



HARNESSING THE SHIFT

Reimagining a Sustainable Future

Jamaica — Dialogue for Development Distinguished Lecture Series

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Presentation Overview

- 1 Hurricane Melissa as a Stress Test
- 2 The Dual Transition: Climate + Demography
- 3 Jamaica's Demographic Revolution
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- 9 Conclusion & Call to Action.


Let's start with your experience.

What was the first service you lost after Melissa?

And which one hurt the most?

Electricity · Water · Transport · Communications · Health services · Income





Jamaica stands at a crossroads, where climate shocks collide with demographic transformation, and the choices made now will define the nation's future.

Hurricane Melissa: The Stress Test

Category 5 · October 28, 2025 · A brutal systems test

\$8.8B

Physical damage
(41% of GDP)

1.6M

People directly
affected

70%

Without electricity
in first 48 hrs

60%

Vegetable crops lost
in St. Elizabeth

Cascading Failures Across Interconnected Systems

When power, water, and transport failed simultaneously, clinics struggled to operate, workers lost income, children missed school, and female-headed households were forced to cut nutrition, care, and savings. Displacement fractured caregiving networks, the unpaid support, largely provided by women, that sustains older persons and vulnerable groups.



*But Jamaica responded quickly:
with institutions and with heart.*

Response: Government & Community Solidarity


Government Response

- Fiscal & customs relief on recovery imports
- NHT mortgage moratoriums & disaster grants
- ROOFS housing programme for displaced families
- Tourism Recovery Task Force established
- Multi-sector recovery strategy deployed


Community Solidarity

- Neighbours organized clean-ups & reopened roads
- Shared tools, generators, food, and water
- Checked on older persons & people with disabilities
- Faith-based groups coordinated shelter & aid
- "Grooming days" brought dignity to shelters


"If recovery works for those who cannot self-rescue, it works for everyone."



Melissa revealed a deeper truth: Jamaica faces not one crisis, but two simultaneous transitions.



The first transition is a climate reckoning: Sea level is rising, and Jamaica's people and economy sit squarely in its path.



Two Simultaneous Transitions

Jamaica is entering a new development era requiring integrated strategies



Climate & Risk Transition

- › Intensifying hydro-meteorological shocks
- › 82% of population within 5 km of coast
- › ~90% of GDP generated in coastal zone
- › Cascading system failures: electricity → water → transport → health → income
- › Damage increasingly expensive to repair

Climate Vulnerability: A Compound Risk



Sea-Level Rise

3.3 ± 0.4 mm/year (1993–2019).
Projected 0.26–0.82 m by 2100.
Coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and storm surge threatening settlements and ecosystems.



Heat & Health


Mean temperature rising 0.65–0.84°C by 2030s. Higher heat stress for health, energy demand, and outdoor work. NCDs account for ~75% of Caribbean deaths.




Concentrated Risk

82% population coastal. Tourism, agriculture, fisheries all climate-sensitive. 10–30% of water sources affected by pollution including saline intrusion.

Sources: IPCC, World Bank, UNEP, State of the Jamaican Climate



The second transition is the dramatic changes in population size and structure because of very low fertility, stagnant mortality and sustained emigration



Two Simultaneous Transitions

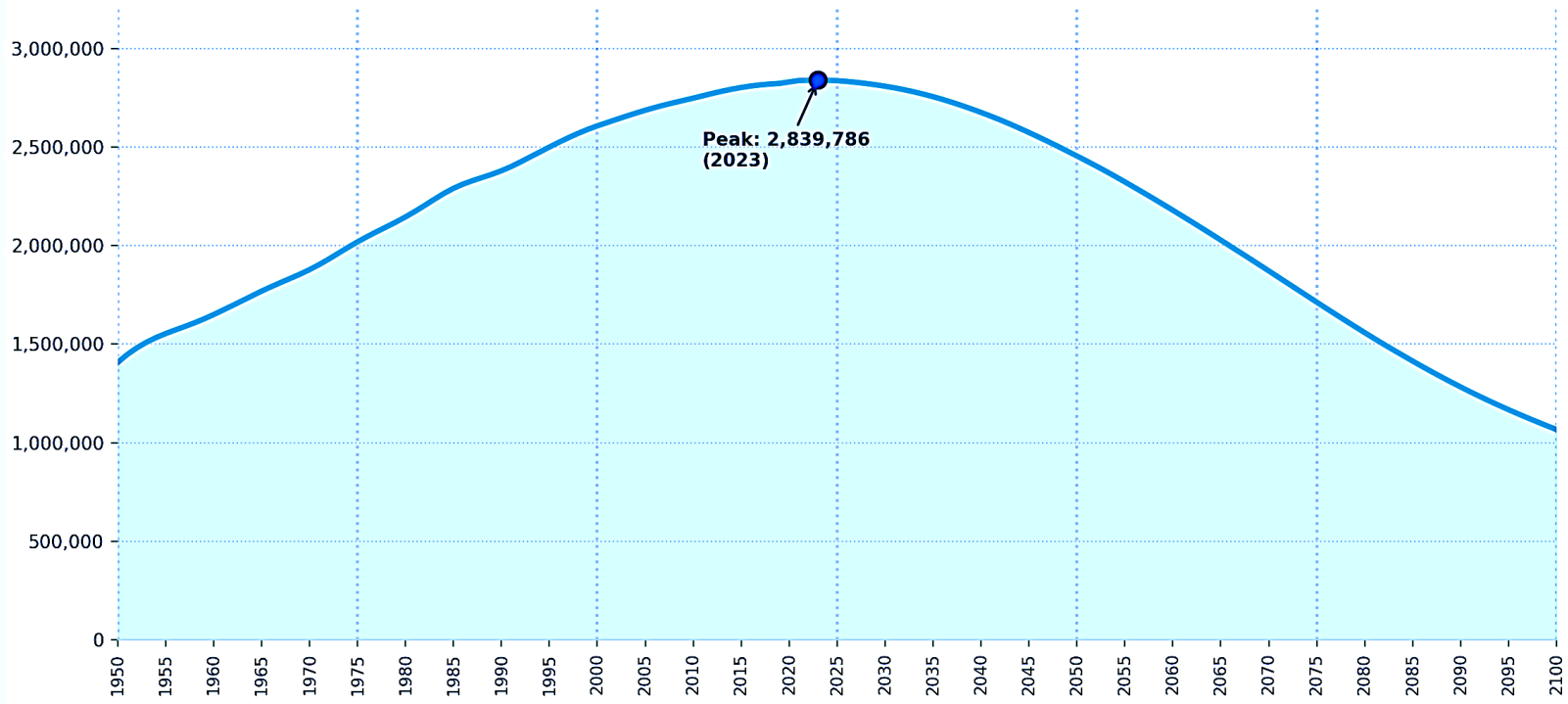
Jamaica is entering a new development era requiring integrated strategies



Demographic Transformation

- Close to population decline
- Rapid population ageing
- Shrinking young population and soon shrinking of the working-age population
- Smaller households and weaker care networks

Graph 1.
Jamaica: Total Population, 1950-2100



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024).

Jamaica's Demographic Revolution

A complete transformation of the age structure of the population

Source: UN Population Division, STATIN



**Children
(0–14)**

-40%

Declined from 882K (1997) to 531K (2024). Another -145K by 2040.



**Working-Age
(15–64)**

Peak 2024

Grew by +500K since 2000. Would contract by -170K by 2040.



**Older Persons
(65+)**

+72%

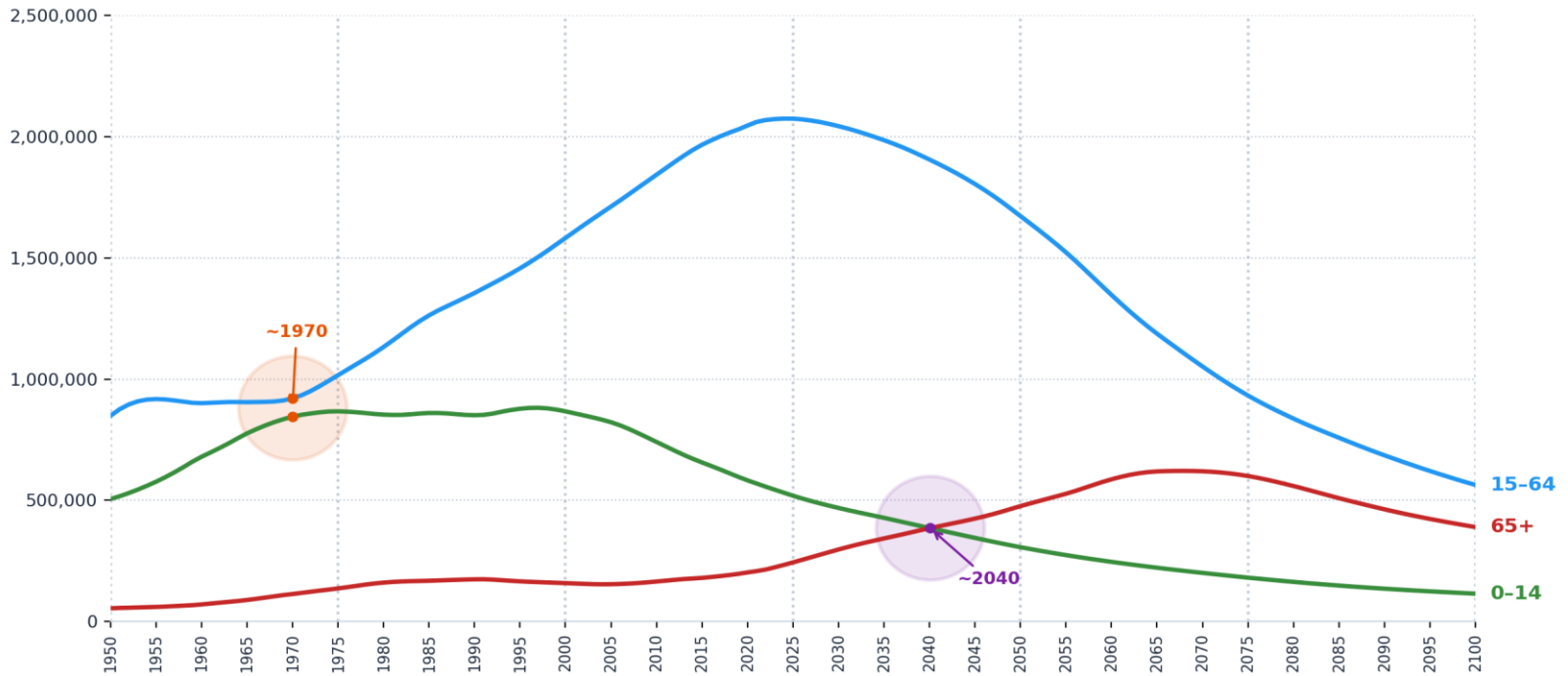
Growing from 233K (2024) to ~400K by 2050 — the only expanding group.



Households and family composition and structure:

Smaller families mean weaker informal care networks. More one- and two-person households. Higher demand for separate housing and accessible services.

Graph 2. Jamaica: Population by broad age groups, 1950-2100



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024).

Before we look at the data, take a guess.

How many babies do you think Jamaica recorded in 2024?



A. 45,321

B. 35,017

C. 25,942

D. 18,982

The answer may surprise you.

34,862 in 2019

Before we look at the data, take a guess.

How many babies do you think Jamaica recorded in 2024?

C. 25,942





Four forces are driving this transformation.

Drivers of Demographic Change



Fertility Collapse

TFR fell from 4.5 (1970s) to 1.9 (2019–2024). Births dropped 33% in just 5 years (34,632 → 25,942). Teen births down from 137 to 32 per 1,000.



Sustained Emigration

~60% of tertiary-educated Jamaicans live abroad. ~500 specialist nurses lost per year. Remittances reach \$3.36B (15% of GDP) but cannot replace lost capacity.



Mortality Stagnation

Life expectancy stalled at ~71–72 years for three decades — well below the Caribbean average (73.3). Caused by layered crises: economic stagnation, HIV/AIDS, epidemic violence, and NCDs.

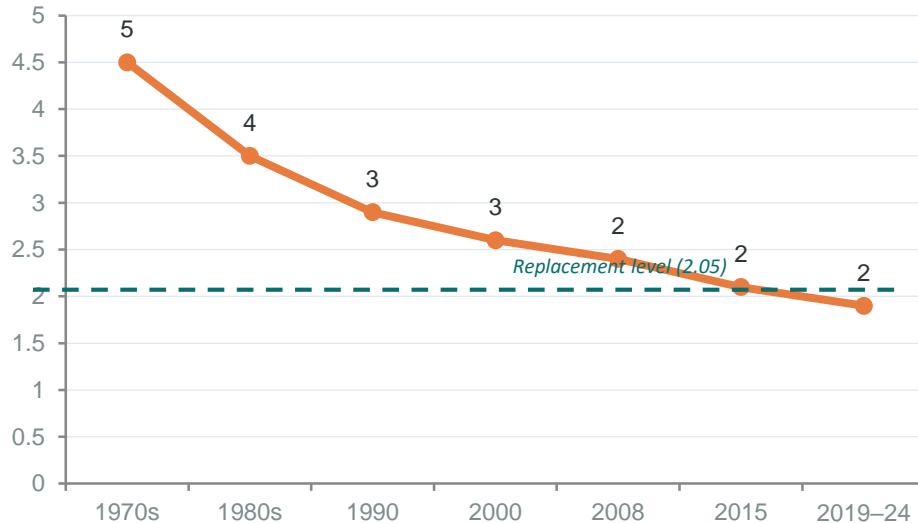


Fewer children are being born, far fewer than anyone expected.



Fertility: The Unstoppable Decline

Total Fertility Rate (births per woman)



Source: STATIN, UN Population Division

Key Data

Annual Births

34,632 → 25,942


-33% in just 5 years (2019-2024)

Adolescent Births (per 1,000)

137 → 32

Ages 15-19, from 1975 to 2021

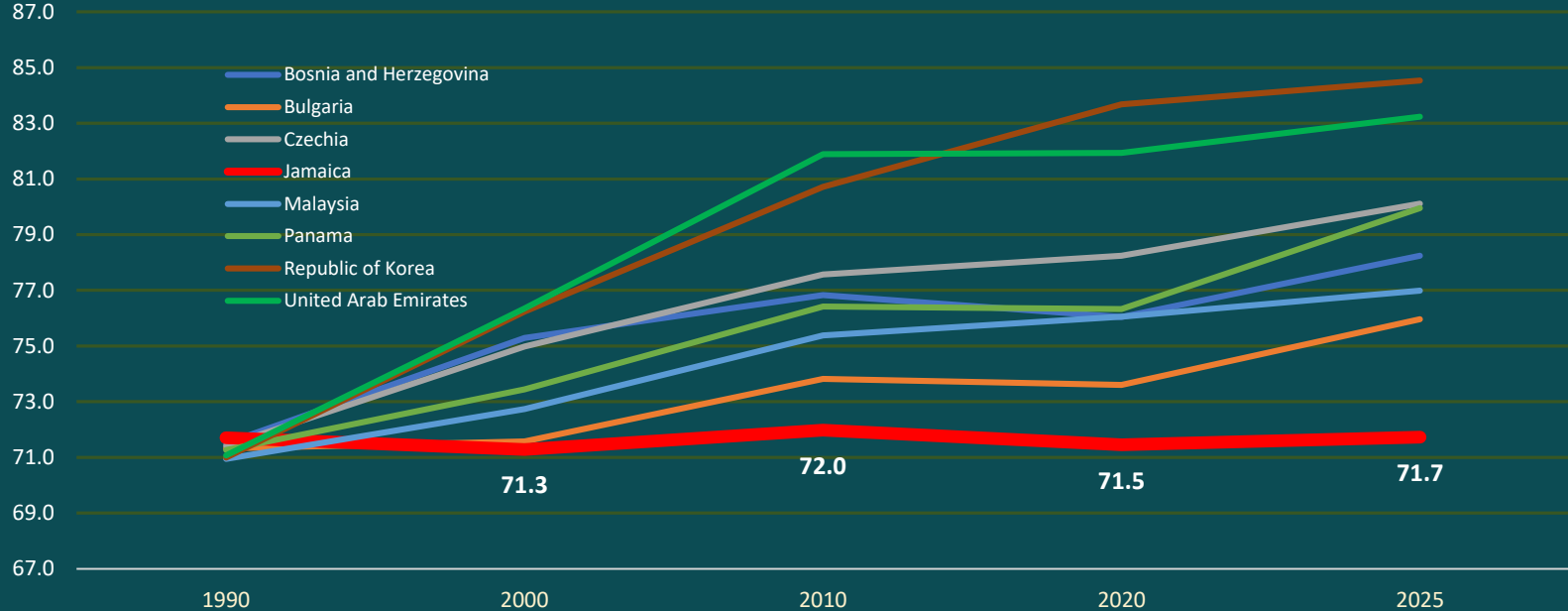
**Jamaica is now below
replacement fertility**




*And those who are here are not living as long
as they should.*

Mortality: The Unexpected Stagnation

Life expectancy stalled at ~71–72 years for three decades



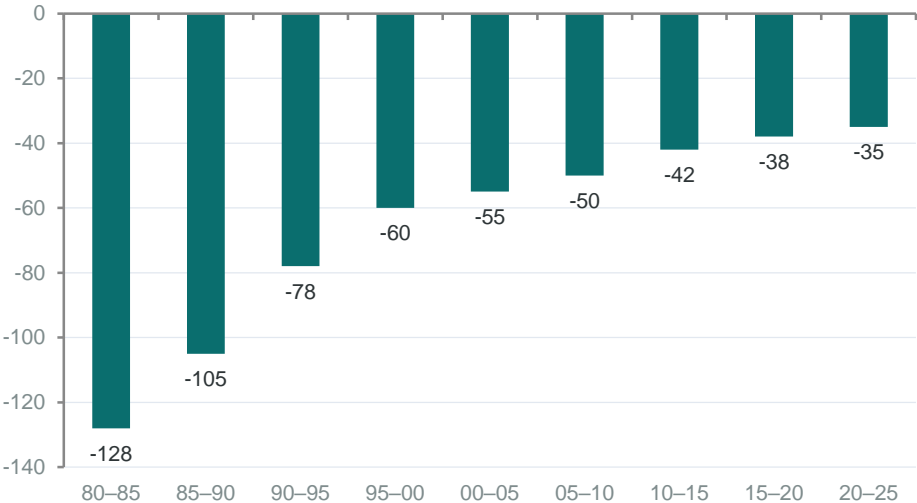
All these countries started at ~71 years in 1990. By 2025, everyone gained 4–14 years, except Jamaica, stuck at 71-72.



Meanwhile, the young and skilled continue to leave.

Migration: A Continuous Drain of People & Skills

Net Migration (thousands per 5-year period)



The Brain Drain

60%

of tertiary-educated Jamaicans live abroad (PIOJ estimate)

~500

specialist nurses lost per year to emigration

Remittances: \$3.36B
(15% of GDP, 2024)

If 60% of graduates leave, what does "investing in education" actually achieve?



*Together, these forces are closing around a
Perfect Storm of Demographic Decline*


**Very Low
Birth Rates**

**High
Emigration**

**The
Perfect
Storm**

**Low Life
Expectancy**

of Demographic Decline

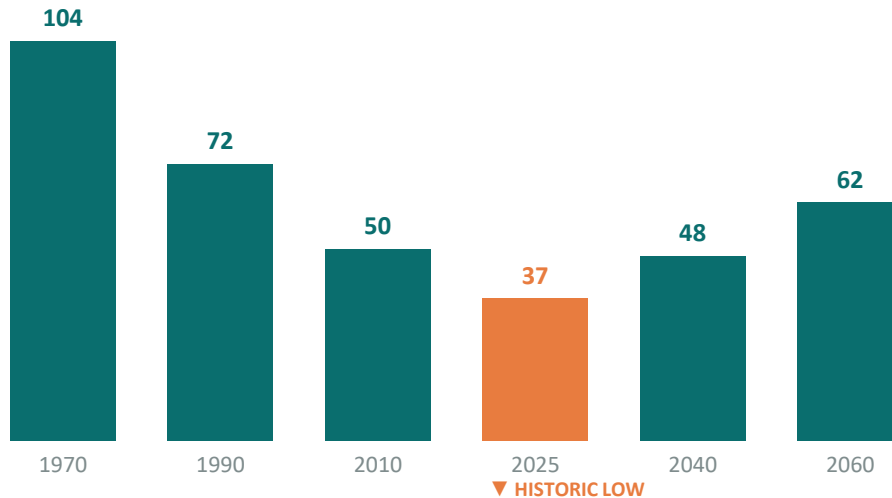


... But also, has generated a once-in-a-generation window of opportunity.

The Closing Window of Opportunity

Dependency Ratio Trajectory

(Dependents per 100 working-age)




Source: UN Population Division, PIOJ National Transfer Accounts

Key Insight

Jamaica's dependency ratio hit a historic low of ~37 in 2025, a time-limited window when the workforce is largest relative to dependents.

Demographic dividends are not automatic. East Asian economies succeeded by investing heavily in education, health, and productivity.

**Jamaica has ~15 years to act.
What should the priority be?**



This is why climate and demography can no longer be treated as separate problems.

Why the Two Transitions Must Be Integrated



Vulnerability Equation

Demography changes who is exposed, who is fragile, who needs help, and who can recover. Smaller households and older populations shift demand from 'more people per unit' to 'more units per person' — increasing housing needs, transport dependence, and reliance on accessible services.




Human Capital Channel

When fertility is below replacement and the workforce tightens, sustainability shifts from 'expand' to 'maintain and adapt.' A smaller workforce can still deliver high-quality services, but only if capability per worker rises and systems become more efficient.




Care & Support Systems

As families shrink and migration reshapes who is available to help, resilience shifts from 'rebuilding assets' to ensuring continuity of care, income, and essential services. In an ageing society, a hurricane is not only a weather event — it is a health-and-care crisis.



For older Jamaicans, sustainability means one thing: that essential services do not collapse when they are needed most.



Sustainability for Older Persons

Cascading Risks for the Elderly

- Power failure →** Medicine refrigeration at risk
- Roads blocked →** Care & emergency referrals delayed
- Staffing disrupted →** Service capacity drops as needs rise
- Networks fractured →** Isolation becomes a direct risk factor
- Chronic conditions →** Require stable routines & monitoring


WHO Healthy Ageing Framework; Vision 2030 Jamaica

Older Persons as Resilience Assets

Many older persons remain active resilience contributors through experience, community ties, caregiving roles, and institutional memory of past shocks.

They hold practical knowledge — safe paths, local drainage behaviour, early warning signals, and the social map of who needs checking on first.

A sustainable approach engages them as advisors and contributors, not just beneficiaries.



For young Jamaicans, it means that shocks do not steal their future.

Sustainability for Young People



Learning Continuity

Establish education continuity protocols for hurricanes. Define 'safe-to-reopen' standards. Implement learning-loss recovery packages after shocks. Surge psychosocial support.



Education-to-Opportunity Pipeline

Link secondary → certified skills → work experience → job placement. Scale paid apprenticeships. Actively recruit women into green recovery trades.



AI & Digital Skills

Phase in AI-in-education framework. Integrate AI/digital skills. Use smaller cohorts as a quality redesign opportunity — higher investment per learner.

Proposed: Youth Results Scorecard — 5 measures tracked annually: learning recovery, return-to-school, job placement (6 mo.), retention (12 mo.), gender balance

A personal question.

**Who cared or are caring
for your parents and
grandparents?**

Who will care for you?



The answer to that question is the foundation of the Purple and Silver Economies.

Building the Purple & Silver Economies

Turning demographic change from a burden into an engine of growth

Purple Economy

Professionalizing the Care Economy

Unpaid care work is valued at 15–45% of GDP, with women generating $\frac{2}{3}$ of that value.


- › Care Economy Fellowships: train & employ youth in home-based elder support
- › Defined occupations & skills pathways
- › Reliable community-level services
- › Continuity when service chains break
- › Align with SDG 5.4 & Vision 2030

Silver Economy

Longevity as Market Opportunity

Population ageing creates new market segments and innovation drivers.

- › Wellness & silver tourism services
- › Age-friendly housing & retrofits (PPPs)
- › Telehealth & assistive technologies
- › Financial inclusion for retirees & diaspora
- › Adapted insurance & pension products
- › Older entrepreneurs & knowledge economy



But none of this works unless the invisible backbone of society, women and the care economy, are finally seen and supported.

Gender, Care & Resilient Recovery

~45%

of Jamaican homes are
female-headed

15–45%

of GDP value from
unpaid care work


$\frac{2}{3}$

of unpaid care value
generated by women

Climate change can deepen gender inequality.

Female headed households often have fewer assets yet carry more unpaid care. Recovery support, cash, housing repairs, and services, must ensure women can rebuild without sacrificing care

Resilient shelters must be designed with adequate lighting, sex-segregated sanitation, and secure partitioning, because violence and harassment spike during displacement. Safety for women and girls is a structural requirement, not an afterthought.



Delivering on these promises requires not only upgrading how Jamaica's institutions connect, coordinate, and respond, but also building the data foundation needed to make informed decisions, monitor outcomes, and validate real impacts.


Making Resilience Operational

Upgrading the state's operating system: from silos to integrated delivery



Population estimation and projection, total and by administrative areas

Goal 10: By 2030, demographic data systems and other institutional capacities and interoperable information, communication and technology (ICT) and civil registration and vital statistics systems are strengthened, to facilitate the provision of relevant, accurate, timely and comprehensive demographic data. **NPSD & PPA**



*The path forward for **adaptation** is clear,
and the time to act is now.*

Reimagining Jamaica's Adaptation

UNDERSTAND

- Upgrade demographic intelligence: interoperable data, geospatial risk targeting, integrated delivery, responsible AI
- Develop modelling of demographic, economic, and social demand scenarios

GOVERN AND ALIGN

- One resilience lens: align climate risk and demographic change in one planning and investment framework

INVEST IN PEOPLE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

- Extend the demographic window: boost productivity and labour participation (women + older workers)
- Turn ageing into growth: shift from a demographic dividend to a longevity dividend , and build the Purple (care) and Silver (ageing markets) economies
- Put human capital of young people at the centre: secure the education-to-opportunity pipeline — foundational learning, market-relevant skills, apprenticeships, and shock-proof first jobs

Reimagining Jamaica's Adaptation

*"If Jamaica aligns adaptation to demographic transition and climate-driven vulnerability (healthy ageing, sustainable pensions and care, productive work across the life course, migration, and equity), it can strengthen national **adaptation** and advance a **resilient and inclusive** development path."*

Did we forget Mitigation?

For Climate change, what needs to be done is well known.

But **what needs to, and can, be done** to face the ‘Perfect Storm of Population Decline’?”

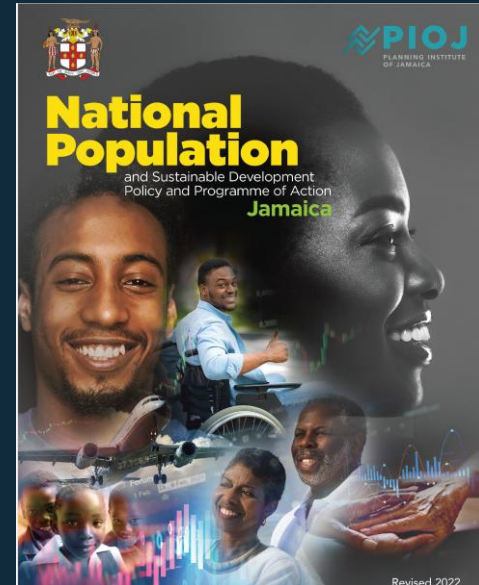



Vision 2030 already set the ambition of a stable population.

The question is: what policies can make it real?

National Population and Sustainable Development Policy

“Goal 2: By 2030, Jamaica’s population size, growth, age-sex structure and spatial distribution are aligned to support sustainable development in all dimensions (social, economic and environmental).”





The question is: From a demographic perspective, what needs to be done to make this happen?

*The first front: Create the conditions for reversing/stopping the **fertility** decline that is shrinking Jamaica's youngest generation.*

Goal 2: By 2030, replacement level fertility of 2.1 is achieved and maintained.
(NPSD-P&PA 2022)



Fertility Decline

UNDERSTANDING:

- Understand and measure well and timely what's happening: desired vs. achieved fertility, timing, parity, childlessness

CREATING CONDITIONS

- Make parenting affordable: childcare, housing, transport, and targeted support for low- and middle-income families
- Make work family-compatible: flexible work protections for pregnant workers, and parental leave
Improve pregnancy and childbirth experience in public facilities (respectful care, quality, continuity)
- Strengthen youth mental health/wellbeing, including digital/social-media harms and services access

ACT ON THE PERCEPTION / ASPIRATIONS

- Launch a Jamaica Population Dialogue (youth, families, private sector, faith/community leaders, all)
- Help Jamaicans become parents earlier if they want (education, counselling, financial planning, workplace support)
- Normalise fertility awareness in schools, primary care, and family planning service.
- Communicate clear messages about children, family life, partnerships



The second front: breaking the three-decade stall in how long Jamaicans live.

Goal 4: By 2030, life expectancy at birth of at least 75 years for males and 80 years for females are achieved and the survival gap between males and females is reduced.

(NPSD-P&PA 2022)



Mortality Stagnation

UNDERSTANDING

- Measure and monitor mortality and life expectancy: overall and by cause, NCDs, injuries/violence, maternal causes, with routine reporting and geography

COMMIT AND GOVERN

- Declare life expectancy stagnation a policy priority, tracking healthy life expectancy (HALE), not only survival

TARGETED PREVENTION FOR HIGH-RISK GROUPS

- Reduce road traffic fatalities
- Reduce preventable violent mortality, especially among young men
- Address mental health as a mortality driver: untreated depression, anxiety, and substance abuse as direct contributors to premature death, not only as wellbeing issues

ACT

- Scale NCD prevention and early detection as a population and economic priority
- Retain and rebuild the health workforce, addressing healthcare brain drain
- Strengthen climate and disaster resilience in the health system, ensuring care during shocks



The third front: keeping Jamaica's talent at home or bringing it back.

Goal 5: By 2030, international migration (immigration and emigration) is managed and mobilized to support Jamaica's national development
(NPSD-P&PA 2022)



Sustained Emigration

UNDERSTANDING

- Establish a migration data management system (flows, skills, destinations, return, impacts) to guide policy and monitor results
- Develop projections of future labour needs by sector, integrating both demographic change and economic scenarios, to anticipate skills gaps before they become crises

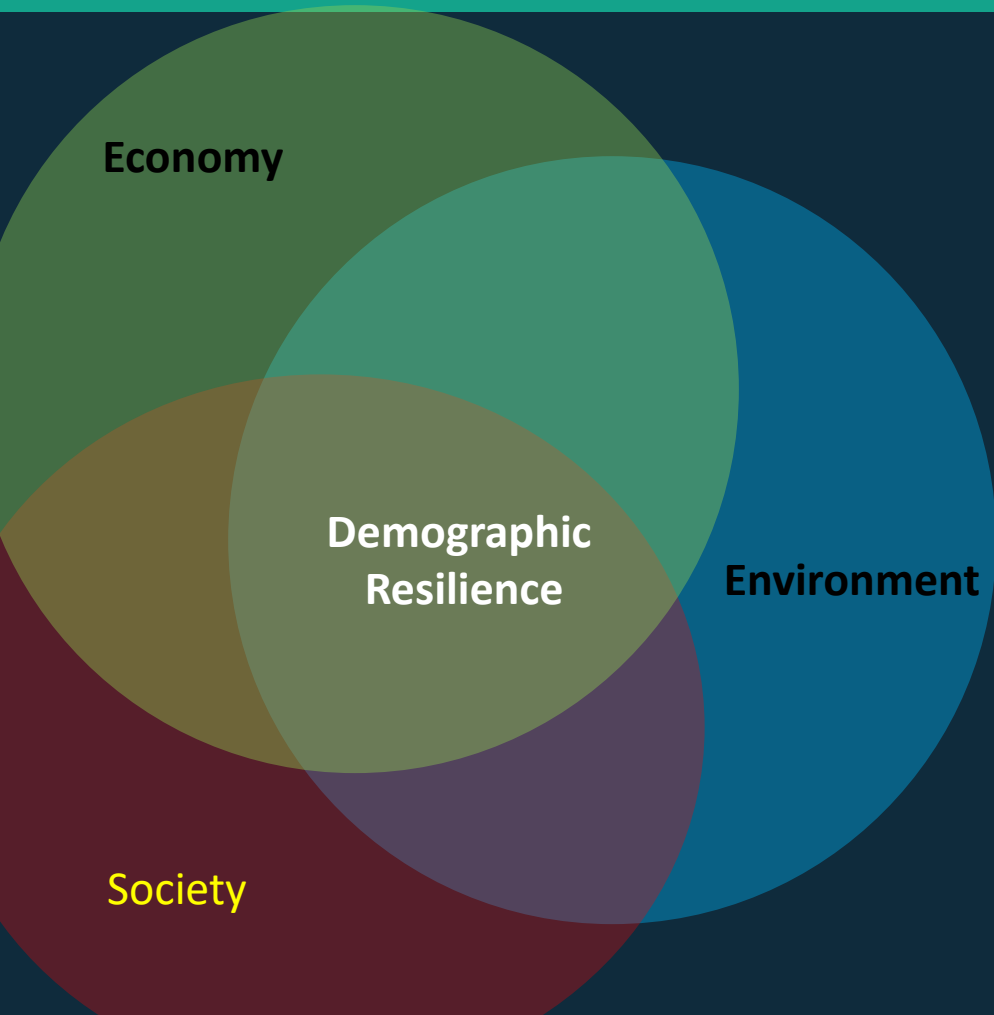
COMMIT AND GOVERN

- Declare talent loss a strategic risk: migration governance through laws, regulations, and bilateral/multilateral agreements to protect rights and maximise development gains
- Reduce push factors: safety, governance, opportunity, and service quality as the most durable retention strategy

TURN THE TIDE

- Implement the National Diaspora Policy as a core instrument of demographic resilience and national development
- Launch a modern Return-to-Jamaica pathway (skills recognition, housing/finance, business facilitation, family reintegration)
- Manage targeted immigration to meet priority skills gaps, paired with strong integration supports

The success of *Jamaica* in successfully navigating this policy road through adaptation and mitigation in the next two or three decades will be heavily defined by the capacity of the country to put *demographic resilience* at the center of the national priorities.



Because...

DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE

IS

AN ECONOMIC ISSUE,
A SOCIAL ISSUE, AND AN
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE.

The time when Demographic Change was
just an add-on
is over!

Conclusion & Call to Action

*The time to harness the shift is **now***

ADAPT Five Imperatives

- 01** One resilience lens: align climate + demography
- 02** Extend the demographic window
- 03** Turn ageing into a longevity dividend
- 04** Put young people at the centre
- 05** Upgrade demographic intelligence

MITIGATE Three Fronts

- 01** Deal with the fertility decline
- 02** Break the life expectancy stall
- 03** Manage emigration strategically

Jamaica has ~15 years to act. Demographic resilience is the foundation of a sustainable, inclusive future.



How feasible do you think this is ?

Thank You

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Any Question?