



WORLD BANK GROUP

SHARED METRICS, SHARED PROGRESS:

Insights from
harmonized data on
poverty and inequality
in Caribbean countries

October 2025

Summary



This brief analyzes poverty and inequality in six Caribbean countries—**Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Suriname**—for which recent harmonized microdata are available.



Monetary poverty remains a concern for the Caribbean countries analyzed here; **between roughly 10 and 25 percent of people live below the poverty line** for upper middle-income countries of **\$8.30/day**.



Poverty's strong link to **low education and lack of employment** underlines the importance of fostering private sector development to create productive jobs and investing in the skills and digital infrastructure needed to help people meet the labor market's changing demands.



Widespread vulnerability to proliferating shocks and high child poverty necessitate adaptive social protection systems that can protect against extreme deprivation in the short term and enhance household resilience.



High inequality warrants stronger fiscal redistribution through progressive taxation and targeted social spending.



Bolstering access to basic services such as sanitation and electricity, and improved housing, especially for poor households, can help boost living conditions today and in the future.

Section 1. About this brief

This brief focuses on the Caribbean countries of Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Suriname, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia. Other than Jamaica, which has a population of approximately 2.8 million, these countries are small in both population (ranging from 117,000 in Grenada to 634,000 in Suriname) and geographic size (ranging from 344 square kilometers in Grenada to 163,820 square kilometers in Suriname). Despite relatively high per capita incomes—above the average for Latin American and Caribbean—and steady economic growth in recent years, they face shared development challenges. All are highly vulnerable to external economic shocks and natural hazards, which frequently undermine development gains and fiscal stability. Limited economic diversification remains a key constraint, with most of these countries relying heavily on tourism or commodity exports. While access to basic education has improved, high youth unemployment persists.

This brief draws on newly harmonized household survey data for these six Caribbean countries to present core poverty and inequality statistics. Box 1 provides details on the data and harmonization process. Section 2 presents an overview of poverty, vulnerability, and inequality across these Caribbean countries, comparing them with relevant regional and global benchmarks. Section 3 explores the characteristics of poor households, examining individual and household demographics, attributes of the household head, dwelling conditions, and digital connectivity. Section 4 concludes and discusses implications for policy.

Box 1.

Data harmonization and poverty benchmarking in Caribbean countries

Insufficient comparable data hampers analysis of how Caribbean countries fare relative to global benchmarks, limiting what policymakers can learn when developing poverty-reducing policies. Household surveys in the Caribbean are infrequently collected, and while some countries have produced national poverty estimates, these often cannot be benchmarked against international poverty standards. Still, a number of Caribbean countries have recently implemented household surveys that can be leveraged to generate internationally comparable measures of poverty and inequality.

To support this effort, the World Bank has harmonized household survey data containing information on poverty and other welfare metrics for six Caribbean countries, in line with international best practices. The harmonization process involves constructing consistent welfare aggregates—based on total consumption—and benchmarking them against international poverty lines. These harmonized poverty measures are essential for characterizing and targeting the poor, and for informing policies that reflect their specific vulnerabilities and living conditions. Because the methodology is standardized across countries, the resulting estimates allow for comparisons with other countries and regions¹. This helps to identify challenges that Caribbean countries share with peer countries, as well as those that are unique to the region. However, minor differences in welfare aggregates remain due to variations in survey design and data availability across countries (Saavedra Facusse, Sanchez Castro, & Olivieri, 2025).

The six countries covered by the harmonized data are Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Suriname. Specifically, the analysis uses the Barbados Survey of Living Conditions (BSLC, 2016), Belize's Household Budget Survey (HBS, 2018), Grenada's Survey of Living Conditions and Household Budgets (SLCHBS, 2018), Jamaica's Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC, 2021), Saint Lucia's Survey of Living Conditions and Household Budgets (SLCHBS, 2015), and Suriname's Survey of Living Conditions (SLCHBS, 2022)².

The brief does not cover all Caribbean countries; in particular, Haiti—the Caribbean country with the lowest GDP per capita—is not included in the analysis. Since the household survey data needed to construct monetary welfare measures have not been collected for a decade or more in many Caribbean countries, they are not included in the harmonized data underpinning this brief. Haiti is one such example, as its last household survey was collected in 2012. Since then, conflict, social unrest, and natural disasters have hampered Haiti's development, so its 2012 survey is unlikely to capture the current extent of poverty, vulnerability, and inequality.

¹ Since the surveys being harmonized were collected over a long-time span, during which significant events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related shocks, occurred, cross-country comparisons should be interpreted with attention to the timing of each survey.

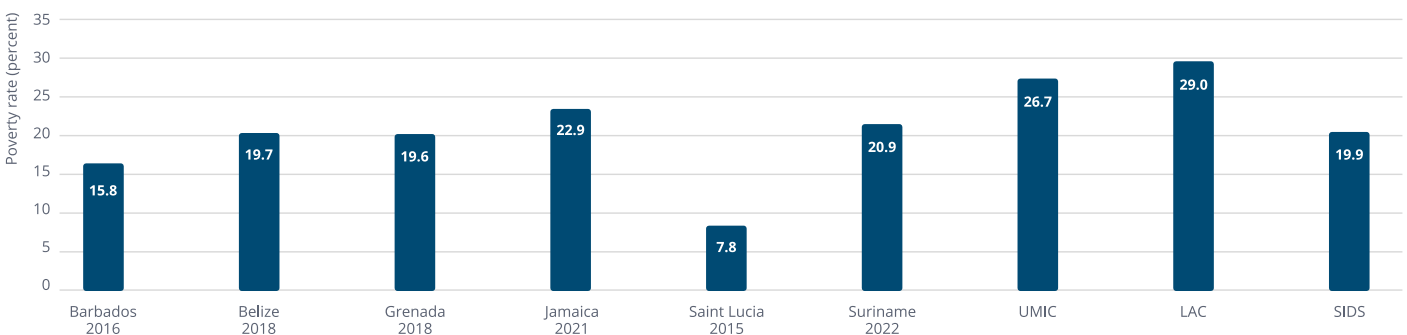
² Some of the estimates in this brief deviate slightly from those presented in a recently published *Poverty Assessment for Suriname* (Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank, 2024). These discrepancies are the result of efforts to follow a unified approach to the analysis for all countries included in this brief.

Section 2.

Poverty, vulnerability, and inequality remain key concerns

Monetary poverty remains a concern for the Caribbean countries analyzed in this brief. The share of people living on less than \$8.30/day (2021 PPP), the World Bank’s global poverty line for upper middle-income countries (UMICs), ranges from 7.8 percent in Saint Lucia to 22.9 percent in Jamaica (Figure 1). These rates are generally lower than the averages for countries with similar income levels (UMICs) and for countries in the same region (Latin America and the Caribbean - LAC). Compared to countries with similar development contexts (Small Island Developing States - SIDS), Jamaica and Suriname have higher poverty rates, Belize and Grenada are comparable, and Barbados and Saint Lucia—the countries with the highest GDP per capita—perform better. While this brief uses the \$8.30/day line, appropriate for UMICs, throughout, Annex 1 reports the poverty rates for the Caribbean countries analyzed when applying alternative lower poverty lines used for global poverty measurement.³

Figure 1.
Poverty rates in the Caribbean countries analyzed range from 7.8 percent in Saint Lucia to 22.9 percent in Jamaica

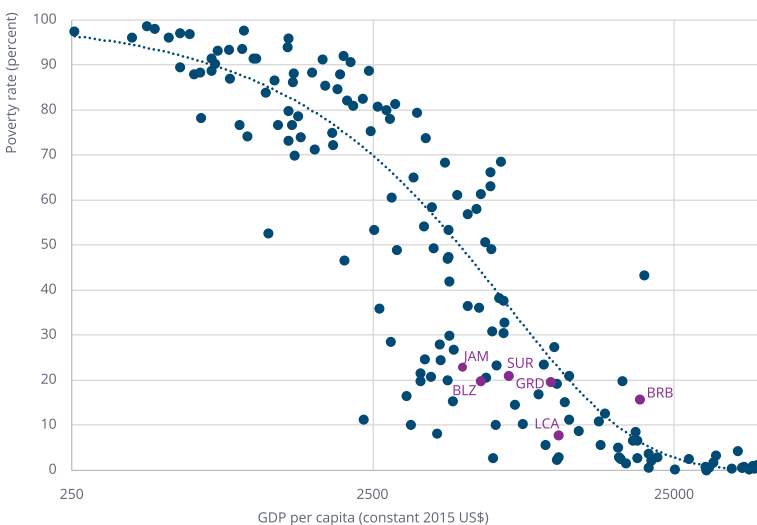


Note: Poverty is measured at the upper-middle income international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP). PPP: purchasing power parity. The SIDS average only includes upper-middle income and high-income countries with the latest estimates from 2010 onwards, that are classified as Small Island Developing States by the United Nations (2025). The UMIC average includes latest estimates from upper-middle income countries from 2010 onwards. The LAC average corresponds to the 2022 regional aggregate from the World Bank’s Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP). UMIC: Upper middle-income countries. LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean. SIDS: Small Island Developing States.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022). UMIC, LAC, and SIDS averages based on World Bank (2024) estimates.

All six Caribbean countries analyzed exhibit poverty levels that are broadly consistent with those of other countries at similar levels of economic development. The dotted line in Figure 2 represents the estimated level of poverty expected at a certain GDP per capita considering all countries with available data in the World Bank’s Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP). Poverty rates for the Caribbean countries analyzed fall close to or slightly below the fitted line and align with those of other countries in the same income group. This suggests that poverty outcomes in these six Caribbean countries are in line with expectations given their GDP per capita.

Figure 2.
Poverty rates in the Caribbean countries analyzed do not deviate from global expectations based on GDP per capita



Note: GDP per capita is expressed in logarithmic values and reflects each country’s latest available estimate from 2010 onwards. Poverty rates correspond to each country’s latest estimate from 2010 onwards, as found in the World Bank’s Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP). PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: World Bank estimates (2024). For Caribbean countries: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

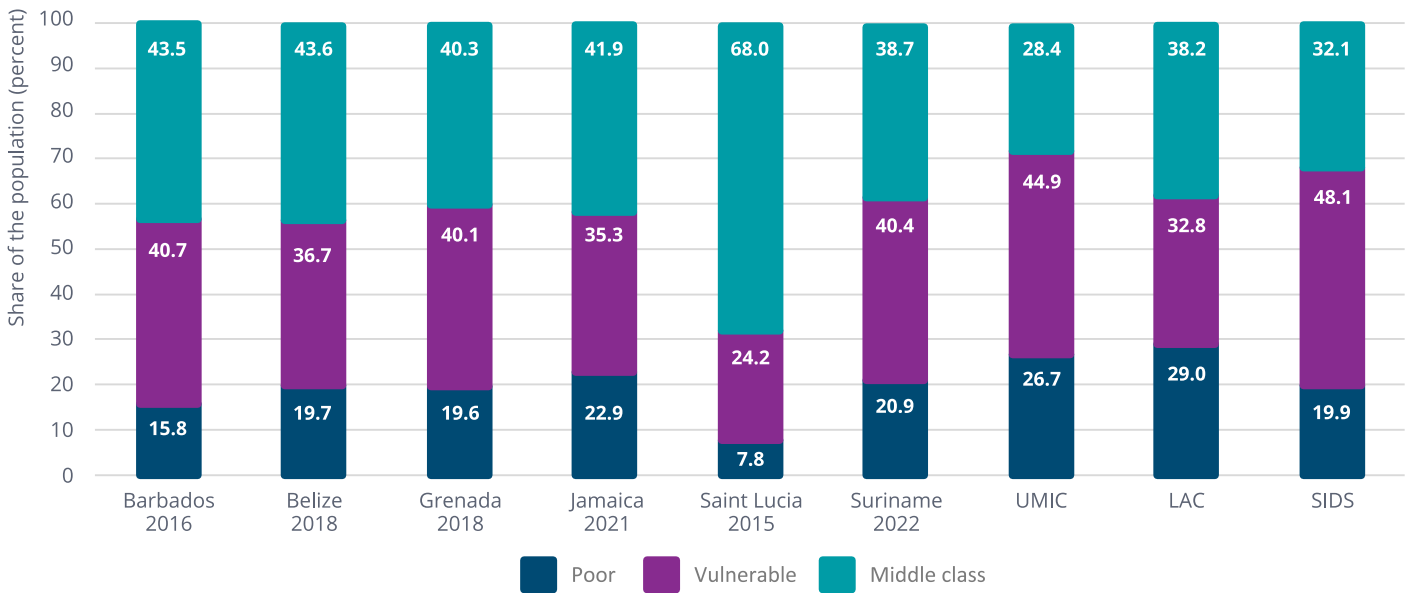
Country codes: BRB: Barbados; BLZ: Belize; GRD: Grenada; JAM: Jamaica; LCA: Saint Lucia; SUR: Suriname.

³ Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Suriname are UMICs. Barbados is a high-income country.

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Vulnerability to poverty is widespread in the Caribbean countries analyzed, with over one-third of people facing a high risk of falling into poverty due to economic shocks in all the countries analyzed, except in Saint Lucia. The share of the population who are not poor but who live below the vulnerability threshold of US\$17/per person per day—which means they are at serious risk of falling into poverty—ranges from 24.2 percent in Saint Lucia to over 40 percent in Suriname and Barbados (Figure 3)⁴. While this is lower than the average for other SIDS and UMIC, it is higher than the average of LAC. High vulnerability underscores the lack of economic security in the Caribbean countries analyzed, a concern amplified by the region's high exposure to climate-related shocks. In 2021, nearly 80 percent of households in Suriname, Belize and Saint Lucia reported exposure to disaster risks. Poorer households are also less likely to own essential supplies for disaster preparedness (Anglade et al., 2024).

Figure 3.
Over one-third of residents in the Caribbean countries analyzed are vulnerable to poverty, except in Saint Lucia



Note: Poverty is measured using the upper-middle-income international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP). Vulnerability is defined as living on \$8.30 to \$17 USD and the middle class as more than \$17 USD per capita per day (all in 2021 PPP). PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: World Bank estimates (2024). For Caribbean countries: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Nevertheless, the middle class in the six countries analyzed is broader than the averages for LAC, UMIC, and SIDS. Middle class households enjoy greater economic resilience and stability and are less likely to fall into poverty when faced with economic shocks. Using the threshold of more than US\$17 per person per day⁵ to define middle class, Saint Lucia stands out with 68.0 percent of its population falling into this group, more than double the average of the benchmarks (Figure 3). In the other Caribbean countries covered, the middle class comprises approximately 40 percent of the population.

Relatedly, inequality in monetary welfare is high across all the Caribbean countries analyzed, except for Barbados. The Gini index⁶ in these countries is higher than in many other upper middle-income countries and is at or above the World Bank's threshold of 40 points for high inequality (Figure 4)^{7,8}. The only exception is Barbados, the only high-income country in the region, which has a Gini coefficient of 34. This echoes Barbados' low poverty rate and its relatively broad middle class (Figure 3). The Palma ratio (Annex 2) reflects a similar pattern: in Barbados, the top 10 percent of the population consumes 1.4 times the amount consumed by the bottom 40 percent, compared to the other Caribbean countries analyzed where the top 10 percent consumes nearly twice as much as the bottom 40 percent.

⁴ The threshold was determined by extrapolating the US\$14 threshold from 2017 to 2021. See World Bank (2023) for further discussion on the methodology used to establish the thresholds.

⁵ Ibid.

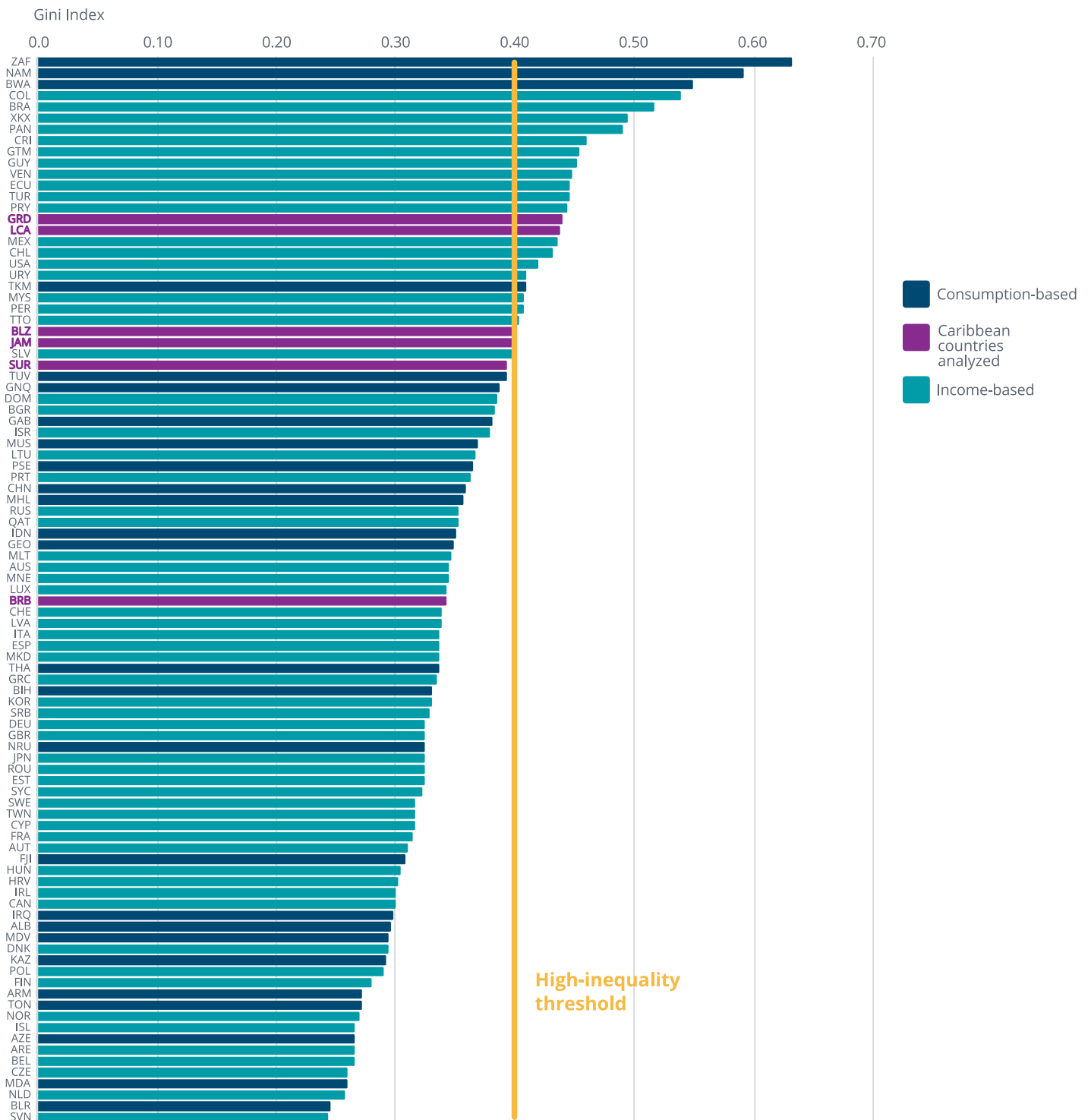
⁶ The Gini Index ranges from zero to one. A Gini Index of zero represents complete equality in consumption or income. A Gini Index of one implies complete inequality.

⁷ See Haddad et al. (2024) for more information on the high Inequality threshold of 40.

⁸ This pattern holds when focusing on the upper middle-income countries that measure welfare using consumption rather than income, just as in the Caribbean: measuring welfare through income rather than consumption can affect inequality statistics.

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Figure 4.
Inequality is high in all the Caribbean countries analyzed except Barbados, with Gini coefficients at or above 40



Note: Harmonized Caribbean countries are shown in purple. “Consumption-” and “income-based” refer to the type of welfare aggregate used to calculate poverty estimates; all Caribbean countries analyzed here use consumption aggregates.

Source: Latest Gini coefficients from the World Bank (2024). For Caribbean countries: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Country codes: BRB: Barbados; BLZ: Belize; GRD: Grenada; JAM: Jamaica; LCA: Saint Lucia; SUR: Suriname.

Section 3.

Profiling the Caribbean's poor can help design and target policies to lift people out of poverty sustainably

This section describes the individual- and household-level characteristics associated with poverty in the Caribbean countries analyzed. These “poverty profiles” provide insights into the constraints that may be holding back the poor and vulnerable, helping to design and target countervailing policies.

Young people are more likely to live in poverty, while people aged 65 or above are less exposed to poverty

Poverty rates are higher for younger people across the Caribbean countries analyzed, so children make up a disproportionate share of the poor. In all six countries, the share of children (0-14-year-olds) living in poverty is higher than for any other age group (Table 1). This, in turn, means that children comprise a disproportionate share of the poor: children make up between 29 and 45 percent of the poor in all the countries considered (Table 2).

The elderly—those aged 65 years old or above—are the least likely to be poor in all countries, except in Saint Lucia. Indeed, households composed solely of older adults, without any working-age members, tend to have some of the lowest poverty rates. In Barbados, Grenada, and Suriname, between 3 and 7 percent of individuals in elder-only households are poor. This may reflect both the relationship between poverty and life expectancy, as well as the role of social protection programs targeting older adults, such as non-contributory pensions for those aged 60 or above in Suriname and 67 or above in Barbados.

Table 1.
Children and women face higher poverty rates across the Caribbean countries analyzed—Poverty headcount rates (percent)

	Barbados (2016)	Belize (2018)	Grenada (2018)	Jamaica (2021)	Saint Lucia (2015)	Suriname (2022)
Age group						
0-14	25.1	27.6	31.2	31.6	13.5	30.3
15-24	20.5	20.0	21.6	26.7	9.6	23.9
25-40	16.2	15.9	19.7	20.2	6.4	17.1
41-64	10.5	13.2	15.3	18.1	3.5	15.4
65 or more	8.4	12.9	8.6	15.6	6.0	11.3
Gender						
Male	14.7	19.0	19.2	22.4	6.9	20.3
Female	16.8	20.4	20.0	23.3	8.5	21.4
Highest education (16+)						
Primary or below	12.3	23.0	18.1	30.3	7.0	28.5
Secondary	15.7	12.0	17.5	23.6	6.9	15.7
Tertiary	7.0	3.0	6.8	8.0	0.2	3.5
National Poverty Headcount	15.8	19.7	19.6	22.9	7.8	20.9

Note: Poverty is measured at the upper-middle income international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP). PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

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Table 2.

Poor individuals in the Caribbean countries analyzed have lower educational attainment compared to the total population—Share of the poor and total populations (percent)

	Barbados (2016)		Belize (2018)		Grenada (2018)		Jamaica (2021)		Saint Lucia (2015)		Suriname (2022)	
	Poor	Total	Poor	Total	Poor	Total	Poor	Total	Poor	Total	Poor	Total
Age group												
0-14	29.0	17.6	45.6	32.6	35.8	22.5	30.2	21.8	40.1	23.1	38.2	26.3
15-24	18.3	13.5	18.6	18.4	15.5	14.0	21.0	18.0	20.8	16.8	19.8	17.2
25-40	20.5	19.2	17.5	21.7	21.6	21.5	21.4	24.1	19.1	23.2	16.8	20.5
41-64	23.3	33.5	14.1	21.0	20.1	25.7	20.4	25.8	12.3	27.0	21.2	28.6
65 or more	8.9	16.1	4.2	6.4	7.1	16.3	7.0	10.3	7.7	9.9	4.0	7.4
Gender												
Male	44.1	47.4	47.3	49.0	48.9	49.9	48.2	49.2	43.3	48.6	48.5	49.8
Female	55.9	52.6	52.7	51.0	51.1	50.1	51.8	50.8	56.7	51.4	51.5	50.2
Highest education (16+)												
Primary or below	20.2	19.5	72.4	49.7	48.6	43.2	12.5	8.3	48.8	40.3	39.6	23.7
Secondary	58.2	44.0	24.1	31.8	44.7	41.1	76.8	65.1	50.6	42.4	57.6	62.8
Tertiary	21.6	36.5	3.5	18.4	6.7	15.7	10.6	26.7	0.7	17.4	2.7	13.5

Note: “Poor” refers to the distribution of individuals living in poor households, while “Total” refers to the distribution of the overall population. For example, 29 percent of the poor in Barbados are aged 0-14, while 17.6 percent of all Barbadians are within that age group. Poverty is measured at the upper-middle income international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP). PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Poverty is less common among men and those with higher levels of education

People living in poor households have lower educational attainment than the total population, but overall educational attainment rates differ across countries. The share of individuals with primary or no education is higher among the poor than the total population in each country (Table 2). Yet the share of poor people with primary or no education varies considerably between countries, ranging from 12.5 percent among poor Jamaicans to 72.4 percent among poor Belizeans. Similarly, tertiary completion is much less prevalent among the poor than the total population. Less than 4 percent of poor people in Belize, Saint Lucia, and Suriname have reached tertiary education. Barbados stands out as having far more prevalent tertiary education: over one-third of the total Barbadian population and one fifth of poor Barbadians have attended tertiary education.

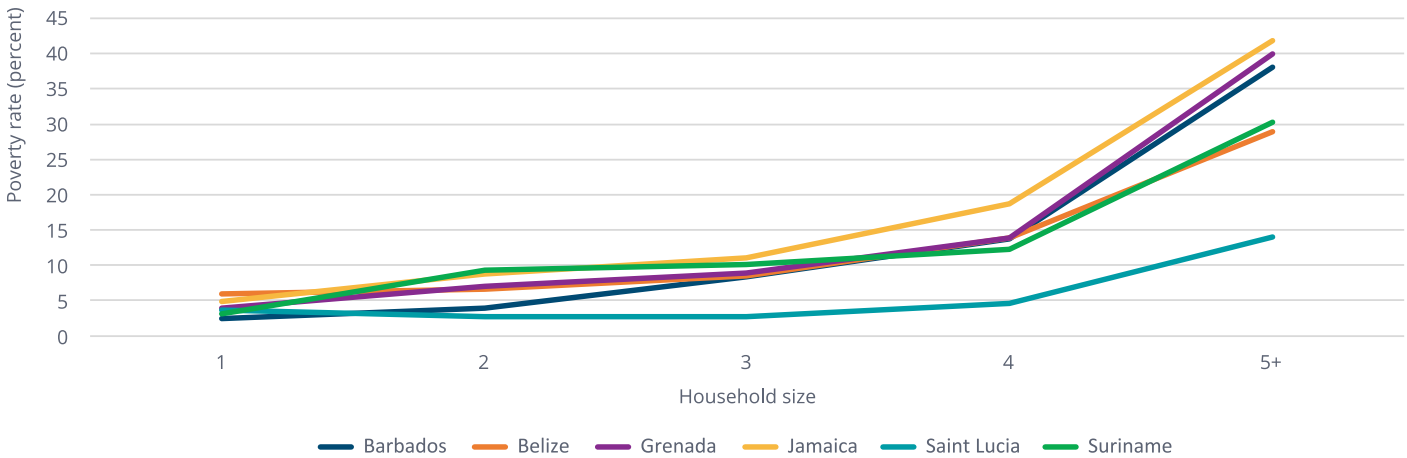
The gender gap in poverty is relatively small, but this masks gender differences that arise when household composition is considered. The poverty rate is slightly higher for women and girls than for men and boys across all the countries considered, but these differences are approximately 2 percentage points or less (Table 1). However, this does not provide a complete picture of how gender dynamics are related to poverty in the Caribbean countries analyzed, as the discussion on household composition below reveals.

People living in larger households with more children are more likely to be poor, while female-headed households with children are particularly at risk

Poverty is more widespread in larger households that contain children. The share of people living in poverty is higher in larger households, for all countries (Figure 5). Relatedly, households with children face significantly higher poverty rates—on average, 17 percentage points higher—than those without children (Figure 6). Consequently, poor households have around two additional household members on average and at least one more child than non-poor households (see Annex 3). The dependency ratio is also higher for poor households compared to non-poor households, which means a large proportion of the additional members in poor households are not of working age.

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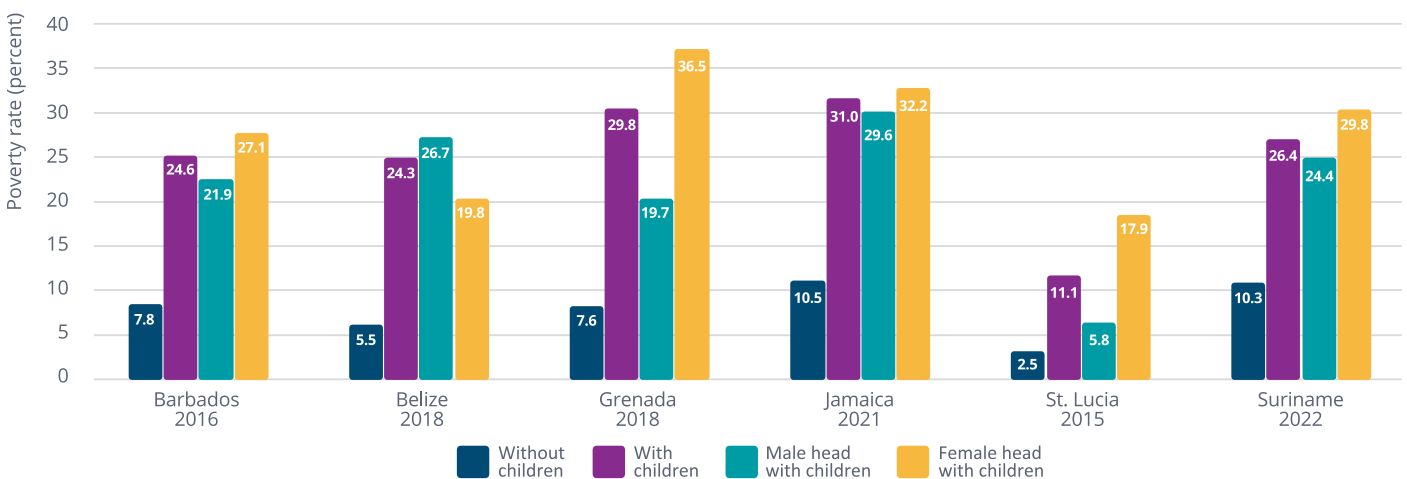
Figure 5.
Larger households have higher poverty rates across the Caribbean countries analyzed



Note: All households with more than five members are grouped into the last category. The international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP) is used as benchmark. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Figure 6.
The presence of children in a household is associated with significantly higher poverty rates



Note: The international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP) is used as benchmark. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Looking at household composition more broadly reveals further gender disparities: in all countries except Belize, female-headed households with children face higher poverty rates than male-headed households with children (Figure 6). This gap is most pronounced in Grenada (16.8 percentage points) and Saint Lucia (12.1 percentage points). In Belize, by contrast, female-headed households with children have a lower poverty rate than their male-headed counterparts. A possible explanation might be the relatively high urban concentration of female-headed households in Belize: 57.7 percent live in urban areas and 45.3 percent live in Belize City alone—the district with the lowest poverty rate—compared to 36.2 percent and 22.4 percent of male-headed households, respectively. Living in urban areas may offer greater access to jobs, services, and social protection.

Households headed by people with more education and who are employed are less likely to be poor

Overall, people living in households where the head has higher levels of education are less likely to be poor, although in some countries the difference between primary and secondary education is small. Poverty rates are consistently lower for those living in households where the head has higher educational attainment (Table 3). The most notable difference occurs between secondary and tertiary education. Households with heads who attended tertiary education are also less likely to be vulnerable, suggesting that tertiary education not only reduces poverty but also offers greater protection against economic shocks. Yet the same patterns do not arise in all countries when comparing households whose heads have primary and secondary education. In Barbados and Saint Lucia, for instance, poverty rates among households where the head attended secondary education are higher than among those with no schooling or only primary education. This indicates that secondary education alone may not guarantee economic security in some parts of the Caribbean.

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Table 3.
Households with more educated and employed heads tend to have lower poverty rates in the Caribbean countries analyzed—Poverty headcount rates (percent)

	Barbados (2016)	Belize (2018)	Grenada (2018)	Jamaica (2021)	Saint Lucia (2015)	Suriname (2022)
Highest education (completed or incomplete)						
Primary or below	16.6	27.4	24.4	36.3	8.0	34.1
Secondary	17.9	11.7	15.4	25.6	8.5	16.2
Tertiary	7.9	3.4	4.8	7.9	0.0	4.9
Employment						
Employed	10.0	19.6	16.2	19.9	4.1	19.1
Not employed	18.5	21.6	22.5	29.5	15.2	24.7

Note: The international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP) is used as benchmark. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Households headed by employed people face lower poverty than those headed by people who are not employed. However, the magnitude of the difference varies between countries, ranging from 2 percentage points in Belize, where 82.1 percent of heads are employed, to 11.1 percentage points in Saint Lucia, where only 67.3 percent of heads are employed.

Access to some basic services, especially sanitation and electricity, is limited for poor households in the Caribbean countries analyzed

Access to improved drinking water sources is widespread across the Caribbean countries analyzed. For the total population, the share of people with access to improved drinking water exceeds 95 percent (*Figure 7*). Even for the poor, the share exceeds 90 percent. This exceeds international benchmarks: around 81 percent of the population in UMICs and around 75 percent of the LAC population have access to improved drinking water (World Bank, 2022).

Figure 7.
Access to improved drinking water is high, but sanitation and electricity are not ubiquitous, especially among the poor



Note: Bars show the percentage of individuals in poor households with access to the service, while diamond markers indicate the percentage among all the population. The international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP) is used to classify poverty. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

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Yet access to other basic services—namely sanitation and electricity—is far from universal, especially among poor people in Belize and Saint Lucia. Improved sanitation and electricity are available to only 68.7 percent and 86.8 percent of poor Belizeans, and 80.6 percent and 94.7 percent of all Belizeans. Similarly, Saint Lucia—despite having the lowest poverty rate in the region—shows significant disparities between the poor and the country at large, with 82 percent of the poor having access to electricity compared to 96.1 percent for the total population. These disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve living conditions for the most vulnerable populations.

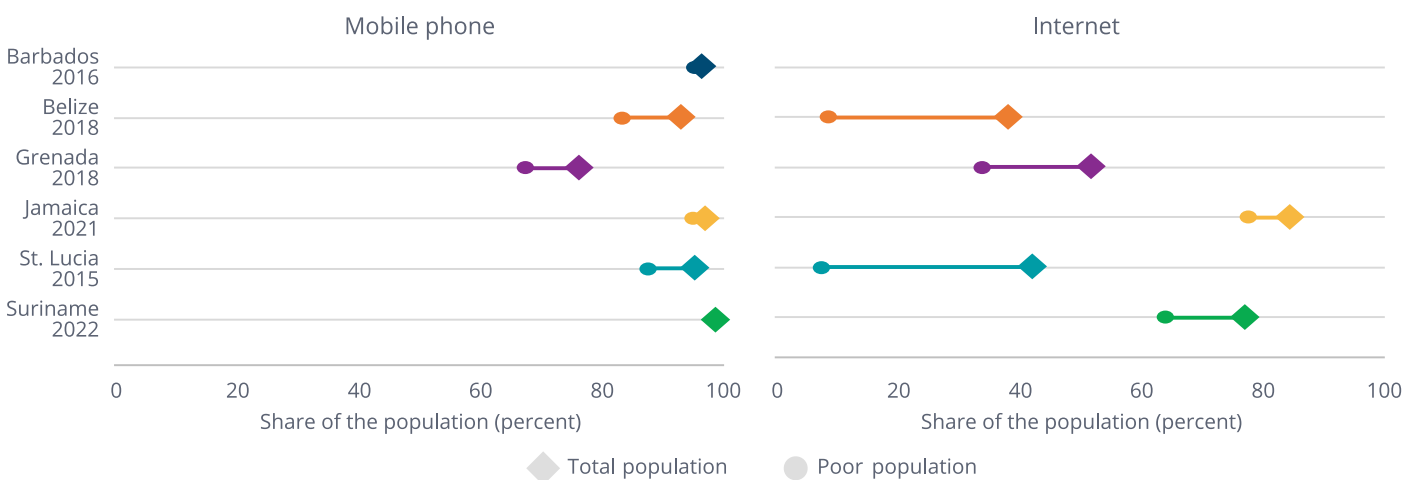
Most of the Caribbean countries analyzed fall slightly below the UMIC and LAC averages for electricity access among the total population but exceed the UMIC and LAC average for access to improved sanitation services. Electricity access among the overall population in the Caribbean countries analyzed is slightly below the averages for UMICs and LAC, which stand at 99.5 percent and 98.6 percent, respectively. Within the countries analyzed, electricity access ranges from 94.7 percent in Belize to 99.7 percent in Suriname. Turning to improved sanitation services⁹, all countries exceed the LAC average of 49.2 percent and the UMIC average of 60.2 percent.

The share of the population in dwellings with improved materials is also uneven across the Caribbean countries analyzed. Again, living in dwellings with improved materials is least likely for the population—and especially poor people—in Belize and Saint Lucia. Just 49.5 percent of poor Belizeans and 64.6 percent of poor Saint Lucians lived in dwellings with improved building materials. In contrast, in Grenada, the prevalence of improved materials exceeds 80 percent for both the poor and the total population, and in Jamaica, Suriname, and Barbados, it exceeds 93 percent.

Even though mobile phone access is high, many people in the Caribbean countries analyzed do not have internet access, especially in poor households

Digital connectivity has become essential for improving access to education, healthcare, markets, employment opportunities, and financial inclusion—all potential drivers of poverty reduction. Its importance is even greater in contexts of high vulnerability to climate-related disasters—like the Caribbean—as it enhances disaster preparedness and response and enables the continued delivery of social protection during and after such events. Information on whether households have computers, mobile phones, and internet access is also incorporated into the harmonized data for all six Caribbean countries analyzed here (*Figure 8*). While there have been dramatic improvements in overall digital access in recent years and some of the harmonized data are now several years old, the data can still help assess the digital divide between the poor and the population at large.

Figure 8.
Individuals living in poor households have lower digital connectivity compared to the total population



Note: Circle markers represent the percentage of individuals in poor households that own each asset, while larger diamond markers indicate the percentage among the total population. Information on internet access is missing for Barbados. The international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP) is used to classify poverty. PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Mobile phone access is high across most of the Caribbean countries analyzed, but ownership among the poor remains significantly lower in Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Belize. Mobile phones are the most widely owned digital asset. In Barbados, Jamaica, and Suriname, over 95 percent of the population live in a household with a mobile phone. The gap between the poor and the total population is minimal, with less than 5 percent of poor individuals lacking a phone.

Across countries, poor households have lower internet connectivity than the overall population. This gap persists regardless of how recent the data are. Jamaica and Suriname show the highest levels of internet access among the total population (close to 80 percent); however, access among poor households still lags by approximately 7 and 13 percentage points, respectively¹⁰. Disparities are even more pronounced in Belize, Grenada, and Saint Lucia, where internet access among the poor falls behind the national average by 20 to 30 percentage points.

⁹ Safely managed sanitation services for LAC and UMIC averages (World Bank, 2022).

¹⁰ Suriname and Jamaica have the most recent household surveys, from 2022 and 2021 respectively, so this should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Section 4.

The way forward

The results hint at four policy priorities to address poverty and vulnerability; first, boosting opportunities for productive jobs—by fostering private sector job creation, providing young people with the skills required by the labor market, and bolstering digital infrastructure—can help sustainably lift people out of poverty. Although extreme poverty is rare, between around 10 percent and 25 percent of people in the Caribbean countries covered in this brief live on less than \$8.30/day. Poverty is more common among younger, less educated individuals and in larger households headed by single women. Moreover, households headed by people who are employed are less likely to be poor, underlining the importance of productive jobs for exiting poverty. Productive jobs offer a more durable solution for lifting people out of poverty than short-run social protection measures. While educational attainment has increased in the Caribbean overall, the skills required by the labor market are changing. Around 10 percent of current jobs in Barbados, Belize, Suriname, and Grenada are likely to be enhanced by AI exposure. Aligning skills development with the needs of the labor market and supporting access to digital infrastructure is of growing importance for seizing emerging livelihood opportunities. At the same time, fostering an enabling environment for the private sector to invest and expand is essential for generating demand for these skills and creating the productive jobs needed to reduce poverty.

Second, developing adaptive social protection measures can help protect against extreme deprivation in the short term, build resilience among vulnerable households, and reduce child poverty. About one-third of people in the Caribbean countries analyzed are vulnerable to economic shocks, living between \$8.30/day and \$17.00/day. Adaptive social protection measures can help households prepare, cope, and adapt to shocks not only by expanding social assistance to stave off extreme deprivation in the short term, but also by ensuring that underlying information and financing systems are set up to deal with risk and uncertainty. Poverty is significantly higher for children, so such policies are especially important for young people: suffering shocks early on in life can have long-term consequences for welfare, human capital, and livelihoods. Moreover, conditional cash transfers that encourage households to invest in children's health and education can help to break intergenerational poverty and protect vulnerable children.

Third, fiscal redistribution could be strengthened to reduce inequality. Inequality in consumption, captured by the Gini coefficient, is high by international standards in all the Caribbean countries analyzed here except Barbados. Progressive taxation, targeted social spending, inclusive budgeting, and enhanced social protection measures can all help address inequality. Such policies can promote economic security not only for the poor but also for those just above the poverty line who remain vulnerable to falling back into poverty.

Fourth, improving access to basic services and housing conditions remains a key priority for supporting living standards today and in the future. Access to basic services such as sanitation and electricity and use of improved housing materials varies across the Caribbean countries analyzed and between poor and non-poor households. Inadequate service access and low-quality housing is especially prevalent for poor households in Belize and Saint Lucia. Addressing these gaps in basic services and housing conditions not only affects welfare today but could also have long-term consequences. Deficient sanitation can hamper human capital development, electricity is needed to access digital infrastructure, and using durable housing materials is essential for protecting people from the growing threat of climate-related shocks.

The harmonized data used in this brief offers future opportunities to generate evidence to support poverty-reducing policies. Many of the core poverty and inequality statistics presented above are now included in the World Bank's Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP), helping to foster inter-country learning. Moreover, the harmonized data can now be used to explore countries' key development challenges in greater depth: new analysis planned for forthcoming briefs will expand the base of evidence that policymakers need to develop poverty-reducing policies.

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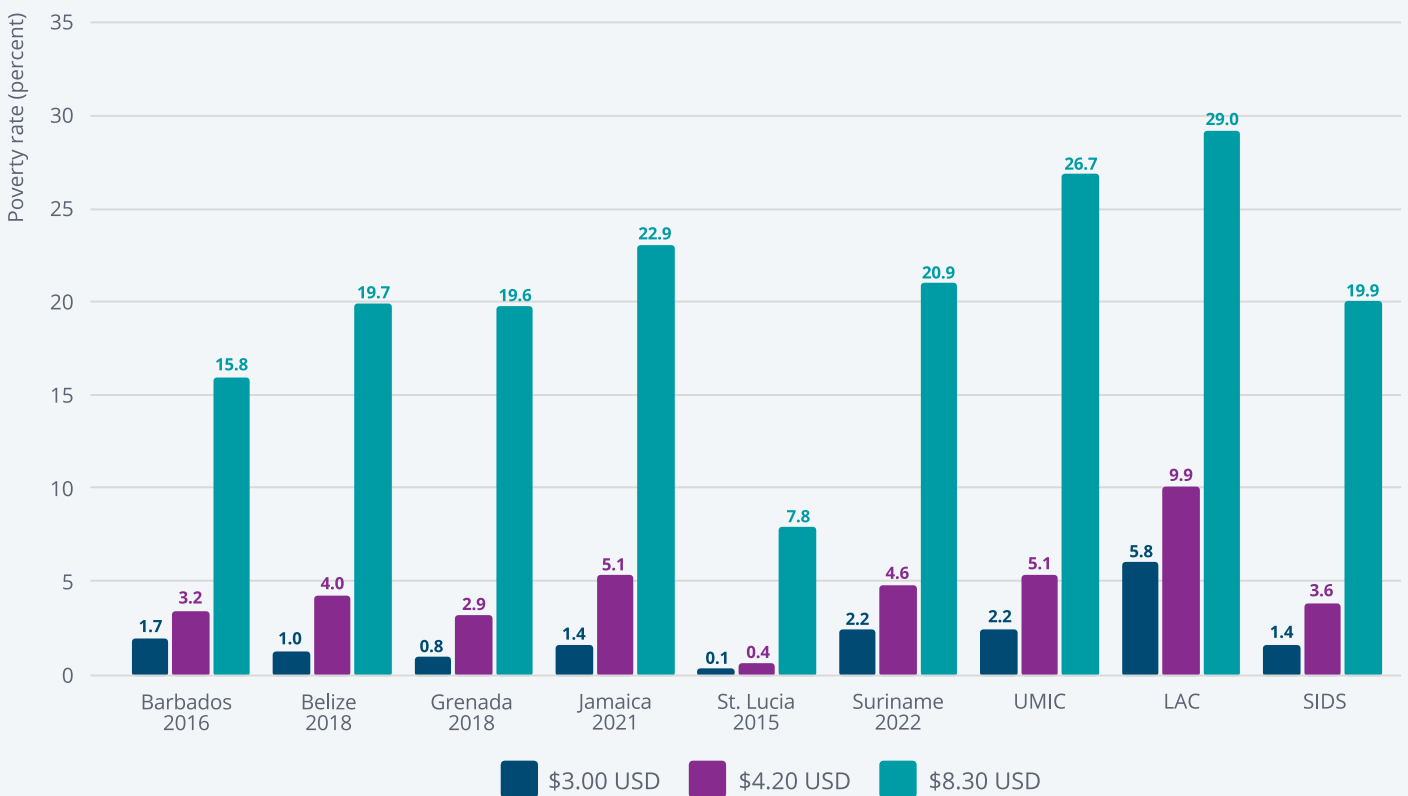
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Annex 1.

Poverty rates at lower global poverty lines

Alongside the \$8.30/day line applied in this brief, global poverty measurement also uses lower lines appropriate for low- and lower middle-income countries; poverty is much lower when measured against these lines. The share of people living on less than \$3.00/day—the poverty line used for low-income countries—is at about 2 percent or less for the Caribbean countries analyzed. The share of people living on less than \$4.20/day—the poverty line used for lower middle-income countries—ranges from 0.4 percent in Saint Lucia to 5.1 percent in Jamaica. This reinforces the importance of focusing on the \$8.30/day poverty line throughout this brief, to ensure the yardstick used is commensurate with the living standards and policy aspirations of the six Caribbean countries covered.

Figure 9.
Extreme poverty, measured using the \$3.00 international poverty line for low-income countries, is rare for the Caribbean countries analyzed.



Note: The SIDS average only includes upper-middle income and high-income countries with the latest estimates from 2010 onwards, that are classified as Small Island Developing States by the United Nations (2025). The UMIC average includes latest estimates from upper-middle income countries from 2010 onwards. The LAC average corresponds to the 2022 regional aggregate from the World Bank's Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP). The poverty lines considered are in daily per capita 2021 purchasing power parity U.S. dollars. UMIC: Upper middle-income countries. LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean. SIDS: Small Island Developing States.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022). UMIC, LAC, and SIDS averages based on World Bank (2024) estimates.

Annex 2.

Poverty and inequality indicators

	Barbados (2016)	Belize (2018)	Grenada (2018)	Jamaica (2021)	Saint Lucia (2015)	Suriname (2022)
\$3.00 Poverty line						
Headcount	1.7	1.0	0.8	1.4	0.1	2.2
Poverty gap	0.9	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.5
Severity	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2
Number of poor	4690	3941	888	39357	145	13573
\$4.20 Poverty line						
Headcount	3.2	4.0	2.9	5.1	0.4	4.6
Poverty gap	1.3	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.1	1.2
Severity	0.9	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.5
Number of poor	8830	15255	3404	145405	670	28562
\$8.30 Poverty line						
Headcount	15.8	19.7	19.6	22.9	7.8	20.9
Poverty gap	4.9	6.0	6.1	7.0	1.9	6.6
Severity	2.5	2.6	2.5	3.1	0.6	3.0
Number of poor	44106	74967	22695	648450	13557	130092
Vulnerability	40.7	36.7	40.1	35.3	24.2	40.4
Middle class	43.5	43.6	40.3	41.9	68.0	38.7
Gini	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Prosperity gap	2.6	2.1	2.1	2.3	1.3	2.3
Palma ratio	1.4	1.8	2.2	1.8	2.3	1.8

Note: Vulnerability is defined as living on between \$8.30 and \$17 (2021 PPP) per day per capita. The middle class is defined as living on more than \$17 (2021 PPP) per day per capita. The number of poor is calculated using population estimates from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI) corresponding to the year of each household survey.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

Annex 3.

Household composition indicators by country

	Barbados (2016)		Belize (2018)		Grenada (2018)		Jamaica (2021)		Saint Lucia (2015)		Suriname (2022)	
	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor
Average												
Household size	4.4	2.4	5.0	3.4	4.5	2.4	4.5	2.6	4.8	3.0	5.3	3.5
Dependency ratio	0.7	0.4	1.2	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.8	0.4	1.1	0.5	0.9	0.5
Number of children	1.2	0.4	2.3	1.0	1.6	0.5	1.4	0.5	1.9	0.6	2.0	0.8

Note: "Poor" refers to the distribution of poor households, while "non-poor" refers to the distribution of the non-poor households. Poverty is measured at the upper-middle income international poverty line of \$8.30 USD/day per capita (2021 PPP). PPP: purchasing power parity.

Source: Barbados—BSLC (2016); Belize—HBS (2018); Grenada—SLCHBS (2018); Jamaica—JSLC (2021); Saint Lucia—SLCHBS (2015); Suriname—SLCHBS (2022).

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