



UNIVERSITY of STRATHCLYDE  
CENTRE FOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW  
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UNIVERSITY  
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ISLAND



# COVID-19 Island Insights Series

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## Jamaica

Suzana N. Russell

The COVID-19 Island Insights Series is an initiative spearheaded by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law & Governance (SCELG) and the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island in collaboration with Island Innovation. The initiative brings together critical assessments of how specific islands around the world have performed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which their recovery plans can promote resilience and sustainability in the long term.

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## Jamaica

Population 2,726,667 <sup>1</sup>

Size 10,991 square km <sup>2</sup>

Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean. The economy is heavily dependent on tourism (35% of GDP), with a record 4.3 million tourist arrivals in 2017<sup>3</sup>.

### COVID-19 data<sup>4</sup> and timeline (as at 19 February 2021)

- Number of cases 20,016 (~0.7% of the population)
- Number of fatalities 381 (~0.014% of the population)
- Schools closed on 13 March 2020; initially for 2 weeks. All schools operated virtually for the remainder of 2020. As at January 2021, many schools have reopened with a blended approach, i.e. a combination of face-to-face and online classes.
- Travel restrictions have been enacted. Travel ban imposed on China on 31 January 2020. Effective 25 March 2020, the borders were closed to all persons. Controlled re-entry of Jamaican citizens and residents started in April 2020.

## Suzana N. Russell

Dr. Suzana N. Russell is a Senior Lecturer at the Mona School of Business and Management, University of West Indies, Mona



Jamaica<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from the Statistical Institute of Jamaica.

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from the CIA World FactBook.

<sup>3</sup> Data obtained from the Jamaica Information Service.

<sup>4</sup> Data obtained from the Ministry of Health Jamaica and the Jamaica Information Service

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamaica>

## COVID-19 on Jamaica

Jamaica recorded its first COVID-19 case on 10 March 2020. The following day, the country recorded its second confirmed case. Both cases were women who had traveled to Jamaica from the United Kingdom. On 13 March 2020, all schools including early childhood institutions, teachers' and community colleges were closed, initially for 2 weeks. Also, that same day, two entire communities were placed in quarantine for two weeks after it was discovered that two new confirmed cases were close contacts of the country's first confirmed case ('patient 0'). Security forces were immediately deployed to these communities to control the movements of residents. By the end of March 2020, Jamaica had recorded 38 cases, mainly imported but some from local transmission. The country quickly entered community spread phase and on 30 August 2020, 244<sup>6</sup> new cases were recorded (the highest daily case count until this was surpassed in January and February 2021, where new cases rose to a high of 468<sup>7</sup> on 17 February). Plans for the resumption of in-person teaching were abandoned as the number of daily cases continued to rise in September (Figure 1) and schools started the new term with the continuation of online classes.

Jamaica reopened its borders to international travelers on 15 June 2020, after imposing travel bans on several countries including France, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom and South Korea. A travel ban was imposed on China on 31 January 2020. Concerns about the new British variant of the COVID-19 virus saw a travel ban imposed again on flights from the UK on Dec 21, 2020. In fact, at the time of the announcement of this new travel ban on flights from the UK, one flight was already en route to Jamaica; all 302 passengers were placed in state quarantine as they landed<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 1: Daily new COVID-19 cases, Jamaica<sup>9</sup>**



In an attempt to slow the spread of the virus, several measures have been implemented over the past eleven months, some more restrictive than others. In March, the government issued work-from-home directives to non-essential workers, stay-at-home orders for residents and citizens 75 years and older, nightly nationwide curfews, a ban on in-person dining at restaurants, and the closure of bars, beaches, gyms and entertainment spots. To maintain that delicate balance between reopening the economy and slowing the spread, some of these restrictions have been loosened, but many are still in place, such as nightly curfews and stay-at-home orders for the elderly. A national mask mandate, instituted in April 2020, is still in effect.

Based on the data in Figure 1, the initial intensive measures mandated by the government appeared to have kept the number of infections low in the early months of March to July. However, as the country continued its phased reopening of the economy, in addition to a general election on 3 September 2020 which saw large crowds taking part in political campaigns, the daily confirmed cases increased significantly in August and September. While the recent daily cases of infections continue to fluctuate, the number is still not as low as the early months

<sup>6</sup> John Hopkins University COVID-19 Statistics Data

<sup>7</sup> John Hopkins University COVID-19 Statistics Data

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Health and Wellness, December 22, 2020. Jamaica Information Service. <https://jis.gov.jm/302-travelers-from-the-uk-now-in-state-quarantine/>

<sup>9</sup> Source: John Hopkins University.

and cases continue to surge in different parishes across the island<sup>10</sup>. Since the start of 2021, the numbers have skyrocketed, with a record 1,950 new cases between 7 and 13 February<sup>11</sup>.

### Key socioeconomic pressures in Jamaica during COVID-19

As with most economies around the world, the Jamaican economy has been significantly impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the economy expected to contract by 5% (IMF, 2020<sup>12</sup>). Adverse impacts on the tourism sector, which accounts for 35% of GDP, coupled with the fall in alumina prices (the main export commodity accounting for 3.6% of GDP) have resulted in a concomitant increase in unemployment. The tourism sector has been decimated: 120,000 persons or 75% of the workers were laid off by April 2020<sup>13</sup>. Remittances, a very important source of earnings for the country at approximately 16% of GDP in 2018, were severely curtailed in the early months of the pandemic, as the Jamaican diaspora in countries such as the US struggled to cope with the prospect of their short-term unemployment. This severely impacted the lives of the almost 51% of Jamaican citizens who receive remittances. However, there was a recovery from the initial onslaught of COVID-19 and remittances were up by 42% in June<sup>14</sup> and 38% in September<sup>15</sup>.

The government implemented social and economic support through its CARE<sup>16</sup> Programme, which provided assistance in the form of cash

transfers to vulnerable individuals and small businesses (IMF 2020); nearly 500,000<sup>17</sup> Jamaican received this assistance. Measures adopted included tax credits for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), reduction in regulatory fees for certain commodities, and a waiver on fees for certain personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies. Commercial banks also joined the effort by offering customers the option to defer payments and providing new lines of credit and other services to the most affected sectors.<sup>18</sup> Other industries such as wholesale, retail, manufacturing and construction have all been impacted by the pandemic. The once vibrant entertainment industry is still being impacted by the nightly curfews.

A study of 500+ households with children conducted by the UNICEF/Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) (2020) gives some insight into the social impacts of the pandemic. The findings from the survey showed that respondents lost an average of 46% of their income. Although 86% were able to make up for this lost income by using up their savings, this effectively eroded their financial safety nets. Forty-four percent of the 505 households also experienced food shortages and tried to cope by having fewer and smaller meals. The closure of schools and the emotional impact of this is reflected by children in the study who are displaying elevated levels of frustration (41%), clinginess (39%), overeating (57%) and fear (21%)<sup>19</sup>.

Connectivity issues persist across the island and this absence of adequate bandwidth is negatively impacting the government's effort to ensure that no child is left behind<sup>20</sup>. Like many

<sup>10</sup> <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20210125/tufton-announces-tighter-measures-manchester-covid-cases-surge>

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Health and Wellness COVID-19 Clinical Management Summary. <https://www.moh.gov.jm/updates/coronavirus/covid-19-clinical-management-summary/>

<sup>12</sup> IMF Country Focus (May 2020). Jamaica ramps up social and economic support in COVID-19 response.

<sup>13</sup> Jamaica Observer, April 19, 2020. [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/bartlett-appeals-for-regional-unity-in-responding-to-covid-19\\_192353](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/bartlett-appeals-for-regional-unity-in-responding-to-covid-19_192353)

<sup>14</sup> Caricom Business (Sep 2020). Jamaica remittances rebound in June. Caricom Business Newsletter Vol. 3 No. 36

<sup>15</sup> Jamaica Observer, November 29, 2020

<sup>16</sup> Covid Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE)

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Finance and Public Service. <https://www.wecare.gov.jm/>

<sup>18</sup> Cucagna, M. and Johnson, S. (2020). Return to paradise: A poverty perspective on Jamaica's COVID-19 recovery response. November 17, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF and CAPRI (2020). The effect of the COVID pandemic on Jamaica's children preliminary results.

<https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/reports/effect-covid-19-pandemic-jamaican-children-preliminary-results>

<sup>20</sup> Jamaica Gleaner. January 25, 2021. Connectivity issues impacting resumption of face-to-face classes.

countries around the world there are increasing concerns about the mental health of Jamaicans with fears that COVID-19 outcomes such as social isolation, financial losses, increased stress, increased intimate partner violence, increased sexual abuse, even among children, will result in increased depression and suicide<sup>21</sup>.

### **Post Covid-19 recovery on Jamaica: A different approach**

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On 27 April 2020, the Prime Minister appointed the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force comprising of a 28-member committee from government, private sector, and academia to develop plans for Jamaica's economic recovery. Recommendations by the task force that are deemed essential to the country's recovery include the following:

1. Recommit to, and accelerate, macro-fiscal reform and business climate improvements
2. Restore tourism
3. Deepen local supply chains
4. Digitize and modernize Jamaica
5. Diversify Jamaica's economic base
6. Increase economic formalization (currently, informal employment accounts for 47% of employment)
7. Strengthen the safety net and pursue labour market reforms

With such a huge dependence on tourism, it is not surprising that tourism is at the heart of Jamaica's post COVID-19 recovery plans. Policies that are being considered in order to build back a safer, more resilient and equitable tourism product include:

1. Strengthening local supply chains by creating a tax incentive programme for large-scale farms and warehousing

- aimed at purchasing from local farmers and selling in the tourism industry.
2. Focus on rural area tourism to benefit rural communities by transforming these 'sleepy areas into buzzing centres of economic activities'.

Although the future remains uncertain, the government has projected a shorter recovery period compared to the global economic recession of 2008/9, largely due to the relative strength and buffers in the economy and the many stimulus packages introduced<sup>22</sup>.

### **Post Covid-19 recovery and the Sustainable Development Goals**

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The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) anticipates slippage on the pace of the country achieving development targets that are being implemented under Vision 2030 Jamaica (the National Development Plan) and aligned to the SDGs. While the country remains committed to the SDGs<sup>23</sup>, the government is currently reviewing the strategic implementation of Vision 2030<sup>24</sup>. This review, which began in November 2020, includes the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals. While no deadline is given for the completion of the review, the government has noted the critical importance of ensuring that SDG policies, particularly those related to human capital development and social protections, are integrated in any new economic and business practices in a post COVID-19 recovery. In keeping with this goal, the government has responded to this pandemic through social measures such as reduction in the general consumption tax (GCT) from 16.5 to 15% on all products taxed with GCT; supporting employees with transfers of cash for workers who were laid off; general grants for barbers, hairdressers, bar and nightclub operators; assistance to small farmers; assistance for the

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<sup>21</sup> Jamaica Observer, September 10, 2020. Suicide watch

<sup>22</sup> Jamaica Information Service. <https://jis.gov.jm/jamaica-to-un-country-will-recover-faster-from-covid-19-than-for-the-08-09-global-recession/>

<sup>23</sup> Jamaica Information Service. <https://jis.gov.jm/jamaica-leading-global-conversations-towards-a-sustainable-and-green-recovery-after-covid-19>

<sup>24</sup> Jamaica Information Service. <https://jis.gov.jm/government-reviews-long-term-national-development-plan/>

homeless and deferral of student loans and interest payments. In its post-pandemic recovery, Jamaica is not approaching its commitment to the SDGs with pessimism but instead the country remains committed to moving beyond business as usual and embracing a “new normal” that “leaves no one behind”<sup>25</sup>.

### Useful Sources

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<sup>25</sup> Wayne Henry, 2020. PIOJ. Keynote speech on COVID-19 and Beyond: Perspectives from Jamaica’s experience in inte-

grating the SDGs in the implementation of Vision 2030 Jamaica – National Development Plan, 2015–2020. September, 2020

### Published COVID-19 Island Insights Papers

- |  |  |
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| #1. Malta. November 2020               | #8. Okinawa. February 2021               |
| #2. Egadi Islands. November 2020       | #9. Mauritius. February 2021             |
| #3. Grenada. November 2020             | #10. Seychelles. February 2021           |
| #4. Trinidad and Tobago. November 2020 | #11. Aotearoa New Zealand. February 2021 |
| #5. Shetland Islands. November 2020    | #12. Hawai'i. February 2021              |
| #6. Åland Islands. November 2020       | #13. Barbados. March 2021                |
| #7. Guam. December 2020                | #14. Jamaica. March 2021                 |



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