

10 Things to know about

May 2026 | R2604



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Gap Between Public Spending and Child Outcomes in Jamaica



info@capricaribbean.org or
by telephone at
(876) 970-3447 or (876) 970-2910

JAMAICA CANNOT ACCOUNT FOR CHILD SPENDING

Budget templates require no ministry or agency to identify child-specific allocations, set targets, or report against them.

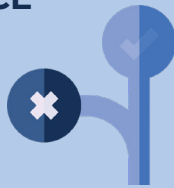


ONLY 4 OF 34 COMMITMENTS FULLY ALIGNED



Of 34 specific government commitments to children assessed across eight sectors and nine fiscal years, only four are fully aligned — meaning a named institutional home, a traceable budget line, and a confirmed delivery mechanism all exist. The pattern is consistent: where those three features are absent, commitments do not produce traceable fiscal responses.

THE EVIDENCE IS WORLD-CLASS, THE FOLLOW-THROUGH IS NOT



Jamaica has produced some of the world's most rigorous evidence for early childhood investment, but has not systematically acted on it.

INVESTMENT SKEWED AWAY FROM HIGHEST RETURN IN EARLY YEARS



Jamaica's child investment is concentrated at the formal schooling stage, where evidence suggests returns are lower, and thin at the stage—the first thousand days, in health, nutrition, housing, child protection--where they are highest.

LOW PROVISION LOW ADULT LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY



Underinvestment in early childhood harms the children who experience it reproduces itself in persistently low labour productivity, which is the adult expression of developmental deficits that adequate early investment could have prevented.

HIGH SPENDING DOES NOT EQUAL HIGH LEARNING



Jamaica spends on education at rates higher than the regional average and than the world's top-performing systems, yet a child entering school today will acquire the equivalent of only 7.1 years of full-quality learning against 11.4 years of expected schooling.

CHILD PROTECTION BUDGET GREW BUT CAPACITY DID NOT



Child protection expenditure grew 50 percent in real terms between 2017/18 and 2025/26, yet social worker density remains 45 percent below the functional minimum, the CPFSA has not reported publicly since 2018, and a Cabinet-directed merger with the NPSC remains unexecuted after five years. Growth in the budget line has not translated into growth in operational capacity.

FOSTER CARE SUBVENTION HAS LOST MORE THAN HALF ITS VALUE



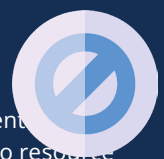
The foster care subvention lost 54 percent of its real per-child value since 2018/19, when it peaked at J\$404,000, and remains frozen in nominal terms at J\$185,000 in 2025/26. This is the fiscal record of a system whose stated policy is to expand family-based care.

WAGES ARE GROWING BUT CHILD PROGRAMMES ARE NOT



In recreation, culture, and sport the record is weakest. The wage bill rose from 37 to 57 percent of total expenditure between 2017/18 and 2025/26, while real child-focused programmatic spend in 2024/25 is 11 percent below its 2018/19 level.

THE CONSTRAINT IS NO LONGER MONEY



The gaps this report identifies are no longer attributable to resource scarcity; the constraint now is accountability, institutional follow-through, and the willingness to invest at the stage of the life cycle where the evidence points.