

A report to congressional committees

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**What GAO Found**

Air cargo volume handled by Puerto Rico’s three international airports fluctuated between 2015 and 2024, hitting a low of 501 million pounds in 2019 before increasing to 621 million pounds in 2024, according to Bureau of Transportation Statistics’s air carrier data. The largest of these airports, Luis Muñoz Marín in San Juan, increased cargo volumes over this period, while volumes declined at the second largest airport, Rafael Hernández in Aguadilla. Mercedita Airport in Ponce is not regularly used as a cargo airport. Health care-related goods—including pharmaceuticals and medical devices—accounted for about half of the reported cargo volume leaving Puerto Rico, according to Census trade data.

**Air Cargo Traffic for International Airports in Puerto Rico (in pounds), 2015–2024**



Source: GAO analysis of Bureau of Transportation Statistics’s Air Carrier Statistics T-100 database. | GAO-26-107762

Note: Data do not include traffic between Puerto Rico’s airports. Mercedita International Airport, which annually handled between 0 and 50,000 pounds of cargo, is included in the total but not separately.

According to air cargo stakeholders GAO interviewed, some conditions at Puerto Rico’s international airports can support existing air cargo operations, but improvements are needed for growth. Stakeholders noted recent improvements to airport infrastructure in San Juan, including expanding access roads. However, they also identified additional improvements needed, such as enhancing warehouses and cold storage space at all airports. They also identified needed operational improvements. For example, agency officials, including from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Agriculture, noted that there were limited staff available to inspect cargo, which could affect timeliness should operations increase.

Puerto Rico has pursued several initiatives to promote growth in air cargo operations, including seeking expanded authority for some air carriers to transfer cargo. In addition, Puerto Rico has developed an air cargo strategy and worked with health care manufacturers and the logistics sector to increase collaboration and standardize pharmaceutical handling practices at its international airports.

**Why GAO Did This Study**

Aviation is critical for delivering time-sensitive goods like health care products. With the growth of e-commerce, it is also a means to rapidly deliver consumer goods. Puerto Rico is promoting air cargo operations as a means of increasing economic development.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 includes a provision for GAO to study air cargo operations in Puerto Rico. This report describes (1) trends in air cargo operations from 2015 through 2024 at Puerto Rico’s three international airports, (2) conditions at these airports to support air cargo operations and improvements needed for growth, and (3) government and industry efforts to promote air cargo growth and potential effects of such growth.

GAO analyzed Bureau of Transportation Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau air cargo data. GAO also interviewed officials from the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Homeland Security, and Transportation; interviewed Puerto Rico government officials, including airport officials at Puerto Rico’s three international airports; and reviewed associated documents from these entities. GAO also interviewed a nongeneralizable sample of 29 air cargo stakeholders, including air carriers and health care manufacturers with perspectives on air cargo operations and infrastructure at Puerto Rico’s airports. GAO observed air cargo operations and infrastructure conditions in Puerto Rico.