UNICEF Jamaica Hurricane Melissa

Humanitarian Situation Report No. 7

unicef
for every child



Over 100,000 children continue to feel the impact of the hurricane on their lives through damage to their homes and schools, forcing some into unstable learning environments or causing them to miss classes altogether. UNICEF distributed 92 classroom tents and 1000 tarpaulins to support learning recovery for children. (December 2025).

Reporting Period: 9 January 2026 – 23 February 2026

Situation in Numbers

280,000 children in need of humanitarian assistance (UNICEF)

739,000 people affected (ODPEM)

284 people taking refuge in 43 shelters (16 Feb. ODPEM)

Highlights

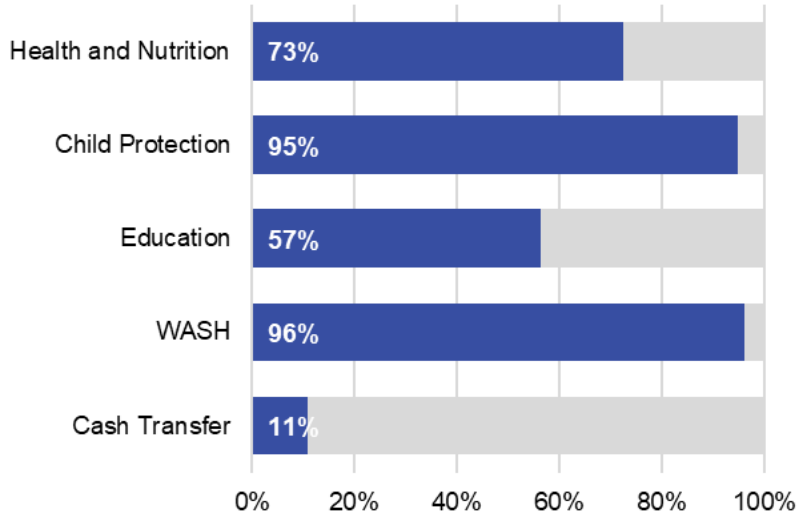
- Following Hurricane Melissa, UNICEF provided health and nutrition supplies for 100,000 people to health facilities, reached over 53,900 people with safe water, delivered hygiene supplies to 25,000 people, provided over 4,000 children with psychosocial support services, and distributed tents, tarps and school supplies benefiting over 55,000 children in the most affected areas of the country.
- UNICEF also provided 38,000 households living in poverty with cash assistance, while 300 people with disabilities were provided with digital vouchers allowing them to purchase basic necessities.
- School classes resumed at the start of January, but access to quality education remains constrained in many locations due to damaged classrooms, the start of construction repairs on classrooms, and people still sheltering in some schools.

UNICEF Jamaica activities and presence (by Community)

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Funding Overview & Partnerships



Funding availability by sector shows significant variation. Further investment in education and cash transfers would help to reduce learning loss among the most vulnerable.

UNICEF is engaging and coordinating with donors and private sector partners to secure timely, flexible funding for recovery priorities in support of the government and the most affected communities. UNICEF is grateful to its partners that have contributed to the response: American Friends of Jamaica, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, National Commercial Bank (NCB) Foundation, Spain, United Kingdom, United States of America (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration) and anonymous trusts and donors.

Sustained donor support has translated into the rapid restoration of critical services and meeting immediate needs. These partnerships are also strengthening national systems, enabling institutions to recover faster, respond better, and build resilience.

UNICEF will continue to advocate for and support sustainable recovery which places children's needs, rights, and potential at the centre — from rebuilding schools and health facilities to restoring water systems and protection networks.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Three and a half months after Hurricane Melissa hit the country, Jamaica continues to face a humanitarian situation marked by extensive infrastructure damage, widespread disruptions in education and public health risks in the most affected parishes as the country transitions to recovery.

These impacts compound existing inequities, with 15.7 per cent of children in the country living in poverty and significantly higher rates in rural areas, alongside persistent gaps in services for children with disabilities.

Public health concerns remain however, disease surveillance and water-quality testing are ongoing in the most affected communities, and recent reports show that the trend of new leptospirosis cases is now on the decline. The Ministry of Health and Wellness has also been monitoring immunization uptake and is engaging communities through RCCE interventions as needed to ensure continued uptake of health services.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness reports that 92% of dietetic and nutrition services in affected parishes have been restored, however, equipment, supplies, infrastructure repairs and capacity building in nutrition in emergencies are ongoing needs. Nutrition service restoration is ongoing through mobile clinics (Westmoreland), community outreach, home visits for at risk babies, capacity building and shelter-based nutrition education, breastfeeding counselling and screening.

Water and power services continue to recover: The National Water Commission has increased restoration coverage to approximately 95 per cent of customers (connections). Despite this progress, 111 water systems remain non-functional. In addition, several restored systems are facing elevated turbidity levels and intermittent supply, affecting service reliability in some communities. International technical teams are supporting ongoing power restoration works. Full stabilization of the remaining systems is expected within the next few weeks.



UNICEF partner, Eve for Life, provides psychosocial support sessions for children from the Sandy Bay community in the parish of Hanover. (20 December 2025).

All child protection regular services are operational in the most affected areas of the country. However, there are still challenges with telecommunications in some regions, which could be hindering reporting channels for children and requests for assistance in some locations.

School classes resumed at the start of January 2026, with all 1,010 public institutions reopened to varying degrees. Education remains constrained in many locations due to damaged classrooms, school construction repairs, and from people sheltering in some school classrooms. Nine schools are still serving as shelters for 100 people in the parishes of Hanover and Westmoreland. School repairs are underway in approximately 200 public infant, primary and secondary schools that were damaged by the hurricane. Additional schools that had also been damaged are targeted for repairs in the coming weeks and months.

Prior to the hurricane, public schools in the hardest-hit areas provided daily classes to 169,698 students. Although schools have reopened and some children have returned, the majority have not yet resumed the full number of instructional hours. This situation remains serious, as current measures—such as rotational attendance, blended learning, and the use of printed learning materials—while helpful in reducing learning loss, are not sufficient to restore normal schooling. The disruption to learning therefore persists and continues to affect most students in the impacted areas.

Updated data from the private/community run early childhood institutions (ECIs) indicate 483 facilities with minor to severe damage in the most affected parishes and 180 damaged in other parishes, impacting some 24,143 students aged 2-6 islandwide.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

UNICEF is delivering a comprehensive, multisectoral humanitarian response to Hurricane Melissa in close coordination with the Government of Jamaica, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), line ministries, local authorities and other partners.

The response has transitioned from immediate relief to early recovery, with partners prioritizing the restoration of essential services, safe school operations and community-based protection systems. Child protection actors are strengthening case management services, and the establishment and rolling out of psychosocial support activities for children through mobile and static child friendly spaces, while education partners are working to expand access to learning for all children across the most affected parishes. Health, WASH and Education partners are rebuilding damaged infrastructure, while social protection support is expanding with targeted assistance to the most affected and highly vulnerable children living in the hardest hit parishes.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Since the passage of Hurricane Melissa, UNICEF has ensured a consistent supply of safe water to 53,900 people living in communities in the worst affected parishes through water trucking, water treatment, and through the provision of water purification tablets, water tanks, jerry cans, and buckets.



A father and his son access a UNICEF-supported safe drinking water station installed as part of emergency response efforts in Westmoreland (15 January 2026).



UNICEF's Climate, DRR & WASH Focal Point, Camille Beckford Palmer and Water Mission representatives assess one of the water treatment sites in Westmoreland (15 January 2026).

In Westmoreland, UNICEF, in partnership with Water Mission International, has significantly scaled up safe water operations. To date, a total of 6.46 million litres of water were treated and 4.88 million litres were trucked and distributed across 30 distribution sites in the parish. The interventions have reached approximately 50,023 people, ensuring continued access to safe water in the affected communities. The phase-out of UNICEF's partner, Water Mission International, was completed in February 2026, with coordinated handover arrangements to national counterparts to ensure the ongoing provision of safe water for surrounding communities.

Since late October 2025, UNICEF has reached 25,600 people with hygiene supplies and has provided over 100 schools with cleaning supplies. In the coming weeks, an additional 200 schools will receive cleaning supplies, while 3,800 families will receive hygiene kits. Additionally, 5,400 water containers (10 litre jerry cans) will be distributed to communities for safe water collection. UNICEF's partners have also facilitated the distribution of over 1000 tarpaulins of varying sizes, 4000 buckets (14l) with taps and 1,000 mosquito nets to displaced and vulnerable households.

Generators and other equipment needed for the restoration of three damaged water systems servicing over 15 communities in St. Elizabeth have been procured to the National Water Commission (NWC). Additionally, 5 rural water catchment facilities in Westmoreland are being rehabilitated, while 20 communal water points across affected parishes are being installed. In partnership with Rural Water Supply Limited, UNICEF is supporting the replacement of solar panels at three rural water systems in St. James and St. Elizabeth, strengthening system resilience and restoring operational capacity.

UNICEF also continues to rehabilitate water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure that was damaged from the hurricane in schools and health facilities. UNICEF is targeting 50 schools and 20 health facilities for this restoration and rehabilitation work. The work will take the next few months to complete.

Health & Nutrition

UNICEF continued its health and nutrition support to children and their caregivers across nine severely affected communities in St. Elizabeth (Black River, Kilmarnock, Sellington, Cutterwood, Forest Mountain, Vineyard and Brompton), Westmoreland (Porter's Mountain) and Hanover (Sandy Bay). Among these communities, several were identified as high-burden, hard-to-reach communities where pre-existing vulnerabilities were compounded by storm damage.

Community and school-based psychosocial interventions exceeded planned targets and strengthened community-based systems especially as it concerns child safeguarding, GBV prevention and support. Small-group sessions, caregiver circles and outreach activities reached 1,711 community members, enhancing

coping with disaster-related stress, emotional regulation, GBV awareness and family resilience. Structured sessions in shelters and schools reached 701 children and adolescents, incorporating trauma-informed play, storytelling, personal safety guidance and age-appropriate GBV awareness. Participants demonstrated improved emotional expression, increased understanding of reporting mechanisms, and greater awareness of available support services. In parallel, 12 shelter managers and community volunteers (target achieved) were oriented in basic MHPSS principles, identification of psychosocial distress and safe referral processes, reinforcing community-level safeguarding and coordination mechanisms.

Digital components further expanded reach with some 7,000 impressions recorded for key social media messages, including messaging on coping strategies, identification of distress, and promotion of help-seeking behaviour and GBV reporting pathways.



A health and nutrition assessment of a baby in the hurricane impacted parishes. November 2025.

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) and partners, continues to strengthen essential nutrition supplies and services for children under 5 and for pregnant and lactating women focusing on restoring service delivery and reinforcing both community, and facility-based, nutrition systems prioritizing 6 of the most affected parishes.

In the aftermath of the Hurricane, UNICEF, in collaboration with the MOHW trained 25 nutrition professionals on in-depth rapid nutrition needs assessment. In November 2026, UNICEF, in collaboration with the MOHW, led an in-depth rapid nutrition assessment in the six mos. t affected parishes. The findings highlight urgent nutrition needs and will guide interventions for children, pregnant and breastfeeding women and other vulnerable groups. To protect and support breastfeeding UNICEF and PAHO/WHO issued a joint position statement to discourage donation of breast milk substitutes (BMS) in emergencies as these products pose health risks due to contamination, improper preparation, and can interfere with breastfeeding, increasing the vulnerability of infants to malnutrition and disease.

More than 82,000 Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) tapes and ten scales were provided to the MOHW for distribution to health facilities in the affected parishes, strengthening national capacity to screen approximately 15,000 children under five for acute malnutrition. To prevent critical nutrient deficiencies among 15,000 children under five and 3,600 pregnant women, the MOHW also received 45,000 packs of micronutrient supplements and 360,000 iron and folic acid tablets for onward distribution. In addition, 780 cases of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) were supplied to support the treatment of severe acute malnutrition in children under 5, while 75 cartons of high-energy, high-protein biscuits were provided to address immediate nutritional needs among more than 100 pregnant and lactating women.

To strengthen the country's nutrition emergency response systems, in December 2025, UNICEF partnered with the Global Nutrition Cluster (GNC) to facilitate Nutrition in Emergencies training for 21 key MOHW nutrition staff at central and parish levels as well as the development of protocols for the identification, treatment and management of acute malnutrition. UNICEF has begun work to build the capacity of health workers in the identification, management of acute malnutrition as well as community-based NGOs and community health workers to deliver infant and young child feeding support. UNICEF is targeting 600 health workers and 30 community-based staff for capacity building. UNICEF is collaborating with the government to strengthen Nutrition Surveillance systems, scale-up Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) counselling and establish mother child friendly spaces in communities and health facilities. Furthermore, in collaboration with partner the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), UNICEF plans to support the delivery of community based integrated nutrition, mental health and psychosocial support and water hygiene and sanitation (WASH) interventions targeting families with children under 2 years of age and community stakeholders in affected

parishes. As the sector lead for Nutrition, UNICEF will continue collaboration with the MOHW to establish and co-chair the Nutrition Sector Working Group which aims to guide the identification of critical needs, map partner interventions and strengthen coherence across nutrition responses to maximise impact for affected populations.

In response to the heightened risk of leptospirosis following sustained flooding and environmental contamination caused by Hurricane Melissa, UNICEF is working closely with MOHW to reinforce community-level prevention and awareness efforts. UNICEF is supporting the reproduction and wide-scale dissemination of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials, including posters, flyers, media, and radio public service announcements, targeting communities with elevated exposure risk due to disrupted water systems, damaged sanitation infrastructure and increased rodent activity.

To further strengthen the national response, UNICEF and the MOHW convened a sensitization and capacity-building session with 20 civil society organizations (CSOs) operating across the affected parishes. The session focused on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), equipping partners with practical tips and tools to promote leptospirosis prevention behaviours, reinforce key WASH messages (safe water handling, household hygiene and sanitation), and support food safety practices during the recovery period. Strengthening the RCCE competencies of CSOs helps expand the reach of public health messaging, ensuring that communities receive consistent, actionable guidance that reduces disease transmission during the post-disaster phase.



Health Specialist Novia Condell at a clinic with partners. (11 Jan 2026).

Data collection has now been completed for the Cold Chain Assessment. The capacities of 240 health facilities have been assessed, and cold chain system gaps have been identified. The results of the assessment will form the basis of an action plan to improve cold chain capacities in terms of procurement of climate resilient equipment and the improving capacities of key health care workers including nurses, doctors, community health aids and technicians. UNICEF will provide technical support for the analysis of the data and will work with key partners including PAHO/WHO to address gaps.

Education


A teacher conducts lessons in a UNICEF-supported tent in Westmoreland. (14 Jan 2026).

UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information (MOESYI) to safeguard continuity of learning following Hurricane Melissa. All schools across the most affected areas are operational using various modalities.

To expand access to safe learning spaces, 92 tents (24, 48 and 72 sq. m) are in use islandwide, with the majority going to schools in St. Elizabeth, St. Ann, Trelawny, St. James, Hanover and Westmoreland. Over 1,000 tarps of varying sizes are also supporting access to learning across the most affected parishes, providing roofing for damaged classrooms. Together these supplies are providing classroom spaces for over 53,000 students.

UNICEF is also supporting the MOESYI's production of 90,000 copies/volume (3 volumes per grade) of catch-up learning kits/workbooks for all students in grades 1-6 across the most affected parishes with students outside of those areas able to access online. Each volume contains core UNICEF provided, Social Behaviour

Change SBC and related content in Health/Nutrition, WASH, Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) and Child Protection.

Complementing the MOESYI's distribution and installation of 150 Starlink devices, 15 Hispasat connectivity devices are also being installed in schools identified by the MOESYI Management Information Systems Unit (MIS).

With support from the National Education Trust (NET) and the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) UNICEF has distributed 40 school-in-a-box sets, 39 Early Childhood Development (ECD) kits and 19 recreation kits to schools in the most affected areas of the country. These supplies are supporting over 3,500 students and 79 teachers and are critical for the resumption of learning. Another 312 Early Childhood Development (ECD) kits will be distributed to partners in the coming week. These kits will support the continued learning of 21,000 additional children once delivered.

In terms of teacher capacity building and support, UNICEF continues to deliver play-based psychosocial first aid (PFA) trainings to early childhood staff and practitioners in partnership with Early Starters International. The trainings focus on age-appropriate activities including strategies on how best to maximise the supplies in UNICEF's Early Childhood Education kits.

Weekly outreach visits continue to early childhood institutions, providing capacity development of additional personnel and teachers in psychological first aid for young children. To date, close to 800 early childhood practitioners have been exposed to this methodology and have engaged with some 800 children. PFA training is also underway for over 1,000 teachers, counsellors and volunteers at the infant, primary and secondary levels to strengthen the Guidance Unit's existing UNICEF supported Communities of Care (COC) network. Nearly 200 COC members and teachers have already participated in sessions that feature UNICEF's Return to Happiness methodology (F2F and online). Play-based PFA kits are being procured in country, and together these activities will benefit approximately 20,000 students.

UNICEF continues to coordinate meetings of the Education Technical Working Group (TWG) focused on leveraging partnerships to facilitate the return of more students to regular schooling and support additional PFA efforts including the staging of the annual Play Day on 4 February which saw many foundations, companies and others visiting schools to explore the use of play as a teaching, learning and mental health tool.

Child Protection

Since late October 2025, UNICEF, in partnership with the Children First Agency, ISRAAID, and the Jamaica Red Cross, supported children and caregivers affected by Hurricane Melissa through Psychological First Aid, community-based psychosocial support, violence prevention interventions, referral services, and resilience-building activities. These interventions were delivered through fixed and mobile Child-Friendly Spaces, as well as community and school-based platforms, with the aim of restoring a sense of safety and normalcy and helping children cope with the emotional impact of the hurricane. The response prioritized strong community engagement and flexible psychosocial approaches, recognizing the heightened vulnerability of children and caregivers during the recovery phase. UNICEF also supported the Child Protection and Family Services Agency in providing emergency supplies and psychosocial services to children living in state and foster care across affected parishes. Across eight parishes, UNICEF and its implementing partners reached 4,114 children and caregivers with psychosocial support, including 3,902 children (2,193 girls). In addition, 468 children identified as requiring individual care and protection were referred to specialized state services, reinforcing protection systems and ensuring timely access to critical support.

To strengthen leadership and coordination across the child protection response, a national Government-led Child Protection Working Group was formally launched for the first time. A mapping tool and a real-time dashboard were developed to enhance the visibility, tracking, and effectiveness of interventions. UNICEF will continue to support the Government of Jamaica in institutionalizing this coordination mechanism beyond the Hurricane Melissa response and expanding its mandate to encompass recovery and emergency preparedness.



Children building creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking while completing a puzzle in a UNICEF-supported child friendly space in St. Elizabeth (6 February 2026).



UNICEF's Nutrition Officer, Vonetta Nurse (right) and a Children's First Agency team member, engage with children at a child friendly space in St. Elizabeth (14 January 2026).

Humanitarian Cash Assistance

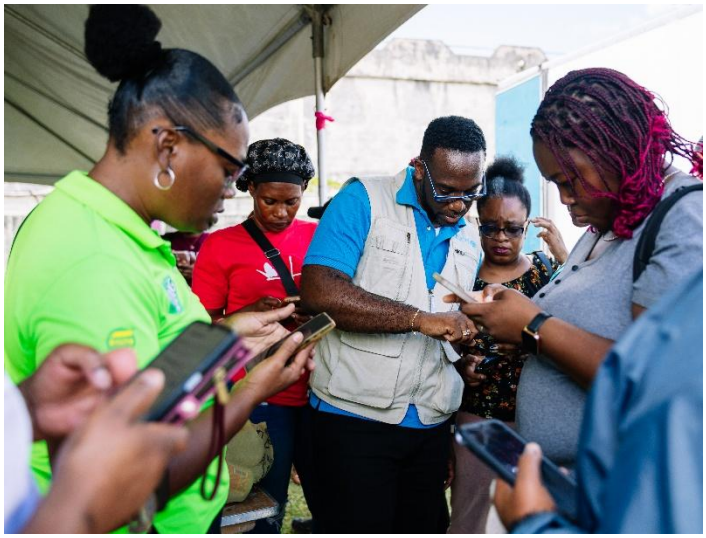
Through the integration of digital innovation and evidence-based tools, national systems are becoming faster, more accurately targeted, and more inclusive of vulnerable populations. UNICEF has supported the Government of Jamaica in delivering the first round of emergency cash assistance to 38,000 households enrolled in PATH (Jamaica's national cash transfer programme) across the most affected areas, reaching an estimated 79,000 individuals.

Since the launch of the Benefit Level Calculator (BLC) in December 2025, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) has used the tool to inform transfer values within its recovery support programme. This has supported the delivery of cash assistance to over 50,000 households severely affected by Hurricane Melissa, ensuring allocations reflect actual household needs when paired with household damage assessment data. This approach supports families, restoring food security, and taking early steps toward recovery with greater autonomy.

As of January 2026, more than 83,000 (92% of the estimated households affected) household assessments had been completed, supported by new digital devices. The MLSS activated a maximum-deployment strategy, mobilizing over 540 assessors to complete data collection. With technical support from UNICEF and other UN agencies, the MLSS continues to provide a digital self-reporting system, allowing families to submit damage information online and triggering follow-up verification by trained assessors.

The UNICEF funded My JCPD platform is now fully operational, offering an accessible, centralized system that streamlines registration, disability verification, and benefit access for children with disabilities. Designed to meet international accessibility standards and optimized for both mobile and desktop devices, the platform supports more equitable service delivery across the country. To date 300 persons with disabilities have received flexible humanitarian aid in the form of digital vouchers. A visually impaired user confirmed the system's accessibility, noting its compatibility with screen-reader technology and ease of use during a voucher transaction. *"My screen reader had no major challenges accessing the information; I used my voucher to purchase a meal. Not only did the cashier confirm that they use the digital card, but I was told that there is actually a sign placed prominently beside the cashier to inform customers. She scanned my voucher and a notification came up on my phone informing me of the value of the transaction. That was also very*

accessible to me via my screen reader. All in all, a good system and it is certainly quite useable by blind and visually impaired individuals using a screen reader on their phone."





Social Policy Officer, Andre Miller, helps community members from St. James with downloading and accessing the My JCPD App during a community outreach activity with the JCPD (17 February).

Child Safeguarding including Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)



UNICEF Child Protection Specialist, Ivana Chapcakova, conducts a Victim Assistance Protocol training with stakeholders (26 January 2026).

UNICEF provided continued support to all its implementing partners in reinforcing and adapting their SEA prevention mechanisms to address safeguarding risks in emergency settings. Regular coaching of partners' PSEA Focal Points strengthened their technical capacity on prevention and response measures, enabling them to independently oversee, monitor, and implement safeguarding actions within their organizations. Partner staff have been trained, and training materials have been shared with focal points to enable them to deliver PSEA sessions to new staff.

Contextualized communication materials on PSEA have been developed for both internal use and affected communities and disseminated.

UNICEF has maintained active participation in the inter-agency PSEA Network, contributing to coordination meetings, training and advancing strategies for SEA risk mitigation in emergencies. Inter-sectoral collaboration has been strengthened through strategic engagement with emergency response sectors, and close coordination with the GBV sub-cluster has ensured alignment of survivor assistance and referral pathways for GBV and SEA cases.

Communication and Advocacy

UNICEF's partnership with donors was prominently showcased through organized field visits to key programme sites, where partners observed first-hand the impact of interventions supporting child-friendly spaces, WASH facilities, and temporary classroom tents. These visits strengthened donor engagement and highlighted the tangible results of their contributions in advancing safe, protective, and enabling environments for children. The visits were captured for social media placement.



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Jamaica's recovery must put children first

Olga Isaza

GUEST COLUMNIST

ALMOST FOUR months after Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica, the headlines are understandably moving away from response priorities. Electricity is returning, and daily life is resuming, but for thousands of Jamaican children, the storm is far from over.

Across the hardest-hit parishes, children are still learning in tents or damaged classrooms. Some attend school on rotation because there are not enough safe spaces. Others are staying with relatives, separated from friends and routines that once anchored their stability. Many get agitated when it rains, a reminder of a trauma that has not yet lost its grip.

When UNICEF teams visit these communities, however, we see something remarkable. What shines through children's eyes is extraordinary determination and resilience. That determination places a responsibility on all of us to ensure that Jamaica's recovery is not just about rebuilding infrastructure, but about safeguarding children's futures.

After Hurricane Melissa, more than 280,000 children across Jamaica needed humanitarian assistance with about 100,000 outside formal social protection coverage. Working closely with the Jamaican government, we along with national and international partners, have supported the transition from immediate response to early recovery for children including those with disabilities.

Safe water has been restored for more than 53,000 people, hygiene supplies have reached 26,000, temporary learning spaces and school materials have benefited over 55,000 students, and more than 1,500 children have received psychosocial support while another 100,000 people have been reached with health and nutrition supplies to prevent critical deficiencies. These numbers matter but what they represent matters even more ...ensuring every child has a chance to survive and thrive.

CANNOT BE LEFT BEHIND

Any serious effort to put children first must confront the disproportionate impact of Hurricane Melissa on children with disabilities and their families. These households face higher care and transport costs at a time when livelihoods have been disrupted, yet existing social protection programmes were not designed to fully absorb these additional burdens.

Working with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, UNICEF has prioritised cash support designed to help families meet urgent needs after a disaster. In parallel, a new digital voucher system developed with the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) is providing targeted assistance to families of children with disabilities, reducing barriers to access and ensuring support reaches those most at risk of being left behind. This approach is not only helping families cope now; it is strengthening Jamaica's social protection system for the future.

Progress after Melissa cannot be sustained without reliable water and sanitation. Disrupted systems and widespread flooding triggered a surge in water- and vector-borne diseases, including cases of leptospirosis, dengue and other illnesses. These are not abstract public health threats. They are daily risks for children whose immune systems are still developing.

UNICEF's WASH interventions, water trucking and treatment plants, hygiene kits, and rehabilitation of water systems, have helped stabilize conditions in the most affected communities. But with connections still awaiting full restoration, and with damaged facilities in schools and health centres, the job is not finished.

LEARNING RECOVERY

Schools reopened at the start of January yet access to quality education remains uneven. Exam-grade students are prioritised for daily instruction, while younger children often attend on rotation or learn from home with limited support. The risk is clear as prolonged disruption can turn temporary learning loss into permanent disadvantage for many children. If children disengage now, Jamaica risks losing them to poverty, violence and long-term exclusion.

Learning recovery must therefore be bold and comprehensive for every child. It is not enough for some children to be physically present at school. They must be learning, supported and motivated to stay. UNICEF's work in providing 92 classroom tents and 1,000 tarpaulins to schools in western Jamaica, learning kits benefiting 3,500 children, along with teacher training and play-based psychosocial support, is helping ensure that children can continue learning, heal from trauma, and regain a sense of normalcy. Scaling these efforts requires sustained investment and coordinated policy decisions that prioritize education as a cornerstone of national recovery.

HEALING INVISIBLE WOUNDS

The emotional toll after the hurricane is less visible than damaged roofs and livelihoods, but just as real. Children who experienced displacement, loss or fear carry those experiences into classrooms. Left unaddressed, trauma can undermine learning, behaviour and long-term wellbeing.

UNICEF and partners have supported psychosocial care through child-friendly spaces, community outreach and training for teachers and volunteers in psychological first aid. Children cannot learn if they do not feel safe, emotionally as well as physically. Without support, displaced children face not only emotional and learning challenges but also an increased risk of exploitation and violence, making interventions more urgent.

Recovery efforts that overlook health and nutrition risk leaving the youngest and most vulnerable behind. We have been working with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and local partners, to train health and community workers to fight acute malnutrition, support infant and young child feeding, and deliver high-energy protein biscuits to protect pregnant and lactating women from deficiencies. Mobile clinics are restoring health services in the most affected areas.

Our work in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa has been made possible through strong partnerships with government, international donors, civil society groups, and communities, underscoring that no single actor can respond effectively alone. Sustained donor support has translated into the rapid restoration of critical services and meeting immediate needs. These partnerships are also strengthening national systems, enabling institutions to recover faster, respond better, and build resilience.

Sustainable recovery stands at a decisive crossroads. As the humanitarian response transitions to long-term rebuilding, choices made now – through budgets, policies, and partnerships – will define Jamaica's path forward.

Government, partners, and decision makers have a unique opportunity to invest in children – not only to restore what was lost, but to build stronger, more inclusive systems that safeguard every child's right to learn, be healthy, and protected.

Applying a child lens to recovery means placing children's needs, rights, and potential at the centre of planning — from rebuilding schools and health facilities to restoring water systems and social protection networks. When recovery starts with children in mind, every dollar spent today lays the foundation for Jamaica's long term growth and human development. Keep children at the heart of recovery, Jamaica's present and future depends on it.

Olga Isaza is the representative of UNICEF Jamaica. Send feedback to columns@gleanerjm.com

UNICEF JAMAICA

Children, facilitators, and community members gather outside a UNICEF-supported temporary learning space.

Strategic visibility was further amplified through a news feature on the deployment of satellite connectivity to schools and health facilities as well as community hubs enabled by HISPASAT, made possible with the support of the European Union and Embassy of Spain in Jamaica, underscoring innovation in ensuring continuity of learning and access to services. The electronic media followed up on this story with an interview with our Senior ICT Associate who spoke about UNICEF's work in the field and the benefits to communities that were restored. Additionally, an op-ed was developed calling on policymakers to put children first in the national recovery efforts. This reinforced UNICEF's advocacy for child-responsive policies and sustained investment in children during the recovery phase.

Humanitarian Leadership and Coordination

Coordination platforms are established, with UNICEF co-leading, with line-ministries, the WASH, Nutrition and Education sectors, as well as the child protection working group and the cash transfer woking group. These coordinated efforts are helping to strengthen national systems and accelerate a safe and sustainable transition to recovery, while ensuring that the most vulnerable and those in most need are reached with services and support in a timely manner.

UNICEF continues to work in close coordination with national and regional emergency mechanisms, including the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), the United Nations Emergency Technical Team (UNETT) and coordination forums. UNICEF also continues to work closely with donors, implementing partners and key government agencies to ensure an effective and efficient response.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

Local and international media coverage, supported by UNICEF's Private Fundraising and Partnerships (PFP) team, helped amplify the impact of UNICEF's response. Features in prominent outlets such as *The European Sting* highlighted the scale of the crisis and UNICEF's child-focused interventions, using human interest stories to raise awareness, mobilize global support, and engage donors.

- Olga Isaza: Jamaica's Recovery must put children first – The Gleaner
- UNICEF Joins Partners to Bring Communities Back Online after Hurricane Melissa
- Jamaica Celebrates the Power of Play
- Leaving No Child Behind: Regional Conference ends with call for children to be central to recovery and resilience in the Caribbean - Jamaica Observer
- UNICEF urges play for children during the holidays - The Gleaner
- UNICEF Drives Education Recovery in Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa - Jamaica Observer
- UNICEF Regional Director for LAC calls on Foreign Minister
- Restoring Education: How UNICEF is helping children return to safe learning after Hurricane Melissa
- UNICEF Provides J$187.2 million to Support Children with Disabilities and Children on PATH
- New Health and WASH Strategy Rolled out with UNICEF Support – Jamaica Information Service
- NCB Foundation and UNICEF strengthen public health protection – Jamaica Observer
- UNICEF intensifies support for children with disabilities: Jamaica Information Service
- UNICEF assisting children and families affected by Hurricane: Jamaica Information Service
- Building a Jamaica where not child is left behind: UNICEF USA
- Through the lens: Documenting Resilience after Hurricane Melissa: UNICEF Jamaica
- UK Minister pledges long-term support to Jamaica: The Gleaner
- Together for Jordan: The Power of Community in the face of the storm: UNICEF Jamaica

- Update on Jordan: UNICEF Instagram
- UNICEF signs MOU to expand Child-Centred Hurricane Relief: Press Reader/The Gleaner
- Hurricane Melissa Disrupts Schooling for nearly 477,000 children across the Caribbean: Radio Guantanamo
- Thirteen learning tents deployed, Minister of Education says thanks: Instagram collab post
- Twenty nutrition professionals trained: UNICEF Instagram
- CERF providing $4M to support recovery: UN Jamaica Instagram
- Hurricane Melissa updates, one month after: UNICEF Instagram
- UNICEF's appeal video: UNICEF Instagram
- World Children's Day and a Broken Jamaica: The Gleaner
- After the storm: Young Jordan's diabetes struggle: Jamaica Observer
- New Health and WASH Strategy Rolled Out with UNICEF Support: Jamaica Information Service
- After the storm: How Jordan is surviving diabetes post Hurricane Melissa: UNICEF Jamaica
- Supporting Children in Jamaica in the wake of Hurricane Melissa: Forbes
- Half of Jamaica reeling from Hurricane Melissa: The European Sting

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