COVID-19 does not create new patterns of inequalities, rather it exacerbates long existing configurations of injustice and marks them, again, as urgent. A holistic COVID-19 policy response mandates the use of an intersectional perspective that enables vulnerable populations to be identified and equitably supported. In the case of Jamaica, discrimination rooted in racism, classism, misogyny, and anti-LGBT sentiment have become more manifest due to the pandemic. One example is the difference in public perception of compliance with prevention measures and resulting policing strategies. Though there is no official data available, it would seem the likelihood of police intervention, if citizens breach the island-wide curfew, is higher in low-income communities compared to high-income neighborhoods. This suggests a broader phenomenon of low-income communities compared to high-income neighborhoods. This suggests a broader phenomenon of low-income communities that receive more negative public attention, in such a way that members of these communities are not only viewed as disobedient, but appear, in the minds of the public, as the root cause of the spread of the virus. This results in the portrayal of people living in low-income communities as not following government guidelines and contributes to a direct association of low-income people with the spread of the virus. If low-income communities are to be associated with communicable diseases it is not because of the ‘unruliness’ of their residents, but because poverty significantly undermines a person’s capacity to avoid disease and survive it once infected\(^1\). Rather than an indictment on the character of low-income persons, this is a dehumanizing gap in our social support system that has been weaponized against the true victims.

Another example of the predominantly negative impact of the pandemic on people from lower-income backgrounds is the fact that many domestic workers or household helpers have lost their jobs in Jamaica. This may stem from the prejudiced perception of employers who view low-income people as a risk for carrying the virus into their homes, as they are associated with living in areas with a high population density, and in unsanitary living conditions. Shirley Pryce, President of Jamaica Household Workers’ Union noted that many live-out workers were fired because employers were concerned they would contract COVID-19 while utilising public transportation. Other workers had their workdays cut so severely that their financial survivability was threatened. Domestic workers who lived-in with their employers were forced to lock down at their places of work and threatened with dismissal should they leave to visit their families or conduct business. These actions were taken by employers who, themselves, continued to go to work in shared office spaces, engage with friends, and visit numerous establishments to conduct their daily tasks\(^2\).

Domestic workers in Jamaica are protected by law and are entitled to all benefits except maternity leave once they contribute to the National Security Fund. However, since these individuals, who are often women, are mostly unaware of their options they are especially vulnerable to exploitation and – as such – function without legal or social protection. The precariousness of these jobs disproportionately impacts this population group and exacerbates inequalities.

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\(^1\) For more see Poverty, Global Health, and Infectious Disease: Lessons from Haiti and Rwanda.

\(^2\) For more on COVID 19 and Domestic Workers.
Jamaica’s response to COVID-19, though admirable, highlights yet another inequality. Domestic workers, as a group, were not specially selected to receive the Government’s fiscal stimulus cash package. Those who wished to apply for the package had to do so online, but many domestic workers were ill equipped to navigate the digital space or unable to purchase data packages to access the website. This digital inequality extends deep into access to online education as both teachers and students face significant barriers, especially in low income and rural areas.

While it is understood that women are a vulnerable group it is essential to recognize and respond to the fact women who are deemed unrespectable may be doubly excluded. For instance, overtly sexual and sexually active young women are viewed as careless and ‘calling violence on to themselves’. This shapes the level of support they receive when reporting sexual assault to community and police. Their access to formal or informal safe spaces may be curtailed by gatekeepers who judge them based on their appearance and behaviour. Similarly, women with poor educational attainment and multiple children are viewed as bringing poverty and even violence ‘on themselves’ through their ‘choice to remain dependent by having many children and no education’. Their requests for support from family, community and State may be denied to ‘teach them a lesson’ or because they and their children are a ‘burden’. It is critical that these types of intersectional exclusion be considered for a targeted policy response to gender-based violence, which has increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Government programs need to deliberately include women in these positions and situations who have low access to emergency shelters and funds.

Another segment of society that has been found to be especially vulnerable when assessing the effects of COVID-19 and related preventive measures in the Caribbean is members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Data from J-FLAG shows that over 25% of LGBTQIA+ persons surveyed were gravely affected by job loss and financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LGBTQIA+ persons [have been] gravely affected by job loss and financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people had to return from the capital, Kingston, to live with their families in rural areas. This has a particular impact on people who have changed their gender expressions, where the low social acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people puts them at increased risk of being subject to violence and discrimination.

The challenges of developing full-fledged cash transfer programmes, school feeding programmes and increased social spending have to be understood in the context of broader inequalities between countries that has been deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability of many Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to develop their social safety net and fund social programmes that cushion the socio-economic effects of the pandemic is limited by debt-servicing obligations to international finan-
With a view to the national response to COVID-19, there is a need for a targeted and measured policy response that proceeds from a thorough analysis of intersecting inequalities and caters to the needs of different populations such as rural, low-income women, LGBTQIA+ people, youth and single parent households, in a SIDS context.

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