UN experts have called on the US to lift the embargo on Cuba, indicating that it is “obstructing humanitarian responses” to fight COVID-19. See *Lift Cuba embargo or risk many lives lost to COVID-19, UN rights experts warn US*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062982>. See also Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, April 30, 2020, *US must lift its Cuba embargo to save lives amid COVID-19 crisis, say UN experts*, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25848&LangID=E>.
- 24 A. Douhan, 2020, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights: Negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights in the coronavirus disease pandemic*, United Nations General Assembly Seventy-fifth session, A/75/209, June 21, <http://undocs.org/en/A/75/209>.
- 25 D. D. Kirkpatrick and J. M. León Cabrera, 2020, “How Trump and Bolsonaro Broke Latin America’s COVID-19 Defenses,” *New York Times*, October 27, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/27/world/trump-bolsonaro-coronavirus-latin-america.html>.
- 26 The Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent Specialized in Disasters and Serious Epidemics was established in 2005 with the goal of providing aid to people affected by Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf States. Though George Bush turned down the offer of support, the brigade has since been deployed in response to disasters and epidemics around the world. See Conner Gorry, 2019, “Six Decades of Cuban Global Health Cooperation”, *MEDIC Review*, September 20, <https://mediccreview.org/six-decades-of-cuban-global-health-cooperation/>; Gisele Coutin and Conner Gorry, 2021, “Cuba’s Medical Team in the European Epicenter of COVID-19”, *MEDIC Review*, January 19, <https://mediccreview.org/cubas-medical-team-in-the-european-epicenter-of-covid-19/>.
- 27 MINSAP, 2021, *Cuba en el enfrentamiento a la COVID-19*, <https://twitter.com/MINSAPCuba/status/1370053651033640967>.
- 28 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2020, *US must lift its Cuba embargo to save lives amid COVID-19 crisis, say UN experts*, April 30, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25848&LangID=E>
- 29 Cubadebate, 2021, *Cuba en datos: El camino hacia la inmunización*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2021/03/30/cuba-en-datos-el-camino-hacia-la-inmunizacion>.
- 30 Decreto Presidencial 198, *Programa Nacional para el Adelanto de las Mujeres*, 2021, <https://www.tsp.gob.cu/documentos/decreto-presidencial-198-programa-nacional-para-el-adelanto-de-las-mujeres>.
- 31 Prensa Latina, 2020, *Bloqueo de EE.UU. retrasa vacunas cubanas contra la Covid-19*, <https://www.prensa-latina.cu/index.php?o=nr&id=418273&SEO=bloqueo-de-ee.uu.-retrasa-vacunas-cubanas-contra-la-covid-19-fotos>.
- 32 Gaceta Oficial No.7 Extraordinaria de 2020, *Decreto 366 de 2019 de Consejo de Ministros*, <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/gaceta-oficial-no-7-extraordinaria-de-2020>.

- 33 Along with the Cuban peso (CUP), the Cuban convertible peso (CUC) was one of two official currencies in Cuba, until its removal on January 1, 2021. The tender began to circulate in December 1994, with a unique monetary symbol, to facilitate domestic hard currency transactions. The value was linked to the US dollar and was 24 times the CUP. Nonetheless, more than 30 years of dual currency circulation led to a number of problems, including discouraging import substitution, suppressing the price of imported goods and services, and rendering domestic materials for production and consumption comparatively more expensive. The CUC also distorted the financial statements and accounting of State enterprises, leading to a lack of transparency needed for economic and financial decision-making at all levels.
- 34 Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 2021, *Actividades donde no se permite el ejercicio del trabajo por cuenta propia*, Havana, <https://www.mtss.gob.cu/noticias/actividades-donde-no-se-permite-el-ejercicio-del-trabajo-por-cuenta-prop>
- 35 Information for this synthesis is drawn from resolution 74/7 *Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba*, United Nations General Assembly Seventy-fifth session, A/75/81, <https://undocs.org/en/A/75/81>. See also Department of the Treasury, 2020, *OFAC Enters Into \$98,830 Settlement with BitGo, Inc. for Apparent Violations of Multiple Sanctions Programs Related to Digital Currency Transactions*, Washington DC, https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/20201230_bitgo.pdf.
- 36 E. Morales, 2018, *The importance of remittances in Cuba*, Havana Consulting Group, <http://www.thehavanaconsultinggroup.com/en-us/Articles/Article/68>.
- 37 ONEI, 2020, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2019*, Havana, <http://www.onei.gob.cu/node/15006>.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 From the start of the pandemic up to March 2021, Cuba sent 56 brigades from the Henry Reeve Contingent to 40 countries, with a total of 4,941 healthcare collaborators. These medical professionals served over one million people in Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and Asia during this period. See Cuban Ministry of Public Health and National Office of Statistics and Information, 2020.
- 40 According to the Central Medical Cooperation Unit Statistical Record, Cuba collaborated with the following countries to provide healthcare support in 2019: Americas: Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Curacao, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Chile, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominique, Saint Lucia, Granada, Suriname, Guatemala, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Haiti, and Uruguay; Sub-Saharan Africa: Angola, Kenya, Botswana, Lesotho, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Chad, Mozambique, Congo, Namibia, Djibouti, Niger, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Seychelles, Gambia, South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, Guinea Bissau, Uganda, Guinea, Zimbabwe, and Equatorial Guinea; North Africa and the Middle East: Algeria, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Turkey, and Kuwait; East Asia and the Pacific: Mongolia, East Timor, China, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Nauru, and Vietnam; Europe: Portugal. Cuba also has experience establishing branches of its Placental Histotherapy Clinic in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay. The Cuban Hospital in Qatar, where the Cuban Medical Brigade operates, is a partnership between the two governments. This hospital has high satisfaction rates according to surveys and has received several international awards. See Colaboración Médica Cubana, a Cuban Ministry of Health website available at <https://salud.msp.gob.cu/tag/colaboracion-medica-cubana/>.

- 41 The forecast from the Ministry of Tourism was 5.1 million visitors for that year. See Cubadebate, 2018, *MINTUR: 2019 será un año de retos para el turismo cubano*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2018/12/27/mintur-2019-sera-un-ano-de-retos-para-el-turismo-cubano/>.
- 42 In 2018, according to the Cuban Statistical Yearbook, 4.7 million tourists visited the country and generated US\$2,782,200 in revenue. Of this total, US\$473,900 (17 percent) corresponds to the private sector. See ONEI, 2020, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2019: Capítulo 15: Turismo*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/15_turismo_2019.pdf.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Cubadebate, 2020, *Turismo europeo ante una encrucijada: Seis millones de puestos de trabajo perdidos por la pandemia*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2020/09/10/turismo-europeo-ante-una-encrucijada-seis-millones-de-puestos-de-trabajo-perdidos-por-la-pandemia/>.
- 45 ONEI, 2020, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2019: Capítulo 15: Turismo*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/15_turismo_2019.pdf.
- 46 D. Delgado Vázquez, 2021, *Políticas restrictivas de Estados Unidos sobre las remesas cubanas: Efectos sobre las familias y el emergente sector privado*, <https://horizontecubano.law.columbia.edu/news/politicas-restrictivas-de-estados-unidos-sobre-las-remesas-cubanas-efectos-sobre-las-familias>.
- 47 A. Nova González, 2019, *Remesas a Cuba: Mito o realidad, tras la ruta del dinero*, <https://rebelion.org/remesas-a-cuba-mito-o-realidad-tras-la-ruta-del-dinero/>.
- 48 E. Morales, 2020, *COVID-19 puede hacer declinar las remesas a Cuba entre un 30 y 40% en el 2020*, Havana Consulting Group, http://www.thehavanaconsultinggroup.com/en-us/Articles/Article/74?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#_edn1.
- 49 Havana Consulting Group, 2020, *COVID-19 aplasta el negocio de las mulas*, <http://www.thehavanaconsultinggroup.com/es-es/Articles/Article/83>.
- 50 The Finlay Vaccine Institute (IFV) is the leading vaccine institution in Cuba. It is known for creating the world's first safe, effective vaccine against serogroup B meningococcal disease, VA-MENGO-C-BC, which helped control a bacterial meningitis epidemic in the 1980s and marked the beginning of biotechnology in Cuba. Dozens of research institutes coordinated by the country's biotech conglomerate BioCubaFarma have marshalled forces to develop COVID-19 vaccine candidates, treatments, and medical devices, including the Finlay Vaccine Institute, Molecular Immunology Center (CIM), the School of Chemistry at the University of Havana, and the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB). For more information, see <https://www.biocubafarma.cu/>.
- 51 This is a hypothetical situation, with two randomly chosen companies that specialize in distributing these products.
- 52 ONEI, 2020, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2019*, Havana, <http://www.onei.gob.cu/node/15006>.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 The CUOMO Foundation is a European philanthropic organization that supports initiatives in education, social and economic development, and environmental research, among others, at the global level. For more information, see <https://www.cuomo.foundation/es/projects-es/centro-de-energia-renovable-universidad-de-las-tunas/>.
- 55 RENERT is a renewable energy project in the Eastern province of Las Tunas. For more information, see <https://ceeprot.cubava.cu/tag/proyecto-renert/>.

- 56 Cubadebate, 2020, *Sistema Educativo en Cuba: Logros y desafíos*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2019/03/07/sistema-educativo-en-cuba-logros-y-desafios-video/>.
- 57 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2019, *En América Latina y el Caribe solo Cuba alcanzó los objetivos globales de la Educación para Todos en el periodo 2000-2015*, <https://es.unesco.org/news/america-latina-y-caribe-solo-cuba-alcanzo-objetivos-globales-educacion-todos-periodo-2000-2015>.
- 58 The cable known as Alba-1 is the only submarine telecommunications cable that links the island to the rest of the world. This fiber-optic cable running between Cuba, Jamaica, and Venezuela was launched in 2011, and began operations in 2013. The cable has a bandwidth of 640 Gbps and spans 1,602 kilometers. See Cubadebate, 2010, *Cable submarino entre Cuba y Venezuela revolucionará las telecomunicaciones en la región, afirma Ramiro Valdés*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2010/11/03/cable-submarino-entre-cuba-y-venezuela-revolucionara-las-telecomunicaciones-en-la-region-afirma-ramiro-valdes/>.
- 59 J. L. Rodríguez and S. Odriozola, 2020, *Impactos Económicos y Sociales de la COVID-19 en Cuba: Opciones de políticas*, UNDP. Anicia García, a professor and researcher at Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana (Cuban Economics Research Center), found that one of the consequences of COVID-19 and the social and physical distancing measures implemented to fight the pandemic was the difficulty in procuring food products. Regulated food distribution continued, but workers whose employment was suspended and students and teachers without in-person classes did not have access to affordable cafeteria food services. The augmented healthcare services and the isolation centers needed to control the pandemic also required amounts of food that exceeded their normal yearly needs. Agricultural markets continued to operate, with notable drops in the supply of pork and pork products, due to the reduction in imported supplies and the chronic problems that domestic agriculture faces, which led to higher prices. The supply of imported beef, beef products, and dairy products contracted, and restrictions had to be imposed to ensure equitable distribution. Due to the revenue deficit for domestic spending, in late June the government enabled the sale of food and cleaning products in freely convertible currencies, to collect foreign currency, ensure the supply in pesos and convertible pesos, and
- invest in the domestic industry to produce import substitutions. See A. García, 2020, *La Covid-19 en Cuba: impacto presupuestal y costo de vida*, <https://www.ipscuba.net/espacios/por-su-propio-peso/con-lupa/la-covid-19-en-cuba-impacto-presupuestal-y-costo-de-vida/>.
- 60 Recent years have produced extreme phenomena such as droughts (2015–2017), major hurricanes (2016, 2017, and 2018) and local flooding resulting from tropical storms.
- 61 Since 2015, 47 cooperatives from four areas in the country have had a series of training and capacity-building opportunities addressing cooperatives, gender, legal frameworks, and other topics. For more information see <https://www.facebook.com/apocoop.cuba.1>.
- 62 Cubadebate, 2019, *Cuba en Datos: Agricultura, sector estratégico que precisa despuntar*, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2019/05/17/cuba-en-datos-agricultura-sector-estrategico-que-precisa-despuntar/>; ONEI, 2020, *Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2019*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/09_agricultura_ganaderia_y_pesca_2019.pdf

- 63 Agricultural land is defined as the area allocated for any form of agricultural production. It may be planted in perennial or temporary crops, be used for nurseries or greenhouses, be natural pasture, or be unplanted arable land that is apt for cultivation.
- 64 Cultivated area is the land dedicated to crops. This includes the area that is planted, in preparation, fallow or awaiting planting, as well as farm roads, irrigation channels, or other essential structures for agriculture production.
- 65 UNDP, 2020, Impactos de la COVID-19 en Cuba, Havana, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/covid19/266%20IMPACTOS%20DE%20LA%20COVID-19%20EN%20CUBA-24%20JUNIO-2020.pdf>.
- 66 US Department of Agriculture, 2020, Agriculture and Food Sectors and the Economy, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy>.
- 67 Celiac disease is an immunological response to consuming gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye.
- 68 This economic sector is comprised of Cubans engaging in economic activities outside the system of public agencies with publicly funded budgets and the web of state businesses. It includes all private workers (freelancers and self-employed, artists, writers, individual farmers) and members of agricultural or non-agricultural cooperatives. The term “own-account” or “self-employed” worker, used by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in its International Classification of Status in Employment, is used in Cuba to refer to those who have been authorized to pursue one or several economic activities independently to earn legal income, hire workers, provide services to other individuals and/or companies, and pay taxes. They are not legally incorporated nor considered to be established companies, but rather they are individuals authorized to engage in economic activities independently.
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- 72 *Conceptualización del modelo económico y social cubano de desarrollo socialista*, 2017, <http://www.granma.cu/file/pdf/gaceta/Conceptualizaci%C3%B3n%20del%20modelo%20economico%20social%20Version%20Final.pdf>.
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- 74 A. Nova González, 2019, *Remesas a Cuba: Mito o realidad, tras la ruta del dinero*. Inter Press Service en Cuba (IPS), Havana, <http://www.ipscuba.net/economia/remesas-a-cuba-mito-o-realidad-tras-la-ruta-del-dinero/>; J. Triana, 2020, *La emigración en la economía cubana: Más allá de las remesas*, OnCuba, Havana, <https://oncubanews.com/opinion/columnas/contrapesos/la-emigracion-en-la-economia-cubana-mas-alla-de-las-remesas/>.

- 75 P. Vidal, 2020, *El reflejo del Gran Confinamiento sobre la economía cubana*, Cuba Capacity Building Project, Columbia Law School, New York, <https://horizontecubano.law.columbia.edu/content/el-reflejo-del-gran-confinamiento-sobre-la-economia-cubana>.
- 76 AUGE is an independent consulting group specializing in private business initiatives. The group has published several studies on important aspects of the private sector's evolution in Cuba. One of these studies examines the impacts on the sector as a result of measures adopted by the Trump administration (April–July 2019). At the beginning of the pandemic, it disseminated the study entitled *Private enterprise in Cuba: A patient with COVID-19*, which analyzes the situation from March to May 2020. See <https://horizontecubano.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/docs/AUGECovid-19.pdf>.
- 77 ONEI-CEM-CEPDE, 2020, *Encuesta nacional de igualdad de género (ENIG-2016)*, ONEI, Havana, <http://www.onei.gob.cu/node/14271>; and ONEI, 2016, *Proyecciones de los hogares cubanos (2015-2030)*, Havana, http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/0_proyeccion_hogares_publicacion_0.pdf.
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- 80 The rate of economic activity is the ratio between the economically active population and the working age population.

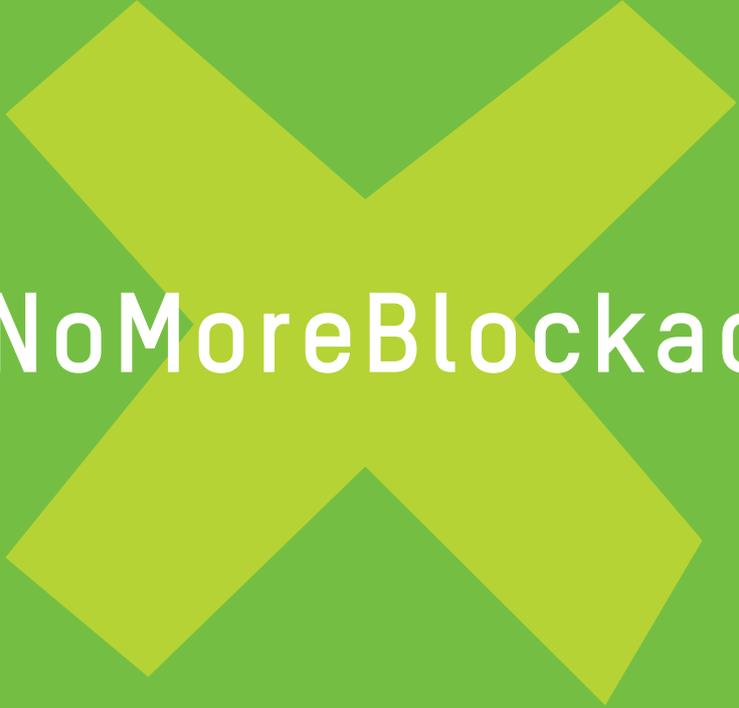


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Oxfam is an international confederation of 21 organizations networked together in 67 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. Oxfam began working in Cuba in 1993 and has since collaborated with many actors at different levels working together to build a more just, inclusive, sustainable and resilient society. The primary focus of Oxfam's work in Cuba has been to contribute to citizen participation and local development, food security and sovereignty, gender justice and women's rights, inclusive disaster risk management and humanitarian response. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org.

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