



JAMAICA Gender In Brief

Population World Bank Data Portal¹ (Census 2011)²: 2,839,175; 1,334,533 male (49.5%); 1,363,450 female (50.5%)

Population age disaggregation (Census 2011)²:

Under 15 yrs: 702,835 (26.1%); 15-29 yrs: 751,489 (27.9%); 30-64 yrs: 1,026,053 (38.0%); 65 yrs and Over: 217,606 (8.1%)

Average no. of households (Census 2011)²: 881,078

Average household size (Census 2011)²: 3.1 persons

Female headed households³: 50%

Life expectancy at birth¹: 71 years

Literacy rates: Population rate⁴: 88%; World Bank Youth (15-24 yrs)⁵: 99% female youth; 88% male youth

Infant mortality Rate (Per 1,000 live births)⁶: 19.3

Maternal mortality ratio (Per 100,000 live births)⁷: 130

Rate of domestic violence⁸: 24%; 29% Intimate partner abuse (Emotional Abuse most common); 23% Non-partner sexual abuse

HIV Incidence per 1000 population⁹: 0.4

Percentage of population with disabilities age 5 and Over (2011 Census)²:

Sight: 15%; Hearing: 3%; Walking: 5%; Communicating: 2%

Introduction

Jamaica has an estimated population of 2.83 million people as of 2024. The nation has a predominantly young population with most residents between 15 and 64 years old. Ethnically the population is of African descent, alongside smaller Afro-European, East Indian, Chinese, and mixed-heritage communities. Hurricane Melissa, one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes on record, made landfall on October 27, 2025, as a Category 5 storm, causing extensive damage to public and private infrastructure leaving over 70% of the island without power. This Gender In Brief aims to provide humanitarian actors with initial data and insights into different issues that impact the resilience and recovery of women, men, boys, girls, LGBTQ+ individuals and other vulnerable groups in different ways. Given the crisis, access to firsthand information is limited. Therefore, this brief primarily relies on secondary data sources.

Gender Roles and Relations

Jamaica has traditional gender norms where men are positioned as breadwinners and women and girls carry a “triple burden” of paid work, household duties, and community care (UN Women Caribbean, 2020). These roles are changing as more women now work in services, education and healthcare, while men remain dominant in construction, transport, and agriculture (PIOJ, 2022). Women and girls, especially in rural and low-income areas, face barriers to mobility, safety, and access to services. Rural women often travel long distances to reach schools or health centers and have fewer childcare options, which limits their ability to participate fully in the public sphere. In addition to these challenges, people with disabilities and older women face additional barriers to participation because of limited accessibility and weak social protection systems. The LGBTQ+ population faces significant discrimination in Jamaica due to social beliefs, which leaves this population at risk during crisis. Adolescent girls face risks of early pregnancy and violence, while older women shoulder ongoing care responsibilities that often intensify during crises, as men’s breadwinner pressures due to traditional expectation, simultaneously heighten stress and the risk of gender-based violence (GBV).

Education and Economic Empowerment

Jamaica's literacy rate is 88% overall (PIOJ, 2022), and 99% female, and 88% male for youth aged 15-24 (World Bank Data). Gender parity has been achieved in primary education, with enrolment at approximately 93% for girls and 92% for boys (World Bank, 2022). However, completion rates have declined to 79% (CAPRI, 2025), suggesting ongoing challenges in attendance, learning quality, and transition to higher levels. Jamaica is working in increasing education completion but 50,000 adolescents of secondary school age are out of school (60% boys) (UNICEF Jamaica, 2023). At the secondary level, gender disparities become more visible. Boys are more likely to drop out or perform below standard (World Bank, 2022). In tertiary education, women significantly outnumber men, with enrolment rates of 38% for females and 20% for males (World Bank, 2022). Contributing factors include economic hardship, low motivation, behavioral issues, early pregnancy among girls and economic pressures discouraging participation in higher education (UNICEF Jamaica, 2023).

Women make up 58% of the services workforce but continue to shoulder most unpaid domestic and caregiving duties (PIOJ, 2022; CAPRI, 2021). Girls often spend more time on chores than boys, affecting study time and school engagement (UNICEF, 2016). Meanwhile, boys especially in rural areas are more likely to engage in child labor, particularly in agriculture (Jamaica Observer, 2024). These intersecting patterns of education, labor, and social norms continue to add to gender and geographic inequalities across Jamaica.

Participation and Policy

Jamaica has developed comprehensive legislative and policy frameworks to advance gender equality and address GBV. Key instruments include the Sexual Offences Act (2011), which protects against sexual harassment, rape, and assault; the Domestic Violence Act (1996), offering legal protection for victims of domestic abuse; and the National Policy for Gender Equality (2011) which promotes gender mainstreaming across all sectors. Jamaica is working on a National Plan of Action for GBV to outline prevention, protection, and prosecution strategies. Enforcement remains insufficient due to limited institutional capacity, resource constraints, and persistent patriarchal norms. Underreporting, judicial delays, and low public awareness further hinder progress. Women represent around 20% of parliamentary and ministerial positions and are active in local governance, school boards and community committees, typically within social and education sectors (UN Women, 2018). At the community level, women play key roles in coordinating programs, supporting vulnerable groups, and driving development initiatives.

Gender Based Violence and Protection

GBV is a widespread protection concern in Jamaica, affecting women, men, LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalized groups. Approximately 24% of women have experienced physical or emotional violence from a partner (World Bank 2023) with additional risks from non-partner sexual violence (23%) and economic coercion. The social perception around GBV is often considered a private matter between intimate partners which leads to under reporting (World Bank, 2023). Male survivors often underreport due to stigma, while boys exposed to violence face a higher risk of perpetuating or experiencing violence later. LGBTQI+ persons experience significant discrimination, physical and sexual violence, and legal and social marginalization (UN Women 2021). Persons with disabilities face heightened vulnerability to neglect and abuse, compounded by mobility barriers to accessing services.

Gender In Emergencies

Past hurricanes (Ivan 2004, Dean 2007) and COVID-19 showed some gendered patterns: Women and girls are disproportionately negatively affected due to pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, risks of economic insecurity (especially for female headed households), intensified caregiving responsibilities, heightened risks for domestic violence or GBV, and limited access to social services. Women typically remain in affected communities to care for children, elderly relatives, and manage household recovery by using traditional knowledge of health care to assist with recovery. Men and boys are more likely to migrate temporarily in search of work or relief assistance, which exposes them to increased risks of physical and financial stressors. Boys are also at a heightened risk for child labor and abuse.

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