

HON. PEARNEL CHARLES JR.

MINISTER OF LABOUR & SOCIAL SECURITY



**Ministry of Labour
& Social Security**

"Providing Opportunities, Stability & Social Protection"



2026 SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION

**Rebuilding Stronger: Beyond Systems.
Delivering Impact**



**REBUILDING STRONGER:
BEYOND SYSTEMS. DELIVERING IMPACT.**

Sectoral Debate Presentation 2026

Hon. Pearnel Charles Jr., MP, JP

Minister of Labour and Social Security

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I. OPENING REMARKS

Madam Speaker,

I rise today with gratitude, humility and a deep sense of responsibility as I make my contribution to the 2026 Sectoral Debate on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Before policy, before programmes and before announcements, I pause first to give thanks to Almighty God for carrying Jamaica through one of the most difficult periods in recent history.

Hurricane Melissa tested our infrastructure, our systems, our economy and our communities. But above all, Madam Speaker, it tested our people.

Families lost homes, livelihoods, possessions and stability. Some lost loved ones. Many lost the sense of safety that every Jamaican deserves to feel.

Yet, despite the devastation, Jamaica weathered the storm and we stood together as one.

Not because of one institution, one Ministry or one person, but because Jamaicans came together.

Madam Speaker, I express sincere gratitude to our visionary Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, for his exceptional leadership and continued confidence in me. I thank my Cabinet colleagues and Members of this Honourable House for their support and service to the people.

Together, let us salute the ministries, agencies, boards, emergency personnel, volunteers, churches, NGOs, private sector partners, members of the Humanitarian Assistance Committee, international allies, community groups and private citizens who showed up for the Jamaican people throughout the response and recovery effort.

Madam Speaker, I also acknowledge my State Minister Hon. Donovan Williams, Permanent Secretary Dione Jennings and the dedicated staff of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Also, special recognition to PS Riden and our dedicated team of Liaison officers. Across parish offices, field operations, relief activities and recovery efforts, the team worked under extraordinary pressure to serve all Jamaicans.

I thank my wife, children and family, whose support, sacrifice and prayers continue to strengthen me daily. I thank my executive staff, CPOs, constituency and management teams, Councillors and my extended family: the people of South East Clarendon. You remind me every day that leadership must always remain people-centred.

Madam Speaker,

Disaster does not affect everyone equally. The person with savings and security experiences crisis differently from the person living day to day outside formal systems.

That is why vulnerability is not measured by income alone. It is also measured by access — by whether people are seen, whether systems are responsive and whether help can reach people quickly when they need it most.

That understanding shapes the direction of this Ministry and the foundation of this presentation today.

Because Government is not measured only by the systems it creates, but by how effectively those systems improve people's lives.

This Ministry is therefore focused on strengthening protection, expanding opportunity and reducing the distance between vulnerability and access.

Whether we are protecting workers, modernising social protection, supporting vulnerable families, expanding employment pathways, strengthening occupational safety, advancing overseas opportunities or rebuilding communities after Hurricane Melissa, the principle remains the same:

Government must work in the service of people.

Today, I speak not only about policy, but about progress.

Not only about programmes, but about impact.

And not only about systems, but about people.

That is what rebuilding stronger must mean for Jamaica.

Beyond systems. Delivering impact.

II. WORKERS AT THE CENTRE

Domestic Workers and Dignity in Labour

Madam Speaker,

I begin today with a group of Jamaicans whose contribution to national development has for far too long remained undervalued and under protected.

Our domestic workers.

They care for our children.

They support our elderly.

They maintain homes.

They prepare meals.

They manage daily routines.

They provide the support that allows many other Jamaicans to go out and participate in the wider economy.

And yet, Madam Speaker, for too long, many domestic workers have remained at the margins of formal protection and recognition.

This must change.

Because true national development cannot exist where dignity is selective.

When we speak about labour, we cannot only speak about boardrooms, factories, farms, construction sites and offices.

We must also speak about the home.

Because work done in the home is still work.

And those who perform that work deserve dignity, training, protection, opportunity and respect.

Madam Speaker, this year the Jamaica Household Workers Union celebrates thirty five years of advocacy and representation on behalf of domestic workers locally and internationally.

For thirty-five years, the Union has amplified voices that were too often unheard and challenged attitudes that diminished the value of domestic work.

Today, I commend the Jamaica Household Workers Union for its service, persistence and commitment to dignity in labour.

But recognition alone is not enough.

We must move from appreciation to action.

I am pleased to report that the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding with the Jamaica Household Workers Union.

This agreement will support collaboration in training, employment services, occupational safety and health awareness and public education.

But Madam Speaker, we are going further.

Under this partnership, Jamaica will establish a dedicated training institution for domestic workers, the first of its kind in the Caribbean.



Madam Speaker, that is action.

That is reform.

That is barrier removal.

That is what it looks like when Government moves beyond words and begins to build structures that give dignity practical meaning.

This institution will help professionalise domestic work, support skills development, strengthen employability, improve standards and provide a pathway for domestic workers to advance.

This initiative is not symbolic.

It is transformational.

Domestic workers deserve more than kind words.

They deserve pathways.

They deserve protection.

They deserve training.

They deserve recognition.

They deserve dignity.

Madam Speaker, this Government also remains committed to advancing the legislative framework necessary to fully honour Jamaica's obligations under the International Labour Organization's Domestic Workers Convention, C-189.

In the past year, critical procedural barriers have been addressed to comply with this Convention.

Madam Speaker, we are not simply talking about dignity.

We are building pathways to dignity.

And we are doing so because people must come first.

WORKERS' WEEK

Workers' Week 2026 is being observed under the theme "Voices Heard: Shaping Labour Policies in an Evolving Labour Market," reinforcing the Government's commitment to ensuring that workers remain central to national dialogue and the development of fair, modern and responsive labour policies. The week's activities reflect both the dignity of labour and the importance of deeper engagement with workers in a rapidly changing labour environment.

Key highlights include:

- The **Industrial Dispute Tribunal Symposium**, "Promoting Justice, Fairness and Workplace Harmony," which brings together stakeholders to strengthen industrial relations and advance workplace harmony.

- Recognition of Dr. Mavis Gilmour on **Centenarians' Day**, honouring her contributions alongside the enduring impact of Jamaica's senior citizens on national and labour development.
- The continued staging of the **Labour Talks Roadshow** under the theme **"Rebuilding a Resilient and Productive Jamaica,"** providing a platform for workers, employers and communities to engage directly on labour issues and access support services. The next staging will be held in St. Ann.
- The fifth staging of **Frome Reflections**, commemorating the 1938 labour uprising and paying tribute to the struggles and sacrifices that helped shape Jamaica's modern labour movement.
- **The North Street building will be named in honour of former Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller and the National Heroes Circle building will be named in honour of Lynden Newland, the founder of the NIS and former Minister of Labour and National Insurance.**

The observance will culminate with **Labour Day** activities islandwide, reinforcing unity, resilience and inclusive national development through the enduring spirit of collective effort and service.

III. REMOVING BARRIERS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

PATH Transformation and People-Centred Reform

Madam Speaker,

Having spoken about dignity in labour, I now turn to one of the most important pillars of social protection in Jamaica's history: PATH.

The Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education remains one of Jamaica's most significant national interventions aimed at supporting vulnerable families, strengthening human capital and helping to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

In the 2025/2026 financial year alone, PATH delivered more than J\$9.1 billion in direct cash grants to over 240,000 Jamaicans.

But Madam Speaker, if we are truly committed to delivering impact, we must also confront an important reality:

For too many vulnerable Jamaicans, qualifying for PATH did not always mean receiving PATH quickly.

Families completed assessments, demonstrated genuine need and satisfied eligibility requirements, yet many still became trapped in administrative delays before support could begin.

Some waited on orientation exercises.

Some waited on verification scheduling.

Some waited because systems did not move fast enough.

And for too many Jamaicans, support remained stuck in process long after vulnerability had already been established.

Madam Speaker, passing the assessment should not mean remaining trapped in the system.

That is the barrier this Government is now removing.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, with support from the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the World Bank and our own operational reviews, undertook a comprehensive assessment of PATH operations and identified critical areas requiring reform, including:

- verification timelines;
- recertification procedures;

- administrative processing;
- data management;
- and service delivery bottlenecks.

In response, the Government has acted decisively.

Effective immediately, eligible applicants who successfully satisfy the Beneficiary Management Information System assessment requirements will now begin accessing support much faster while follow-up verification and orientation activities are completed within an established timeframe.

Madam Speaker, this represents one of the most significant operational reforms to PATH in recent years.

It will move vulnerable Jamaicans from waiting into support, from delay into delivery, and from administrative uncertainty into faster access to assistance.

Where the evidence supports faster action, Government must respond faster.

Under these reforms, persons within approved families who were previously awaiting completion of orientation or training exercises before benefits could begin will now be activated into the programme without those requirements delaying payment access.

Orientation and training will remain important components of PATH, but they will no longer operate as barriers to timely assistance.

Additionally, provisionally approved households will now move into payable status more rapidly prior to completion of the initial verification visit.

This reform is guided by evidence and practical experience.

The Ministry's data confirms that more than 80 percent of provisionally approved households are ultimately confirmed as eligible following verification exercises.

Madam Speaker, when the overwhelming majority of applicants are ultimately verified, the system must be responsive enough to support people faster while maintaining strong accountability safeguards.

The Ministry has also moved to address longstanding frustrations affecting the recertification process for PATH beneficiaries.

For many families, legitimate changes in household circumstances were not being reflected efficiently within the system, creating unnecessary disruption and frustration.

Under the strengthened recertification framework, households will now be able to more efficiently update and reflect changes including:

- children transitioning from primary to secondary school;
- changes in household composition;
- and updates affecting eligibility and compliance requirements.

Recertification must support families, not frustrate them.

The system must be capable of adapting to the realities of people's lives as those realities evolve.

Madam Speaker,

These reforms will also be supported by expanded field operations and stronger beneficiary engagement.

The Ministry will therefore strengthen its verification and beneficiary support capacity through the addition of social workers dedicated to:

- verification;
- re-verification;
- beneficiary engagement;
- and field-based support services to improve programme delivery and outcomes.

Madam Speaker,

These reforms are about removing unnecessary barriers while maintaining strong oversight.

They are about ensuring that social protection systems remain responsive, people-centred and capable of delivering support with greater speed, fairness and dignity.

Because social protection must never become a system people qualify for but cannot access.

It must remain a system capable of reaching vulnerable Jamaicans when they need it most.

Madam Speaker,

PATH must also become more proactive in how we identify vulnerability and connect families to opportunity.

Very often, our schools already know the children who are struggling. Guidance counsellors already see the warning signs.

They know the students facing hardship.
They know the families under pressure.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has commenced discussions and will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information to strengthen support for vulnerable PATH families and students across Jamaica.

Under this enhanced partnership, the Ministry will receive stronger institutional support to identify, engage and better assist vulnerable students and households at an earlier stage.

This collaboration will strengthen the bridge between education, social protection and long-term economic mobility.

Because social protection must not only respond to vulnerability.
It must also help interrupt vulnerability before it deepens.

Because PATH must do more than provide support.

It must open doors.

Madam Speaker,

Additionally, as part of this people-centred approach to social protection and recovery, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security will give priority consideration to pregnant and lactating mothers affected by Hurricane Melissa.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, and informed by recent field assessments and surveys, targeted support interventions will be coordinated to safeguard vulnerable mothers and newborns during this recovery phase.

Because recovery must protect not only infrastructure, but life itself.

Madam Speaker,

The Ministry has also advanced development of a Priority Inclusion Pathway for persons with disabilities seeking admission to the PATH programme as part of the broader PATH Transformation and national social protection modernization agenda.

This initiative will strengthen disability-sensitive targeting, improve accessibility to social assistance and referral services, and enhance coordinated support for vulnerable households through integrated case management and cross-agency collaboration.

Because a modern social protection system must be accessible, responsive and inclusive for every Jamaican who genuinely needs support.

III. REMOVING BARRIERS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION PATH TRANSFORMATION AND PEOPLE-CENTRED REFORM

A faster, fairer and more responsive PATH for every vulnerable Jamaican.



PATH MAKES AN IMPACT

**J\$9.1
BILLION+**
IN DIRECT
CASH GRANTS

240,000+
JAMAICANS
SUPPORTED IN
2025/2026

THE CHALLENGE: TOO MUCH WAITING

For many vulnerable Jamaicans, passing the assessment did not mean receiving support quickly.



Waiting for orientation



Waiting for verification scheduling



Waiting because systems did not move fast enough



Support stuck in process long after vulnerability was established

THE REFORM: MOVING FROM DELAY TO DELIVERY

Effective immediately, eligible applicants who satisfy assessment requirements will begin accessing support **MUCH FASTER** while follow-up activities continue.

1. FASTER ACCESS TO SUPPORT



Eligible households move into payable status more rapidly—even before the initial verification visit is completed.

Over 80% of provisionally approved households are ultimately-confirmed as eligible after verification.

2. ORIENTATION NO LONGER A BARRIER



Approved families will now be activated into the programme without orientation or training delaying payment access.

Orientation and training remain important—but they will no longer delay timely assistance.

3. STREAMLINED RECERTIFICATION



Households can more efficiently update and reflect changes, including:

- ✓ Children transitioning from primary to secondary school
- ✓ Changes in household composition
- ✓ Updates affecting eligibility and compliance requirements

Recertification must support families, not frustrate them.

4. STRONGER SYSTEMS & OPERATIONS



Addressing key areas to improve efficiency and reduce bottlenecks:

- Verification timelines
- Recertification procedures
- Administrative processing
- Data management
- Service delivery bottlenecks

Smarter systems.
Faster processes.
Better outcomes.

5. EXPANDED FIELD OPERATIONS



More social workers dedicated to:

- Verification
- Re-verification
- Beneficiary engagement
- Field-based support services

Stronger field presence.
Stronger support.
Stronger communities.

A MORE PROACTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND PEOPLE-CENTRED PATH

PARTNERSHIP WITH EDUCATION TO IDENTIFY & SUPPORT EARLIER



New Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information to:

- Strengthen identification of vulnerable students & families
- Connect households to support earlier
- Build a stronger bridge between education, social protection and long-term economic mobility

We will interrupt vulnerability before it deepens and open doors to opportunity.

PRIORITY SUPPORT FOR MOTHERS & NEWBORNS



Priority consideration for pregnant and lactating mothers affected by Hurricane Melissa.

In partnership with the Ministry of Health & Wellness, targeted support will safeguard vulnerable mothers and newborns during recovery.

Recovery must protect not only infrastructure, but life itself.

INCLUSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Development of a Priority Inclusion Pathway for persons with disabilities seeking admission to the PATH programme to:

- Strengthen disability-sensitive targeting
- Improve accessibility to social assistance and referral services
- Enhance coordinated support through integrated case management and cross-agency collaboration

A modern system must be accessible, responsive and inclusive for every Jamaican who needs support.

THE OUTCOME



Families receive support faster



Less delay, more dignity



Strong oversight, greater accountability



Better outcomes, stronger Jamaica.



*PATH is more than support.
It is a pathway to a stronger future.*



OUR COMMITMENT

We are removing unnecessary barriers while maintaining strong oversight to ensure social protection systems remain responsive, people-centred and capable of delivering support with greater speed, fairness and dignity.



PATH
Programme of Advancement
Through Health and Education



BECAUSE SOCIAL PROTECTION MUST NEVER BECOME A SYSTEM PEOPLE QUALIFY FOR BUT CANNOT ACCESS. IT MUST REACH PEOPLE WHEN THEY NEED IT MOST.

IV. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY BEYOND ASSISTANCE

Social Intervention Programme, Rehabilitation, Solidarity and Human Capital Development

Madam Speaker,

Jamaicans know that they can rely on the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. And they continue to do so in moments of crisis, moments of uncertainty and in moments when a single intervention can change the course of a life.

For the calendar year 2025, the Public Assistance Department delivered approximately J\$650.5 million through the Rehabilitation Programme.

Whether it is a father desperately trying to secure urgent surgery for his child through a Compassionate Grant or a young entrepreneur with a dream, seeking support for a Micro Business Grant.

Whether a student needing that extra boost through our Education and Social Intervention Grant or a household devastated by fire and in need of Emergency Assistance.

No matter the circumstance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security is there to help Jamaicans Rebuild Stronger.

Madam Speaker, the Rehabilitation Programme served 7,381 persons in 2025, representing a 27 per cent increase in beneficiaries supported and a 45 per cent increase in total disbursements when compared to 2024

Madam Speaker, for 2025, we continued our collaboration with Members of Parliament through the Short-Term Intervention Programme, providing support to over 12,000 vulnerable persons. **We know that members of this house will be pleased to receive their letters notifying them of their short-term allocations today. We expect that these allocations will be used for continued support to our most vulnerable citizens.**

The Ministry is committed to identifying vulnerable Jamaicans in need of our assistance.

Programme	Persons Paid	Amount (J\$) 2025
Rehabilitation Programme		
Compassionate Grants	2,761	\$214,553,391.23
Micro Business Grant	1,523	\$117,860,723.41
Emergency Grants	987	\$60,016,000.00
Economic and Social Intervention Grants	2,110	\$103,159,519.48
Short Term Intervention	4,715	\$154,880,435.24
TOTAL	12,096	\$650,470,069.36

And it is in that spirit, Madam Speaker, that I turn to the Solidarity Programme. A programme designed with a clear and deliberate mandate to reach Jamaicans who have historically fallen outside of existing systems. This Government has made a conscious decision that inclusion must be intentional, and that we will not only serve those easiest to reach, but those who have previously been excluded. That is the very purpose of the Solidarity Programme.

Despite operational challenges, the Programme has continued to advance its core objectives by actively helping vulnerable Jamaicans address longstanding barriers to documentation, verification, and access to Government services. We are now strengthening referral pathways, prioritising individuals who completed the process but were not paid in earlier cycles, and delivering targeted case management support alongside a phased payment resolution process over the next three months, where applicable and approved.

Madam Speaker, through outreach activities and job fairs conducted across the island, more than 2,000 Jamaicans have already accessed on-the-spot assistance, referrals, and critical Government services. To date, approximately J\$230.42 million has been

disbursed to 11,521 beneficiaries, a clear reflection of this Government's commitment to expanding access to social protection and ensuring that no Jamaican is left behind.

Madam Speaker, once barriers to access are removed, the next responsibility of Government is to create meaningful pathways into participation.

That is why the Ministry's social intervention work must be understood not merely as welfare, but as strategic investment in human potential.

Through the Social Intervention Programme, doors of opportunity have been opened for young people across Jamaica. Beneficiaries have been empowered to pursue meaningful employment, access higher education, develop entrepreneurial ventures, and obtain skills training and certification that position them for long-term independence and success.

This initiative is not simply about assistance; it is about transformation. It is about equipping individuals and families to break cycles of poverty while inspiring a new generation to thrive with dignity, purpose and opportunity.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will now move to strategically restructure the Social Intervention Programme to better support national human development priorities and respond to the growing needs of vulnerable populations.

This restructuring will support investment in areas directly connected to disability support services, special education, behavioural therapy, early stimulation and other sectors where Jamaica requires stronger human capacity.

The restructured Social Intervention Programme will include three major elements:

Firstly, the establishment of EDGE- the Executive Development and Growth Experience" Internship Programme within the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, which will provide structured professional experience across key sectors.

Secondly, an expansion of in-field support capacity for disaster response and social intervention activities.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, a country cannot effectively support vulnerable people unless it intentionally develops the human capacity required to serve them.

It is therefore my pleasure to announce the establishment of a committee to develop specific scholarships in areas of critical need. This will commence with seven (7) scholarship opportunities in the names of the 7 most recent Ministers of Labour and Social Security. The projected areas thus far are:

- **The Hon. Karl Samuda Social Intervention Scholarship**
- **The Hon. Lester Michael Henry Labour and Human Development Scholarship**
- **The late Hon. Shahine Robinson Inclusive Development Scholarship**

- **The Hon. Fenton Ferguson Early Stimulation Scholarship**
- **The Hon. Pearnel Charles Sr. Labour and Human Development Scholarship**
- **The Hon. Derrick Kellier Human Capital Development Scholarship**
- **The Hon. Horace Dalley Social Development Scholarship**

These scholarships will support studies in special education, disability services, behavioural therapy, early stimulation, social intervention and related fields.

Madam Speaker, this is how we connect legacy to opportunity.

This is how we honour service by investing in service.

And this is how we build the next generation of professionals who will strengthen Jamaica's capacity to support and protect its most vulnerable citizens.

Madam Speaker, as we speak about investment in people, dignity and inclusion across every stage of life, it is also important that we recognise those who have contributed to nation-building and who now represent the wisdom, resilience and legacy of generations past.

V. BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE JAMAICA

Seniors, Persons with Disabilities and Participation

This brings me to the work of the National Council for Senior Citizens (NCSC), which continues to play a critical role in promoting the wellbeing, protection and active participation of older persons across Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, if Jamaica is to Rebuild Stronger, we must confront our demographic realities. Birth rates are declining. The population is ageing. Senior citizens already comprise 14% of the Jamaican population — and that share is growing.

Madam Speaker, one of the most inspiring reminders of the value and contribution of our senior citizens is found in the lives of our centenarians — Jamaicans whose lives reflect endurance, sacrifice, service and extraordinary resilience.

Through the NCSC's annual Centenarian Day Activities, being observed tomorrow, May 20, 2026, the Government continues to celebrate and honour the over 423 registered centenarians who have reached the remarkable milestone of one hundred years and beyond. These observances are a national recognition that older persons remain an important and valued part of our society.

Madam Speaker, this year's observance carries special significance as we recognise a distinguished Jamaican who has not only reached this extraordinary milestone, but who has also dedicated her life to public service and national development.

I am pleased to acknowledge the former Minister of Social Security and Consumer Affairs (1988-1989), the Honourable Mavis Gilmour, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday on April 13th of this year. We will recognise her legacy through the Hon. Mavis Gilmour Centenarian Honour to be dedicated to the oldest Jamaican every year on Centenarian day.

Madam Speaker, to further support the work of the NCSC, in this financial year, the NCSC will undertake an organisational review of its current structure to support the implementation of the National Policy for Senior Citizens. On the legislative front and in recognition of the growing impact of elder abuse, a Terms of Reference had been drafted for a legal consultant to prepare drafting instructions for the Elder Care legislation and I am pleased to advise that we have completed bid evaluations and will onboard the Consultant in very short order.

Madam Speaker, under the NCSC GetConnected Digital Literacy Programme in collaboration with the HEART/NSTA Trust, 165 seniors have been empowered with digital skills, with 89 having attained City & Guilds certification, a remarkable testament to the adaptability of our older persons. **This Programme, now available in seven (7) parishes, will be expanded to Clarendon, Manchester, Trelawny, Portland and St Thomas within this financial year.**

Jamaica Council For Persons with Disabilities (JCPD)

Madam Speaker,

Between April and December 2025, the JCPD registered 928 new clients, bringing the national database to 41,739 persons with disabilities.

This Government remains firmly committed to building an inclusive Jamaica where persons with disabilities are fully empowered to contribute meaningfully to national development.

I am pleased to announce Jamaica's first Disability Inclusion Advocate, Mr. Alister McLean. Mr. McLean is a respected youth advocate and public voice for disability rights, widely recognised for using his lived experience to challenge stigma, promote accessibility, and advance equal opportunity—consistently demonstrating that disability is not inability. He will support me and the Ministry in advancing awareness, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and promoting policies that protect rights and expand opportunity for all.

This appointment represents a deliberate and meaningful step toward reducing barriers, promoting dignity, and improving the welfare and livelihoods of persons with disabilities across our nation.

Madam Speaker, as you will recall, last year the Ministry launched the I AM ABLE: My JCPD Digital Services Platform, which enabled online registration, digital verification, and faster access to services. Since its launch, just over 600 applications have been initiated online.

Building on this progress, we recognise that too many talented Jamaicans with disabilities remain economically invisible—not due to lack of ability, but due to lack of access. **In response, we are pleased to introduce the Digital Marketplace for Persons with Disabilities, a bold initiative integrated into the I AM ABLE: My JCPD Digital Services App. This platform will enable disability-owned enterprises to connect with both local and global markets. Madam Speaker, this is more than commerce; it is a pathway to economic independence and digital inclusion.**

We have also deepened strategic partnerships. A Joint Declaration of Intent has been signed with the United Nations Development System, strengthening collaboration in accessibility, data, capacity building, and public education. Additionally, following Hurricane Melissa, UNICEF provided support valued at J\$32 million, assisting 1,500 children with disabilities and their families through digital vouchers through the I AM ABLE app, as well as relief items to support recovery. Speaking about UNICEF Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge Olga Isaza the outgoing representative of UNICEF Jamaica who served us faithfully over 3 years. She will move on to a higher assignment, in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Madam Speaker, we have also reimagined our direct support programmes to better meet the needs of our people. I am pleased to highlight the Access-Ability: Tools for Transformation Grant, a renewed and expanded intervention replacing the traditional Assistive Aid Grant. With an allocation of \$25.5 million, this programme responds to the rising cost of essential assistive devices.

Eligible applicants may receive up to 80 percent of the cost, with full support provided in exceptional cases. The grant covers critical items such as hearing aids, eyeglasses, mobility devices, prosthetics, medical supplies, and therapeutic services—tools essential for independence, dignity, and improved quality of life. This support is accessible to all persons with disabilities, ensuring equitable access regardless of age, sex, or gender.

Looking ahead to the 2026/2027 fiscal year, the JCPD will focus on strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing service delivery with a strong emphasis on accessibility and digital transformation, and advancing rights through policy oversight and enforcement. Key priorities will include full implementation of digital platforms, expansion of rehabilitation services, finalisation of Codes of Practice for Education and Employment, and continued institutional capacity building.

Early Stimulation Programme (ESP)

Madam Speaker, the Early Stimulation Programme stands as a vital pillar of our social protection framework, offering a comprehensive array of therapeutic services to young children from birth to six (6) years old who are living with developmental disabilities. At present, the Programme provides early intervention support to over three thousand, six hundred (3,600) children across the island, working in partnership with private agencies, public early childhood institutions, and faith-based organizations.

Madam Speaker, in response to the growing demand for early intervention services, the Ministry is launching Access Jamaica, a bold expansion of the Early Stimulation Programme that will deploy two additional mobile therapy units to bring care directly to children with disabilities in deep rural communities. Referrals to the ESP have surged by 33 percent since 2023, stretching the capacity of our assessment and intervention centre. Through the Access Jamaica initiative, full clinical teams—including behaviour therapists, physiotherapists, early interventionists, and other specialists—will be placed on the road, beginning in the parishes of Trelawny, Westmoreland, and St. Mary. The goal is to reduce rural wait times by 40 percent and reach an additional 1,000 children in the first year. Madam Speaker, no child should be left behind because of where they live; with Access Jamaica, we are delivering hope, help, and high-quality interventions on the road.

Madam Speaker, The Early Stimulation Programme is a national investment in the dignity and potential of our youngest citizens. In every child supported, every parent trained, and

every life transformed, we reaffirm our commitment to inclusion, resilience, and opportunity for all.

Know Your Benefits Booklet

To ensure that Jamaicans can easily access the full range of services we provide, the Ministry has developed a **Quick Reference Guide : Know Your Benefits**, a practical, user-friendly booklet outlining our programmes and support systems.

This guide brings together, in one accessible resource, information on employment initiatives, social protection benefits, support for persons with disabilities, assistance to vulnerable groups, and services for our senior citizens. It reflects our commitment not only to design strong systems, but to make those systems understandable and reachable for every Jamaican. Physical copies are available here today. You may also scan the QR code at the front for the electronic version and visit our kiosk for a guided demonstration of the programmes and services available to you.

Because empowerment begins with information. And when our people know what is available to them, they are better positioned to thrive.

MLSS EXPO

Madam Speaker,

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security will host the **MLSS Expo: Innovation for Inclusion**, a dynamic showcase highlighting talent, entrepreneurship and strategic partnership.

The Expo will feature artwork and products from the Abilities Foundation, alongside exhibits from the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) and the Early Stimulation Programme (ESP), demonstrating the continuum from early intervention to economic empowerment.

We will explore partnerships with the Development Bank of Jamaica (DBJ) and the Jamaica Business Development Corporation (JBDC). Participants will access business support, financing pathways and market readiness guidance.

Madam Speaker, this Expo moves beyond assistance to opportunity fostering entrepreneurship, promoting independence and advancing true inclusion.

Social protection must not only respond to vulnerability. It must also help create pathways toward productivity, employment and economic participation.

VI. PRODUCTIVITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Jamaica Jobs, Productivity and SPIRO

Madam Speaker,

Rebuilding stronger means ensuring that Jamaica is prepared to compete in a rapidly evolving global economy while creating more accessible pathways to employment, productivity and opportunity for our people.

It is within this context that the Social Protection for Increased Resilience and Opportunity (SPIRO) Project remains central to the Ministry's modernization agenda.

Supported by a US\$20 million World Bank loan, SPIRO will modernize how Jamaicans access employment services and social protection through three major pillars:

- Unemployment Insurance;
- a Unified Social Protection Information System;
- and a modernized Labour Market Information System.

Through SPIRO, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security is advancing Jamaica Jobs by modernizing the Labour Market Information System into a platform designed to strengthen job matching, improve skills alignment and enhance labour market responsiveness. This enhanced system is supported by an estimated US\$2 million investment.

The Unified Social Protection Information System, valued at approximately US\$2.3 million, will create a more integrated and people-centred platform for access to the Ministry's welfare programmes. Procurement has advanced to the Request for Proposal stage, with six firms shortlisted from twelve submissions. Upon completion of the evaluation process, Cabinet approval will be sought for contract award during the second quarter of this financial year.



International Social Workers' Conference 2025

Madam Speaker,

Jamaica recorded an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent at the end of October 2025, reflecting continued labour market resilience despite the national disruption caused by Hurricane Melissa.

To accelerate re-employment, restore livelihoods and support national rebuilding, the Ministry launched the Jamaica Works initiative to connect Jamaicans to opportunities across construction, tourism, agriculture, logistics, manufacturing and other recovery-related sectors.

In the year ahead, the Ministry intends to:

- solicit at least 20,000 recovery-related vacancies;
- register 12,000 new jobseekers;
- conduct 84 job fairs across all parishes;
- facilitate 20,000 referrals;
- and target 10,000 job placements.



Madam Speaker,

These initiatives represent far more than labour market targets. They represent families rebuilding, communities recovering and Jamaicans working toward greater stability, dignity and opportunity.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, through the Jamaica Productivity Centre, also continues to strengthen Jamaica's national productivity agenda.

Over the last five years, the Centre has contributed to more than a 60 percent improvement in firms reached across industries and delivered an estimated J\$288 million in productivity value to audited clients.

Productivity is not simply about output. It is about improving how businesses grow, how institutions deliver and how the lives of Jamaicans improve.

Today, we are also pleased to showcase a number of practical productivity toolkits at our kiosk. I encourage you to stop by, engage with the team, and explore the resources available to help drive greater efficiency, innovation, and growth within your own organisations.

SPIRO, Jamaica Jobs, Jamaica Works and the Jamaica Productivity Centre together represent a broader transformation to make opportunity more visible, services more responsive and Government more effective for the Jamaican people.

As Jamaica modernizes employment systems and labour market access, we must also prepare workers and businesses for the profound transformation reshaping the global economy.

VII. PREPARING JAMAICA FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

Expanding Opportunity Without Weakening Protection

Madam Speaker,

The future of work is no longer something approaching in the distance.

It is already reshaping how Jamaicans earn, compete and build livelihoods.

Remote work, digital services, platform-based employment, artificial intelligence and technology-driven industries are transforming labour markets across the world.

Increasingly, Jamaicans are participating in the global economy from wherever they are — from Kingston to Clarendon, from Montego Bay to rural communities across the island.

These changes present enormous opportunities for Jamaica:

- opportunities for young people;
- opportunities for women balancing work and family responsibilities;
- opportunities for rural communities;
- opportunities for skilled professionals;
- and opportunities for Jamaicans to access global markets without leaving home.

But Madam Speaker, modernization must not come at the expense of protection.

The future of work must expand opportunity without weakening protection.

As labour markets evolve, Jamaica must ensure that workers remain protected, businesses remain competitive and our people remain prepared for the industries that will define tomorrow.

Jamaica cannot prepare tomorrow's workforce using yesterday's labour systems.

And so, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security is advancing a comprehensive Future of Work Agenda built on four major pillars:

- 1. Modernizing labour policy for the digital economy;**
- 2. Establishing fair and flexible standards for remote work;**
- 3. Expanding inclusion for digital and non-traditional workers;**
- 4. Preparing Jamaicans for AI-driven and technology-enabled industries.**

Pillar One — Future of Work and Digital Labour Task Force

Madam Speaker,

I therefore announce the establishment of the Future of Work and Digital Labour Task Force.

This Task Force will bring together representatives from Government, organized labour, the private sector, the BPO industry, HEART/NSTA Trust, academia, digital entrepreneurs and youth stakeholders to develop a strategic national response to the changing world of work.

The Task Force will examine:

- **modernization of labour frameworks;**
- **protections for non-traditional workers;**
- **the impact of automation and artificial intelligence on employment;**
- **and policy reforms required to strengthen Jamaica's competitiveness in the digital economy.**

Stakeholder consultations will commence immediately, with initial recommendations to be provided to the Government within six months.

Pillar Two — National Remote Work Framework

Madam Speaker,

Flexible and remote work arrangements are becoming a permanent feature of the global labour market.

The Ministry will therefore begin development of National Remote Work Guidelines and pilot a structured Remote Work Framework in collaboration with selected public and private sector stakeholders.

This framework will help establish modern standards relating to:

- **productivity and accountability;**
- **worker wellbeing and mental wellness;**
- **cybersecurity and digital responsibility;**
- **fair workplace expectations;**
- **and emerging principles such as the right to disconnect.**

Our objective is not to create unnecessary bureaucracy.

Our objective is to provide clarity, fairness and stability within a rapidly evolving labour environment while supporting innovation, flexibility and competitiveness.

Pillar Three — Digital Worker and Freelance Inclusion Initiative

Madam Speaker,

Thousands of Jamaicans are now earning income through freelance services, platform work and independent digital engagement.

Yet many of these workers remain outside traditional labour and social protection systems.

The Ministry will therefore launch a Digital Worker and Freelance Inclusion Initiative aimed at strengthening engagement with non-traditional workers and expanding pathways toward greater inclusion within the national labour and social protection framework.

This initiative will support:

- **voluntary registration of digital and freelance workers;**
- **expanded access to labour support services;**
- **financial literacy and professional development;**
- **skills certification and workforce advancement;**
- **and long-term exploration of broader social security participation, including NIS accessibility.**

Pillar Four — Workforce Transformation and AI Readiness

Madam Speaker,

Preparing Jamaicans for the future of work also requires preparing Jamaicans for the future of industry.

Artificial intelligence, automation and digital transformation are already reshaping global labour demand. The countries that succeed in the years ahead will be those that invest not only in jobs, but in adaptable, technology-ready and future-focused workers.

Jamaica must be among those countries.

The Ministry will therefore collaborate with HEART/NSTA Trust, academic institutions and private sector stakeholders to strengthen workforce transition and upskilling initiatives aimed at preparing Jamaicans for emerging global labour demands.

The next generation of Jamaican workers must be equipped not only for traditional service roles, but for AI-enabled industries, digital operations, cybersecurity, analytics and technology-driven leadership.

Madam Speaker,

The future of work cannot simply be about preparing workers to survive disruption.

It must be about preparing Jamaicans to lead within the industries of the future.

BUSINESS PROCESS OUTSOURCING (BPO) SECTOR

Modernizing Competitiveness and Worker Wellbeing

Madam Speaker,

The Business Process Outsourcing sector remains one of Jamaica's most important employment industries and continues to create opportunity for thousands of Jamaicans, particularly young people entering the workforce.

The sector has strengthened economic participation, expanded employment and reinforced Jamaica's position as a respected global services destination.

But long-term competitiveness requires more than expansion alone.

It requires workforce stability.

It requires healthy workplaces.

It requires productivity and worker wellbeing to advance together.

The Ministry has therefore intensified engagement with stakeholders across the sector regarding labour relations, workplace wellness, occupational health and workforce development.

Madam Speaker,

As the sector continues to evolve, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security remains committed to ensuring that workplace standards evolve alongside economic growth.

To reinforce these efforts, the Ministry will establish the **Standards Accountability and Fairness in Employment (SAFE) Task Force** to strengthen workplace oversight, compliance engagement, employee welfare and responsible labour practices within the sector.

The SAFE Task Force will support:

- **strengthened worker engagement;**
- **workplace wellness initiatives;**
- **labour rights sensitization;**
- **mediation and labour relations support;**
- **and improved collaboration between Government, employers and workers.**

The Ministry will also undertake a **BPO Workforce Wellness Review** to assess emerging workplace trends, workforce concerns and areas requiring collaborative policy attention and improvement.

Additionally, the Ministry intends to introduce an **MLSS Decent Work Partnership Recognition Programme** aimed at encouraging and recognizing strong labour and workplace practices within the BPO sector and other major employment industries.

This recognition framework will acknowledge employers demonstrating:

- responsible labour practices;
- strong worker wellness systems;
- investment in training and workforce development;
- opportunities for career mobility and advancement;
- and meaningful worker engagement initiatives.

Madam Speaker,

Jamaica's long-term competitiveness will be strongest where innovation, productivity and worker dignity advance together.

As Jamaica modernizes its labour environment, we remain guided by a simple principle:

The future of work must not become a future of insecurity.

It must become a future of opportunity, protection and advancement for the Jamaican people.

As industries expand and reconstruction accelerates, worker protection and workplace safety must remain central to national development.

VIII. REBUILDING SAFELY

OSH and the Risk Management Toolkit

Madam Speaker,

As Jamaica rebuilds after Hurricane Melissa, recovery must never come at the expense of worker safety, because lives lost cannot be replaced.

In 2025, the Ministry's Occupational Safety and Health Department conducted 1,855 safety compliance inspections. These included 1,208 inspections of factories, 548 construction projects, 12 docks and 87 cargo vessels. During the same period, 80 industrial accidents were investigated.

Madam Speaker, these inspections and investigations are not simply regulatory exercises. They are life-saving interventions.

Over the past six years, Jamaica has seen a clear and encouraging decline in fatal industrial accidents. In 2024, Jamaica recorded zero fatal industrial accidents. In 2025, two fatalities were recorded.

Even one death is too many. But the trend demonstrates that when employers, workers and regulators treat safety as a shared responsibility, lives can be saved.

Madam Speaker,

As national reconstruction accelerates, safety cannot be treated as an afterthought. It must be built into the way we work, the way we rebuild and the way we protect the people helping to restore Jamaica.

That is why the Occupational Safety and Health Department will develop a comprehensive OSH Risk Management Toolkit aimed at strengthening workplace safety practices across Jamaica.

This toolkit will provide employers, workers, safety professionals and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises with practical resources to identify high-risk workplace hazards, strengthen safer work practices and reduce serious injuries and fatalities.

The toolkit will include guidance relating to:

- working at heights;
- electrical hazards;
- high-risk worksite conditions;
- safer operational practices;
- and effective accident investigations.

Madam Speaker,

This initiative is about more than compliance. It is about prevention. It is about building a national culture where safety becomes a condition of productivity and not an afterthought to it.

A worker who is unsafe cannot be productive. A family that loses a breadwinner cannot simply move on. A worksite that ignores risk is not efficient — it is dangerous.

Rebuilding safely is therefore not only a technical requirement. It is a moral responsibility.

Madam Speaker,

Throughout 2025, in close partnership with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, the Ministry continued prioritising the Occupational Safety and Health legislation.

The Ministry and the OPC have now arrived at a settled draft of the Bill and consultations with relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies are almost concluded.

Our aim is to present the Bill to the Legislative Committee, table it before this Honourable House, guide it through robust debate and secure its passage within this fiscal year.

This legislation will establish a modern and comprehensive framework for occupational safety and health while strengthening protection for Jamaican workers across all sectors.

Modern labour markets require more than opportunity alone. They require stability, trust, fairness and confidence in the systems that govern work.

IX. STRENGTHENING LABOUR CONFIDENCE

Unemployment Insurance, Minimum Wage and Labour Protection

Madam Speaker,

A strong labour market requires more than jobs.

It requires fairness.

Stability.

Trust.

Protection.

Confidence in the systems that govern work.

Hurricane Melissa reminded us that economic stability can be disrupted suddenly.

A worker can be employed one week and displaced the next.

A business can be functioning one month and closed the next.

A family can be stable one moment and vulnerable the next.

And a worker who loses employment through no fault of their own should not also lose dignity.

That is why this Government continues to advance one of the most transformative reforms in Jamaica's social protection history.

Madam Speaker, you may recall that in May 2025, Cabinet approved the introduction of an Unemployment Insurance Benefit. Since then, our dedicated Unemployment Insurance Committee has worked intensively to develop the comprehensive legal framework.

On December 15, 2025, we submitted the first set of drafting instructions to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, proposing necessary amendments to the National Insurance Act and the Employment (Termination and Redundancy Payments) Act.

Madam Speaker, allow me to be very clear about timelines:

- Consultants will be onboarded in this fiscal year to set up the operational aspects and system modifications.
- Unemployment insurance contributions are envisioned to commence within a year.
- First eligible workers will start receiving benefits in the next two years.

We will also roll out a nationwide public sensitization campaign so that every worker and employer understands their rights and responsibilities under this groundbreaking programme.

Madam Speaker, unemployment insurance is not merely a policy innovation.

Work is about dignity, stability, family security and confidence.

Madam Speaker, unemployment insurance will usher in a new era of social protection as we rebuild stronger to deliver impact.

Madam Speaker, this aligns with the Ministry's continued work with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and key national stakeholders to finalise Jamaica's Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), a framework to guide national efforts to create more and better jobs, strengthen worker protections, improve social protection systems, and support stronger cooperation among Government, employers and workers. A working draft of the diagnostic report has been completed and is currently being refined through ongoing stakeholder engagement and technical review to ensure that the Programme reflects Jamaica's labour and development priorities. The first DWCP Validation Workshop is expected to be completed this month, with the official launch of the Programme anticipated later this year. The ministry is collaborating with the Office of the Prime Minister in developing the National Employment Policy. With the support of the ILO we have completed the diagnostic phase.

Madam Speaker, the minimum wage is a national safeguard that balances social protection with economic stability and serves as a structured mechanism to ensure fair compensation.

As of July 1, 2026, the national minimum wage for all workers, including private security guards, will move from \$16,000 to \$17,000 for a forty-hour work week. In respect of the Industrial security guards all other existing allowances remain unchanged.

This represents the sixth increase since 2016 and reflects this Government's commitment to protecting low-income workers and supporting household stability.

Madam Speaker, worker protection also requires a stable labour environment. As our Prime Minister has indicated, the Government remains committed to ensuring that work provides not merely survival, but dignity, stability, and opportunity for every Jamaican worker. The Minimum Wage Commission will continue to explore the establishment of a Livable Wage Standard, aimed at advancing a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to income security and social protection.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the Labour Relations Code, a foundational framework that has helped guide good labour relations and the peaceful settlement of industrial disputes in Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, as Jamaica marks the 50th anniversary of the Labour Relations Code, we acknowledge the work of our Labour Advisory Council that has served as an effective tripartite forum to advance social dialogue and examine relevant matters.

Looking forward, the Government has commenced the review of the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act (LRIDA), Labour Relations Code and the regulations which will support the modernization of Jamaica's labour relations framework and guide future reforms to strengthen industrial harmony, dispute resolution and decent work standards within a modern labour environment.

After fifty years, one truth remains clear:

Disagreement must never destroy dialogue.

Industrial harmony remains one of Jamaica's greatest competitive advantages.

It preserves jobs.

Supports investment.

Strengthens productivity.

Keeps the economy moving.

And reflects the maturity of our democracy.

The Industrial Disputes Tribunal marked its 50th anniversary and operationalised a fifth panel to address the increasing volume of individual disputes, reduce backlogs and expedite settlements.

Worker protection must also extend to those seeking employment.

In 2025, the Employment Agencies Unit conducted 189 inspections of private employment agencies, processed and recommended 34 new licences, and carried out 18 investigations.

Two persons were arrested for illegal activities.

The Unit also sensitised Jamaica Constabulary Force officers across 13 police localities and conducted 69 outreach activities to help citizens avoid scams.

Madam Speaker, through Operation Streamline, the Ministry also continued improving efficiencies in work permit processing.

During the last reporting period, 710 investigations were conducted, surpassing the established target.

In addition, 253 CSME applications were processed and issued, representing a 25 percent increase.

The Ministry also responded to 102 verification requests from member states.

Our social insurance architecture also remains strong. This year the National Insurance Scheme celebrates its 60th anniversary. The NIS provides a vital safety net to thousands of workers on their retirement as well as domestic workers, workers injured on the job, widows and widowers and orphans. **In the calendar year 2025, the National Insurance Scheme recorded \$44.8 Billion in contributions. Based on the triennial actuary review, the last being in 2022 an increase in benefit rates were recommended. Last year, 2025 over \$31.25 billion was spent to provide these benefits. In addition, Madam Speaker, the National Insurance Fund stands at \$262.8 Billion in net assets at the end of March 2026.**

Madam Speaker, whether through unemployment insurance, minimum wage protection, industrial harmony, employment agency regulation, social insurance or work permit efficiency, the purpose remains the same:

To protect workers.

Strengthen confidence.

Improve systems.

And ensure the labour market works in the interest of national development.

Jamaica's labour strategy must also recognize the important role overseas employment continues to play in supporting livelihoods, strengthening families and expanding opportunity.

X. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY BEYOND BORDERS

Overseas Employment Programme

Madam Speaker,

Sixty years ago, a Jamaican worker boarded a plane, left behind a family, and crossed an ocean to harvest crops on foreign soil. He went not because it was easy, but because it was necessary. He returned not with fanfare, but with earnings that built a house, kept a child in school, and planted the seeds of a better future.

That worker is the reason we gather today. That legacy is the foundation on which this programme stands.

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme — sixty years of service, sacrifice and distinction by Jamaican men and women who have made their mark on Canadian farms and returned home with pride. It is one of the most consequential labour partnerships in our hemisphere, and it belongs, first and foremost, to the workers who built it.



Herman Beckford, the longest serving farmworker (37 years) photographed with Hon. Donovan Williams, Minister of State, His Excellency, Mark Berman, High Commissioner of Canada to Jamaica, Hon. Parnell Charles Jr., Minister of Labour and Social Security, Mrs. Dione Jennings, Acting Permanent Secretary and Ms. Sue Williams, General Manager for the Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (F.A.R.M.S.)

Madam Speaker,

The significance of this milestone was recently reflected in a gesture that stopped many of us in our tracks. Niagara Falls — one of the most iconic natural landmarks in the world — was lit in the colours of the Jamaican and Canadian flags, in recognition of six decades of partnership and the contribution of Jamaican farm workers to Canadian agriculture.

That image — gold, black and green blazing against one of the world's greatest wonders — was a moment of international recognition that Jamaicans everywhere could be proud of. It was also a reminder of what sustained excellence and mutual respect can produce over time.

Madam Speaker,

The programme's strength is reflected in its numbers. **In 2025, a total of 15,169 Jamaican workers were dispatched to Canada and the United States — an increase of 944 workers** over the 14,225 who travelled during the corresponding period in 2024.



These figures are not merely statistics. They represent continued international confidence in the Jamaican workforce — in the discipline, resilience and reliability for which our workers have earned a global reputation.

Madam Speaker,

This Ministry listens. The interventions I am about to announce are not the product of bureaucratic design alone — they come directly from the voices of our farm workers. Their requests have been heard, documented and acted upon. When workers speak, this Ministry responds.

In the coming months, the Ministry will implement an automated calling and text-messaging system to improve worker communication, strengthen tracking and reduce administrative delays and costs.

The Ministry will carry out necessary repairs and upgrades to the East Street location to enhance the facilities used to process our farm workers.

Additionally, the Ministry will open a processing outpost at our El Greco property. This will bring services closer to workers in western Jamaica — reducing travel time and the financial burden on workers from Westmoreland, Hanover, St. James and surrounding parishes who currently travel long distances to access programme services.

This is not a small administrative change. It is a meaningful shift in how this programme delivers — bringing Government to the people, not asking the people to always come to Government.

Following concerns raised by farm workers about the medical assessment process, the Ministry took decisive action: we temporarily paused those assessments to conduct a thorough and impartial evaluation. Assessments will not resume until the Ministry is fully satisfied that the process is fair, transparent and protective of the workers it is designed to serve.

Beginning this week, Jamaicans travelling to the United States through the Ministry will have the option to access an insurance programme under United Work and Travel's policy with The Hartford — providing up to USD 100,000 in coverage, including protection for serious illness, death and dismemberment.

Workers and their families deserve security, not just opportunity. This Ministry will ensure they have both.

Madam Speaker, To honour the sixtieth anniversary in a meaningful and lasting way, the Ministry will award sixty scholarships to the children of farm workers participating in the programme.

These scholarships recognise the sacrifices made by workers who leave their families to contribute to agriculture abroad. Education is not simply a reward. It is the next chapter of the farm worker's legacy.

Madam Speaker, recruitment for the 2027 season will commence immediately. This afternoon, letters will be issued to all Members of Parliament requesting the nomination of fifty suitable individuals to participate in the Overseas Employment Programme during the 2027 season.

Each Member of Parliament may utilise up to five of these nomination spaces to accommodate female candidates, reflecting the increasing demand from our employers for workers skilled in the use of farming equipment.

Members are also being encouraged to give consideration to farmers who are trained and experienced in the following areas:

- Handling of heavy agricultural equipment
- Forklift operations
- Tractor driving
- Other areas involving the operation or servicing of farm machinery

This is because the programme is evolving. The workers we send must evolve with it. Skilled, equipment-ready candidates will position Jamaica to meet the demands of modern agriculture and strengthen our standing with employers across North America.

Global labour markets are becoming more competitive. Jamaican workers must be equipped with modern skills and training to maintain their strong international reputation and access new employment sectors.

Madam Speaker, a programme with the ambition to expand across North America requires governance equal to that ambition. The Management Committee — currently responsible for the Canadian Liaison Service and our operations in Canada — will be fundamentally restructured.

This is not a routine administrative adjustment. It is a bold reform of how we govern and sustain overseas employment at the highest level. **The restructured Management Committee will manage both Canada and US programmes. The Committee will be retooled with a clear mandate: to expand Jamaica's labour presence to drive greater operational efficiency, and secure the long-term international sustainability of the programme.**

Critically, the reconstituted Committee will incorporate private sector leaders — individuals with the specific skills, networks and expertise that a programme of this scale and ambition demands.

Madam Speaker, the programme is becoming more inclusive. In 2025, four persons with disabilities trained in agricultural skills were successfully dispatched overseas. This year, additional placements will bring that number to ten.

Every Jamaican who is willing, trained and capable deserves a place in this programme. Inclusion is not an afterthought — it is a commitment.

Madam Speaker,

Jamaica will proudly host the 2026 Annual Review Meeting of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme this November — bringing together Canadian officials, employers and regional Ministers of Labour to strengthen cooperation, modernise labour mobility and reaffirm Jamaica's leadership in fair and sustainable overseas employment.

This is our opportunity to shape the future of the programme on the international stage. Jamaica will show up with a clear vision, a strong record and an unshakeable commitment to our workers and to our partners.

No discussion about rebuilding stronger would be complete without addressing the national recovery effort following Hurricane Melissa and the systems established to support affected Jamaican families.

XI. HURRICANE MELISSA RESPONSE

Relief, Partnership and National Recovery

ROOFS

PHASE 1

Madam Speaker,

I now turn to one of the Government's most significant recovery interventions following Hurricane Melissa — the Restoration of Owner or Occupant Family Shelters Programme, ROOFS.

In response to the widespread housing damage caused by Hurricane Melissa, the Government of Jamaica operationalised the Shelter Recovery Programme to support the rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery of affected households across the island.

At the centre of this intervention is the ROOFS Programme.

With an initial allocation of J\$10 billion, the programme, implemented through the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, provides targeted financial assistance to owner or occupant households whose homes were damaged during the disaster.

Madam Speaker, the scale of Hurricane Melissa required one of the largest housing recovery operations ever undertaken in Jamaica.

More than 115,000 households were assessed following the passage of the hurricane, reflecting the extensive level of damage and disruption experienced across communities islandwide.

To date:

- approximately 43,000 households have been fully verified under the ROOFS framework;
- Almost 80% have redeemed their benefits
- approximately J\$9.49 billion has been disbursed directly to Jamaican families; and
- approximately 54,000 households remain within various stages of verification, reconciliation, validation or alternative programme assessment under the wider recovery framework.

Importantly, Madam Speaker, not every assessed household falls within the ROOFS payment category, as the broader Shelter Recovery Programme also includes:

- Government-led repairs;
- partner-supported reconstruction;

- National Housing Trust support;
- Modular solutions
- and relocation assistance where necessary.

Assistance under ROOFS remains structured based on assessed levels of damage using the JHDINA framework and includes:

- J\$75,000 for Minor Damage;
- J\$200,000 for Major Damage; and
- J\$500,000 for Severe or Total Damage households.





Madam Speaker,

Behind every disbursement is a Jamaican family trying to regain stability after disaster.

It is the elderly pensioner trying to protect treasured memories from water damage.

It is the market vendor placing buckets across a leaking bedroom floor every time rain falls.

It is families trying to preserve both their homes and their hope.

For many Jamaicans, recovery began with one simple desire — to feel safe at home again.

And that is what the ROOFS Programme is intended to provide.



What Phase 1 taught us

Madam Speaker,

The first phase of implementation exposed operational realities which required modernization and reform.

These included:

- verification and data matching issues;
- incorrect or incomplete beneficiary information;
- duplicate applications;
- GPS and geolocation inconsistencies;
- congestion at collection points;
- and access limitations affecting vulnerable and rural communities.

The Ministry has not ignored these challenges.

Instead, the lessons from Phase I are being used to shape a stronger, more coordinated and more people-centred Phase II recovery framework.

Under Phase 1, there are verified beneficiaries who have not yet redeemed their assistance due to issues such as outdated or incorrect phone numbers and other difficulties receiving notifications.

The Ministry is now actively supporting these verified households to complete the redemption and payment process.

The remaining persons under phase 1 who have been verified but yet to redeem will now benefit from the upgraded GovPay 2.0 platform, which now includes AI-supported scheduling systems assigning beneficiaries specific dates, times and collection points through SMS notifications.

This has already improved organisation at disbursement sites and reduced overcrowding.



Madam Speaker,

The Government has also reviewed another important issue affecting a category of vulnerable households.

Previously, some Jamaicans who had received support under the TransJamaican Highway (TJH), Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) and Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development (MEGID) were restricted from accessing ROOFS benefits because of overlap concerns within the broader recovery framework.



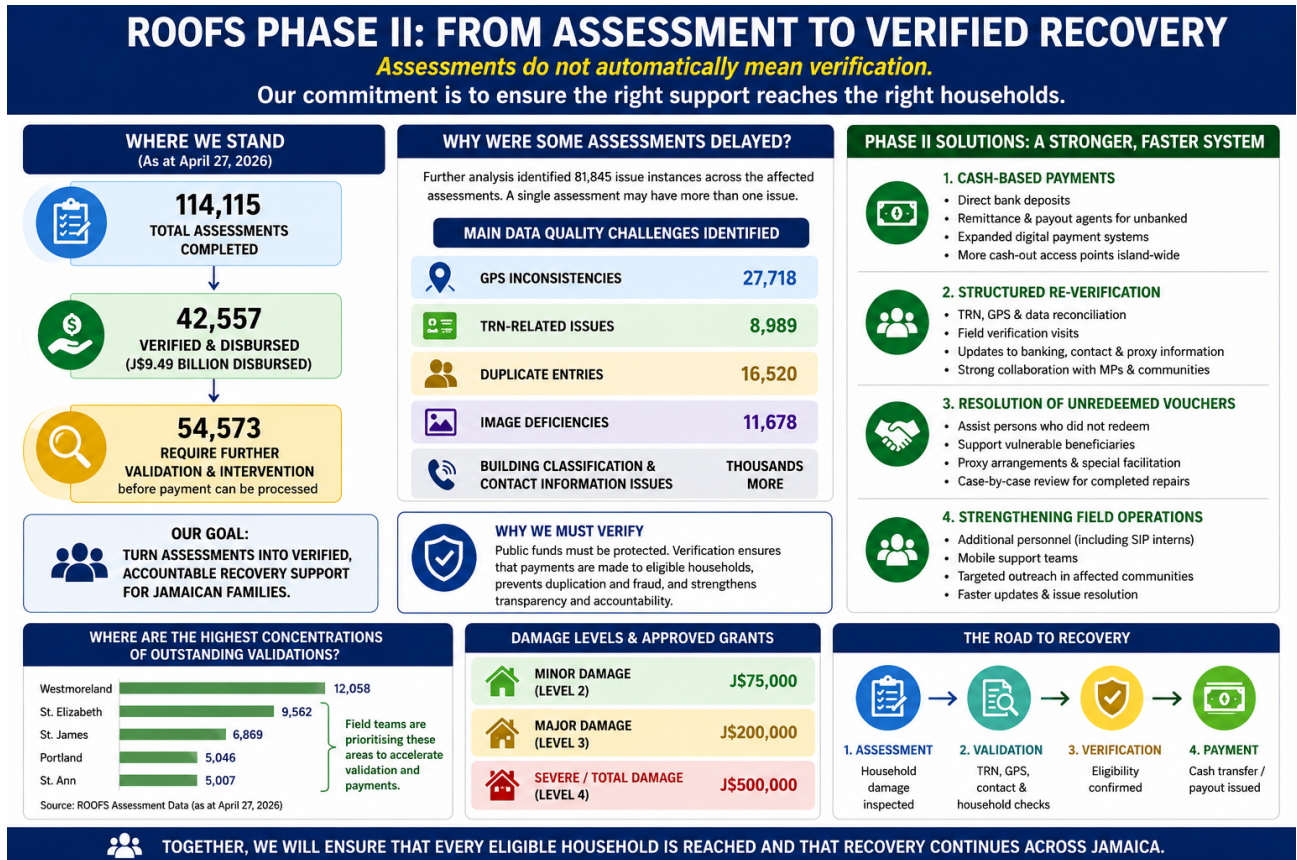
That matter has now been reviewed and adjusted.

Affected households who were previously blocked under those arrangements will now become eligible to access their full ROOFS benefit entitlement where applicable.

This adjustment forms part of the Government's commitment to ensuring that vulnerable Jamaicans are treated fairly and that recovery support reaches households genuinely affected by Hurricane Melissa.

Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF)

Madam Speaker, The Government also welcomes the recent receipt of approximately J\$273 million under the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), through the support of the World Food Programme, which will further support ongoing recovery and resilience-building efforts following Hurricane Melissa.



TRANSFORMATION OF ROOFS

Phase II

Madam Speaker,

Phase I got emergency recovery moving during a period of national disruption.

Under Phase I, the Government implemented a controlled redemption system to ensure accountability and traceability in the use of public funds. While that structure provided an important layer of transaction monitoring, it also created operational bottlenecks, delays in redemption, logistical challenges and frustration for many beneficiaries, particularly vulnerable households and persons in remote communities.



We listened carefully to the concerns of the Jamaican people. We examined the operational realities. And we have acted decisively to improve the system.

Phase II is now modernizing, correcting and accelerating the system to ensure faster, fairer and more accountable delivery to the Jamaican people.

Phase II is not merely a continuation of ROOFS, it represents the transformation of ROOFS into a more accountable, technology-enabled and community-supported recovery system focused on faster delivery and better outcomes for Jamaican families.

ROOFS Phase II is built on three commitments: pay faster, verify smarter and account stronger.

And so today, I announce:

Five Steps to Accelerated Recovery Under ROOFS Phase II

These five measures are designed to:

- speed up delivery;
- improve accessibility;
- strengthen accountability;
- modernize operations;

- and ensure that verified Jamaicans receive support more efficiently and effectively.

STEP ONE

Faster Direct Cash Payments

Madam Speaker,

Following Cabinet approval, under ROOFS Phase II, verified beneficiaries will now receive support through a direct deposit mechanism following completion of the verification process. This adjustment will significantly improve the speed of disbursement, reduce congestion and administrative barriers, increase accessibility, and allow families greater flexibility to move more quickly toward shelter recovery and rebuilding.

Additionally, beneficiaries who are yet to redeem under Phase 1 will also have this option.

STEP TWO

National Verification and Recovery Drive

Madam Speaker,

Before payment can be made, verification must be completed. As such, the Ministry is now launching a National Verification and Recovery Drive focused on accelerating the clearance of outstanding assessment and verification issues.

This initiative will target:

- unresolved verification cases;
- TRN validation issues;
- duplicate submissions;
- incomplete applications;
- occupancy confirmation requirements;
- and beneficiary information updates.

Approximately 8,989 households have been identified with TRN or beneficiary information issues requiring correction or validation before payments can be completed.

To address this, the Ministry has partnered with the Tax Administration Jamaica to utilise the Revenue Administration Information System (RAiS) validation system to verify and correct records more efficiently so that eligible beneficiaries can receive their grants in a timely manner.

The Ministry is also finalising an online correction and verification platform to allow households to update and validate beneficiary information more easily.

Additionally, targeted reconciliation teams will be deployed into high-volume communities where clusters of unresolved assessments and anomalies have been identified.

Where GPS validation challenges exist, Ministry teams will undertake in-field visits to affected households to support validation and ensure that eligible Jamaicans are not excluded because of technical limitations.

Madam Speaker,

Recovery cannot depend only on vulnerable Jamaicans travelling to Government offices.

Government must also go to the people.

STEP THREE

ROOFS ACCESS: Prioritising Vulnerable Households

Madam Speaker,

Phase II will also introduce the ROOFS ACCESS Initiative — Accelerated Coordination and Comprehensive Empowerment Support Services — in partnership with the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities and the National Council for Senior Citizens.

This initiative is specifically designed to identify and prioritise:

- persons with disabilities;
- senior citizens;
- medically vulnerable individuals;
- and households with limited mobility or transportation access

for accelerated assistance under the Programme.

The initiative will:

- strengthen vulnerability identification;
- improve accessibility;
- reduce barriers to support;
- and provide more targeted field assistance for vulnerable households.

Special mobile recovery support teams will also be deployed into vulnerable and rural communities to assist persons requiring support with:

- verification;
- documentation;
- payment processing;
- and reconciliation matters.

STEP FOUR

Community Coordination and Outreach Support

Madam Speaker,

Recovery at this scale requires strong community coordination, local partnership and shared national responsibility.

The Ministry will therefore strengthen collaboration with:

- Members of Parliament;
- Councillors;
- local authorities;
- community stakeholders;
- and civil society partners

through a formal ROOFS Community Coordination Framework.

This framework will improve coordination and the escalation of unresolved community-level issues affecting vulnerable households.

Under the ROOFS Community Coordination Framework partners will be asked to actively support the identification of vulnerable affected households within their respective communities, particularly:

- **senior citizens;**
- **persons with disabilities;**
- **medically vulnerable individuals;**
- **bedridden persons;**
- **and households facing severe mobility, transportation or access challenges.**

These partners are being asked to work alongside Ministry teams over the next four weeks to help compile and submit relevant information to support accelerated targeting, verification and assistance for these high-priority households under the ROOFS ACCESS Initiative.

The Ministry will also work with stakeholders to continue organised outreach engagements across affected communities to help Jamaicans resolve documentation, verification and payment issues closer to where they live.

STEP FIVE

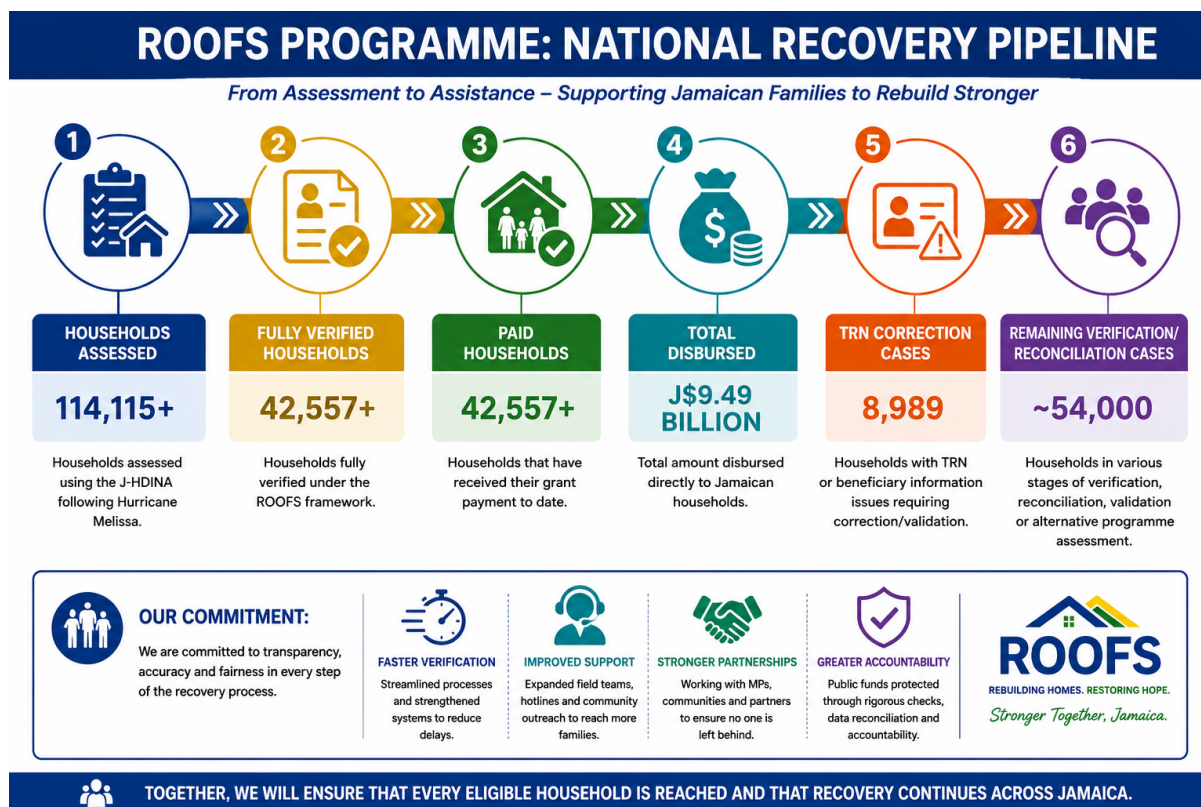
Modernising Systems, Stronger Accountability

Madam Speaker,

Hurricane Melissa exposed the need for Jamaica to build a stronger and more resilient national disaster recovery architecture.

The Ministry is therefore advancing modernization of its verification and beneficiary data management systems through:

- improved digital integration;
- enhanced audit tracking;
- strengthened reconciliation systems;
- and GPS validation improvements;



Stronger Accountability: Safeguarding Public Fund

Madam Speaker, while the system is being redesigned for greater efficiency and responsiveness, accountability remains paramount.

These reforms are intended to strengthen transparency, efficiency and future disaster response capacity.

Under the enhanced accountability framework for ROOFS Phase II, the Ministry will implement strengthened pre-payment verification measures, including:

- TRN validation;
- National Identification checks;
- geospatial and address confirmation;
- and cross-checking against existing Government support databases.

Enhanced data analytics will also be utilised to identify duplicate claims, irregular patterns and suspicious entries prior to payment approval.

Madam Speaker,

The programme will also transition to a modern risk-based monitoring model.

Higher-risk cases will be subjected to increased review, inspection and compliance monitoring, while randomized post-disbursement audits will be conducted across beneficiary categories to strengthen transparency and deter abuse.

These audits may include:

- field inspections;
- photographic verification;
- geotagged evidence reviews;
- and other compliance measures necessary to confirm that assistance is supporting legitimate shelter recovery.

Madam Speaker,

These accountability mechanisms are not intended to create new barriers for vulnerable Jamaicans.

Their purpose is to ensure that the programme remains fair, transparent, accountable and properly targeted to those genuinely in need.

The Government is also exploring enhanced transparency measures, including public reporting dashboards and strengthened compliance tracking systems, to provide Jamaicans with greater visibility into programme delivery and recovery outcomes.

Madam Speaker,

The objective of ROOFS Phase II is clear:

- to reduce bureaucracy without reducing accountability;
- to modernize delivery without compromising integrity;
- and to ensure that families can recover faster, rebuild stronger and restore stability with dignity.

This is what rebuilding stronger looks like.

Beyond systems.

Delivering impact.

XII. CLOSING REMARKS

Madam Speaker,

As I close, I return to the central truth that has guided this presentation — and this Ministry.

Jamaica grows stronger when its people are empowered to succeed.

Not when systems are built. Not when programmes are announced. When people — real people — feel the difference.

The domestic worker with legal protection and dignity. The vulnerable family connected to PATH, now able to access healthcare, education and opportunity. The young person securing employment at our job fairs. The person with a disability dispatched overseas — not as a charity case, but as a capable, contributing worker. The family whose roof was restored after Hurricane Melissa — supported by a Government that prepared for the worst.

Madam Speaker, Hurricane Melissa tested our character and Jamaica answered — with resilience, with solidarity, and with a government that refused to leave its people behind.

That spirit is not reserved for disasters. It is the standard.

This year, this Ministry is not simply administering programmes. We are transforming how they reach people by simplifying access, strengthening protection, expanding opportunity and restoring dignity.

That is what it means to go beyond systems.

Because systems do not build countries, Madam Speaker.

People do.

And when we place people at the centre — when we design for the worker, build for the vulnerable, and deliver for those who have been waiting the longest — we are not just rebuilding.

We are rebuilding stronger.

That is the work of this Ministry.

That is the mission we carry forward.

From PATH, to unemployment insurance, to ROOFS, the mission is the same: moving beyond systems that delay people and building systems that deliver impact for people.

Madam Speaker, we are Rebuilding Stronger for every Jamaican.

I thank you.