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BRAIN GAIN

Solving the Labour Shortage and Competing for Global Talent



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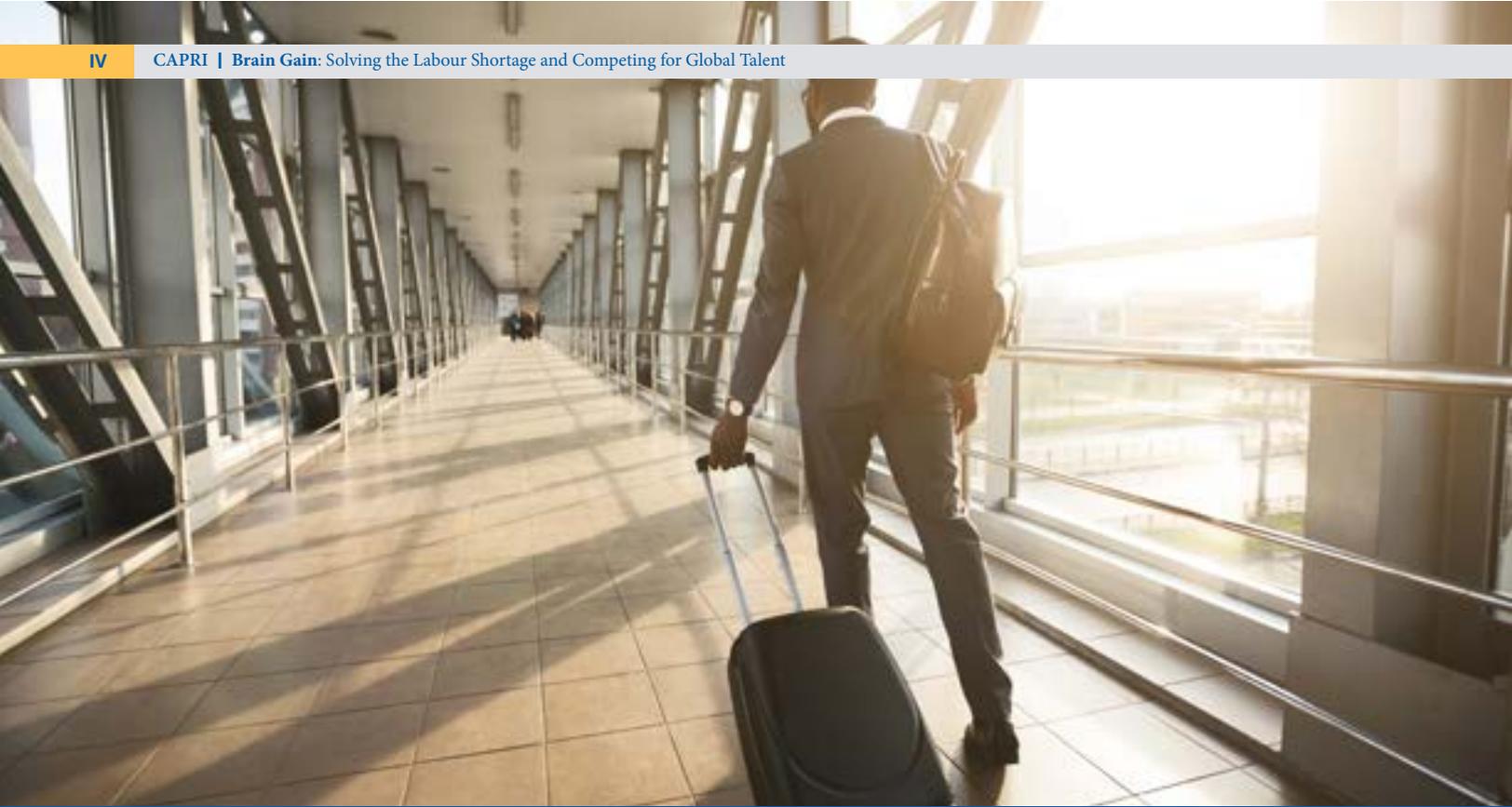
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Acronyms

BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSME	CARICOM Single Market and Economy
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOJ	Government of Jamaica
GNI	Gross National Income
HEART/NSTA	Human Employment and Resource Training/ National Service Training Agency Trust
HIC	High Income Countries
HRMAJ	Human Resource Management Association of Jamaica
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JMEA	Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LIC	Low Income Countries
LMIC	Lower Middle-Income Countries
MLSS	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PICA	Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency
STATIN	Statistical Institute of Jamaica
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TRT	Temporary Residence Transition
TSMIT	Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold
TSS	Temporary Skill Shortage
UCJ	University Council of Jamaica
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Countries
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WVS	World Values Survey



Executive Summary



Increased immigration has the potential to improve Jamaica's economic growth and development trajectory. However, increasing immigration would involve liberalising existing immigration policies and streamlining immigration processes.

Jamaica is currently experiencing record low unemployment of 4.5 percent and a worsening shortage of skills. This skills shortage acts as a constraint on economic growth and development. This report examines the potential effects of increased immigration on economic growth, wages and employment, and productivity. The report reviews Jamaica's migration trends, its immigration framework, and the current labour market landscape. It also considers global attitudes to immigrants before evaluating the potential impacts of liberalising the labour market to achieve higher immigration levels, drawing insights from the experiences of other countries.

Increased immigration has the potential to improve Jamaica's economic growth and development trajectory. However, increasing immigration would involve liberalising existing immigration policies and streamlining immigration processes. Jamaica's immigration framework appears to be relatively liberal; over 99 percent of work permit applications are approved, and immigrants and their dependents enjoy access to social services and a pathway to permanent residence and citizenship. However, the cost, time, and bureaucracy associated with getting permission to work in Jamaica constitute a restrictive process that acts as a disincentive to immigration.

Jamaica has a general shortage of labour



and specific skills, which is partially caused by emigration. Nearly four in every 1000 citizens emigrate from Jamaica annually. And while nearly one third of people born in Jamaica live overseas, immigrants constitute just 0.7 percent of the country's population, the third lowest share in the region before Cuba and Haiti. Therefore, though the ongoing labour and skills shortage worsened post COVID as Jamaica approached today's 4.5 percent unemployment rate, the shortage of skills had existed for several years before and was recognised as a constraint on growth.

This report identified several potential benefits of increased immigration. One study of selected OECD countries revealed that a 10 percent increase in the share of

immigrants in the population was associated with a 0.15 percent higher per capita gross domestic product. Additionally, studies in the United Kingdom and the United States demonstrated that immigrants were more entrepreneurial and innovative than natives, being nearly twice as likely to start a business and 35 percent more likely to have a patent.

The report also found that skilled immigrants contribute technical skills, market knowledge, language skills, and cultural understanding, while low skilled workers complement higher skilled workers by occupying roles locals cannot fill. In aggregate, the evidence in advanced economies shows that a 1 percent increase in

Skilled immigrants contribute technical skills, market knowledge, language skills, and cultural understanding, while low skilled workers complement higher skilled workers by occupying roles locals cannot fill.

the migrant share of the adult population increased productivity by approximately 2 percent. Furthermore, immigration increases the likelihood of investment in both directions. A small, positive relationship was observed between immigration and investment inflows in OECD countries, and in the US, a doubling of the immigrant population from an origin country increased the likelihood of Foreign Direct Investment to that origin country by 4 percentage points.

Additionally, the study found that investment may be adversely affected by labour shortages when projects get delayed or postponed, and when potential investors forego an investment out of fear of not being able to find the required labour. Finally, this study found that immigrants are usually net contributors to the fiscal budget. Generally, high skilled immigrants contribute more than low skilled immigrants. However, immigrants tend to contribute more and benefit less than similarly qualified natives, and usually have a net impact within 1 percent of GDP.

The study also identified areas where immigration had negative or mixed impacts. For instance, no evidence indicated that a one-off influx of immigrants could reverse Jamaica's ageing population. Rather, slowing ageing would require a constant inflow of immigrants. Additionally, the impacts of immigration on unemployment varied by skill and national income levels. While immigration generally has no impact on unemployment in rich countries, one study found that a 1 percent increase in Venezuelan workers reduced employment among Colombians by 0.1 percent.

Analysing wages revealed mixed effects. In Italy, immigrants had a negative effect on wages when they constituted more than 8 percent of employed persons. Meanwhile, in the European Union, migration reduced wages for low-skilled workers by 5 percent. The primary factor in these cases was whether the skills immigrants possessed caused them to complement or compete with the existing workforce. As a result, the report rec-

ognises the potential for the immigration of low skilled workers to Jamaica to adversely affect the unskilled workers who constitute a majority of the employed labour force.

International migration is a difficult and costly process and just 3.6 percent of people globally are voluntary international migrants. Therefore, given the potential benefits, and since Jamaica is not a particularly attractive destination for immigrants, the immigration policy and its associated processes should be conducive to attracting (skilled) talent. This system should be market driven to ensure its



Recommendations

The primary outcomes of a change to immigration policy should be an efficient and transparent immigration system that permits employers to obtain the skills they need, and positions Jamaica as a more attractive destination country for independent skilled workers. This would be in line with the Hybrid Model of selective immigration described above, but with less intervention by the central government. This system should be matched with collaborative efforts to facilitate firm and industry level skills transfers and learning. As is consistent with international norms and Jamaica's current laws, immigrants should retain a pathway to permanent residence and access to public social services, including opportunities to further develop their skills.



1

The government should amend the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) Act to eliminate the requirement for a work permit to specify the name of an employer and the place of employment of the permit holder.²⁴⁷ This would enable a potential immigrant to freely change employers or to legally take on additional employment. Employers and immigrant employees would retain the right to enter into legally binding contracts that outline the terms of employment, including minimum employment durations and relocation costs.

The government should amend the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) Act to eliminate work permit holding fees. The work permit application fee should remain insofar as it covers the cost incurred by the state in processing the application.

2



3

In the absence of an immediate policy reform, the Minister of Labour should use their discretion under Section 8 of the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens Act to pre-emptively exempt from the work permit requirement occupational categories that are experiencing persistent shortages. Occupational categories should be decided through consultations between the MLSS, private sector organisations, and labour unions.



Recommendations



4

The MLSS should remove from the work permit application process the need for employers to prove that actions have been taken to recruit Jamaican workers. The process may retain requirements to report on criminal history, remuneration, skills, firm information, and other such data.

Jamaica's National Visa Policy currently under draft should establish a category of visas that allows highly skilled citizens of any country to move to Jamaica for 3-12 months and search for a job. Granting of the visa should be dependent on the skills possessed and the transfer of funds into a domestic blocked account sufficient to cover living expenses for the time the visa is valid.²⁴⁸ Visa holders should be able to begin working immediately upon finding a job or establishing an enterprise.

5



6

The capacity of the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) to verify international qualifications, particularly those obtained in developing countries, should be expanded. This may involve a one-off payment from government or a loan to improve existing systems, but operating costs including maintaining upgrades, database subscriptions, should depend on fees collected by the UCJ in conducting its business.





1

Introduction



JAMAICA is currently experiencing record low unemployment of 4.5 percent and a worsening shortage of skills. This skills shortage acts as a constraint on economic growth and development.

International labour migration and the associated movement of skills are prominent features of the global economy with implications for source and destination countries. Jamaica, a traditional labour-exporting country, is currently experiencing record low unemployment of 4.5 percent and a worsening shortage of skills. This skills shortage acts as a constraint on economic growth and development. This report examines the potential effects of increased immigration on economic growth, wages and employment, and productivity. The report reviews Jamaica's migration trends, its immigration framework, and the current labour market landscape. It also considers global attitudes to immigrants before evaluating the potential impacts of liberalising the labour market to achieve higher immigration levels, drawing insights from the experiences of other countries.

The report begins with relevant background information on international migration in Jamaica, the prevailing laws and regulations governing immigration, and the nature and extent of the labour and skills shortages in the country. The report also includes an overview of the attitudes to immigrants held by native populations in a range of other countries. Then, it explores the potential impacts of increased immigration enabled by a more liberal policy and streamlined process of immigration on economic growth, wages, employment, productivity, demography,

and fiscal budget. This is followed by an in-depth case study of Trinidad and Tobago's experiences with an influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees since the late 2010s. The study concludes with recommendations for reforming Jamaica's immigration policy.

Background: Overview of Migration Trends for Jamaica

Migration is a key feature of Caribbean societies; emigration outflows exceed immigration inflows. In 2020, the number of emigrants was six times greater than the number of immigrants in the Caribbean region, approximately 9.8 million emigrants versus 1.6 million of immigrants (Table 1 and Figure 1).

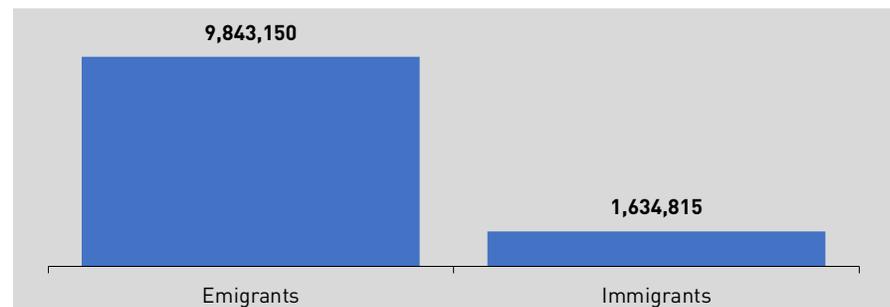
As of 2020, 19 out of 29 countries/territories in the Caribbean region had a higher number of emigrants (nationals living abroad) than immigrants. Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, had more than 1.1 million and even up to 1.7 million emigrants each (Table 1).

Ten of the 29 countries/territories in the region namely, Anguilla, Aruba, the Bahamas, Belize, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, had a higher number of immigrants than emigrants (Table 1).

In the Caribbean, many leave, few enter.



Emigrants and Immigrants, 2020, Caribbean Region.



Source: Regional Data Hub; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division.⁴

In 2020, the number of emigrants was six times greater than the number of immigrants in the Caribbean region, approximately 9.8 million emigrants versus 1.6 million immigrants.

In the majority of countries/territories in the Caribbean, there is a larger number of emigrants than immigrants.



Stock of Emigrants and Immigrants in All Caribbean Countries/Territories, 2020.

Country	Emigrants (Stock) ⁷	Immigrants ⁸ (Stock)	Immigrants (% ⁹ of Population)
Puerto Rico	1,850,529	274,132	8
Haiti	1,769,671	18,884	0.2
Cuba	1,757,300	3,024	0.03
Dominican Republic	1,608,567	603,794	6
Jamaica	1,118,931	23,629	0.8
Guyana	438,413	31,169	4
Trinidad and Tobago	330,519	78,849	5
Suriname	273,209	47,801	8
Barbados	99,611	34,869	12
Dominica	78,191	8,284	12
St. Lucia	71,227	8,338	5
Antigua and Barbuda	66,561	29,286	32
Grenada	62,204	7,213	6
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	55,525	4,738	5
Bahamas	53,793	63,583	16
Belize	52,756	62,043	16
St. Kitts and Nevis	50,285	7,725	16
Montserrat	24,582	1,379	-
Aruba	21,456	53,593	50
Martinique	12,963	68,624	-
Guadeloupe	12,542	90,206	-
Bonaire, Sint Eustatius & Saba	8,148	26,221	-
Curaçao	7,611	57,210	37
British Virgin Islands	5,355	22,164	72
United States Virgin Islands	3,908	-	-
Turks and Caicos Islands	2,689	-	-
Anguilla	2,505	5,715	-
Sint Maarten (Dutch part)	2,191	-	-
Cayman Islands	1,908	29,242	43

Notes: The spaces with a dash (-) indicate that no data were available.

Immigration

Despite primarily being a region from which people emigrate, Caribbean countries/territories also serve as destination countries of both intraregional and extraregional immigrants.¹⁰ As of 2020, there were 1.6 million international immigrants residing in Caribbean countries (Figure 1). Just over one-third of these immigrants were in the Dominican Republic (Table 1). Moreover, although immigrants in Dominican Republic only accounted for six percent of the total population, the country had the largest stock of intraregional immigrants (Tables 1 and 2).¹¹

In Jamaica, immigrants make up less than 1 percent of the total population (Table 1). Out of these immigrants, the intraregional immigrants had the smaller share compared to the extraregional share, and they came from Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, and The Bahamas. The extraregional immigrants came mainly from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and India.¹²

Belize had by far the fewest intraregional immigrants from the Caribbean, perhaps because of its location in Central America and it being farther from many other Caribbean countries. Aruba also had one of

the fewest intraregional immigrants from the Caribbean (Table 2).¹³

As people move from countries with lower standards of living and fewer opportunities to those where employment opportunities are more readily available, some clear patterns emerge. Countries/territories typically characterized by thriving tourism industries and higher incomes (such as The Bahamas) tend to attract intraregional immigrants from countries like Haiti and Jamaica (Table 2). At the same time, high-skilled workers from countries such as Jamaica often move to other Caribbean countries, including The Bahamas, where they have more opportunities to use their skills and earn higher incomes.¹⁴

Belize is both a Caribbean and a Central American country, making its immigrant population unique in the region. In 2020, immigrants accounted for 16 percent of Belize's total population and most immigrants in the country were from other Central American countries, and Caribbean intraregional movement was limited (Tables 1 and 2). The neighbouring countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras accounted for the top three principal countries/territories of origin of extraregional immigrants in 2020.¹⁵ Suriname similarly played a more limited role in Caribbean

intraregional movement. There was immigration to Suriname from countries outside of the Caribbean, with Brazil and China being two of the top three origin countries of extraregional immigrants. Here, Chinese immigration is a reflection of an increasing Chinese economic and political presence in the region, including in the form of growing investments.¹⁶

The largest stock of extraregional immigrants were Venezuelans in the Dominican Republic. Venezuela was the principal country of origin of extraregional immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba and Curaçao (Table 2).¹⁷ After Venezuelans, US nationals were the second largest extraregional immigrant population (Table 2). Immigration from the United States is largely driven by tourism, investment, and family members following Caribbean nationals who are deported from the country. US nationals represented significant shares of the immigrant populations of certain countries/territories, including Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and The Bahamas. Martinique and Guadeloupe are Caribbean territories of France so the majority of the immigrants were extraregional immigrants coming from France.¹⁸



The majority of the region's immigrants come from outside the region.



Top 10 Destination Countries/Territories of Immigrants in the Caribbean Region, 2020.

Destination Country/Territory	Total Immigrants	Highest		2 nd Highest		3 rd Highest	
Dom. Rep	603,794	Haiti	496,112	Venezuela	34,063	US	14,626
Puerto Rico	247,132	US nationals	159,515	Dominican Republic	46,905	Cuba	12,637
Guadeloupe	90,206	France	50,960	Haiti	13,973	Martinique	8,635
Trinidad and Tobago	78,849	Venezuela	24,001	Guyana	10,923	Grenada	8,913
Martinique	68,624	France	52,350	Guadeloupe	6,070	St. Lucia	2,256
Bahamas	63,583	Haiti	29,629	US Nationals	10,359	Jamaica	8,042
Belize	62,043	Guatemala	26,767	El Salvador	10,016	Honduras	9,784
Curacao	57,210	Venezuela	16,500	Netherlands	10,562	Dom. Rep	6,665
Aruba	53,593	Venezuela	17,000	Colombia	10,926	Netherlands	5,128
Suriname	47,801	Guyana	13,557	Brazil	5,566	China	5,446

Source: Regional Data Hub.¹⁹

Notes: Highlighted cells indicate extra-regional source countries and territories; Puerto Rico is an overseas territory of the U.S. Nationals born in mainland US and living in these territories may not be considered as international migrants under certain US definitions. However, these individuals are considered international migrants for statistical purposes in UNDESA databases.

As of 2020, there were **1.64 million** International Immigrants residing in Caribbean countries.





2 Jamaica's Migration Policy Framework



Jamaica's immigration laws provide opportunities for its diaspora to access and engage in the local labour market.

Attempting to increase immigration to Jamaica may involve changing the documentary and monetary requirements (liberalising) or reducing the processing time (streamlining) for work permit applications. In 2021, just 0.3 percent of work permit applications (including renewals) were rejected.²⁰ This implies that once an application is made, approval is nearly guaranteed. However, factors such as the length and difficulty of the application process may deter potential applicants and serve as a barrier to higher immigration levels. This, along with Jamaica's historical unattractiveness as an immigrant destination (high unemployment, low growth, unstable currency, insecurity, etc) may have contributed to Jamaica having the second lowest shares of immigrants in the region.²¹ As some of these factors change, it should be considered the extent to which the existing framework supports the optimal flow of immigrants.

Jamaica has an established framework to manage immigration, regulated by a series of laws and policies that outline the procedures and collectively define the parameters for legal entry into and residency in the country. Immigration is governed by the Jamaican Nationality Act (1999), the Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act (2004), the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens

(Employment) Act (2011), and other related laws and policies.²² Broadly speaking, there are four categories of immigrants to Jamaica:

Jamaican nationals who are resident overseas (or their spouses or descendants), holders of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME) Skills Certificates, exempt persons, and all other non-nationals. The category a potential immigrant belongs to influences the ease, cost, and duration of the immigration process.

Jamaican Nationals (and their Spouses or Descendants)

Jamaica's immigration laws provide opportunities for its diaspora to access and engage in the local labour market. The Jamaican diaspora is the collective of long-term emigrants and their descendants, who are currently residing abroad.²³ Jamaican law permits a non-Jamaican with at least one parent or grandparent who was born in Jamaica to live, study, and work indefinitely in Jamaica.²⁴ This may be achieved through a citizenship application, obtaining a Jamaican passport, or an "unconditional landing" status stamped in a foreign passport.²⁵ Individuals who were born in Jamaica but who travel on a foreign passport, and persons who marry a

Jamaican national, are also eligible for unconditional landing status.²⁶ Consequently, these individuals encounter no legal restrictions to immigrating to Jamaica and thus fall outside the scope of the aspects of this report pertaining to a policy change.

Qualified CARICOM Single Market and Economy Citizens

The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) facilitates limited labour migration among the 12 participating member states.²⁷ Under the current CSME framework, up to 13 categories of workers enjoy unrestricted movement, ten of which are implemented in Jamaica.²⁸ Included in these ten categories of labour are bachelor's degree holders, media workers, sportspersons, and artisans.²⁹ Additionally, the Right to Provide Services and the Right of Establishment permit nationals of participating countries to offer services and establish businesses in other CSME member countries and enjoy equal treatment as host country nationals.³⁰ These provisions offer an advantage to some workers and entrepreneurs from CSME countries who wish to enter Jamaica's labour market. However, in either case, certain requirements must be met by prospective workers before they can commence employment.

There are four categories of immigrants to Jamaica: Jamaican nationals who are resident overseas, holders of Caribbean Community CSME Skills Certificates, exempt persons, and all other non-nationals.

The CSME's regime of free movement of skilled nationals involves a bureaucratic application process. One must obtain a "Certificate of Recognition of Caribbean Community Skills" (also known as a "Skills Certificate") from a CSME member state. The application process typically entails providing personal information, certified proof of qualifications and identity, a criminal record from their recent country of extended residence, a statement of intent for the application, and an application fee. A Skills Certificate, once issued in any CSME member state, holds validity in all other CSME member countries, but receiving countries usually have an authentication process for certificates issued elsewhere. Once the Skills Certificate is authenticated, the CSME national may seek permission from competent authorities to remain indefinitely in the receiving country. In Jamaica, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) processes and authenticates Skills Certificates and the Passport, Immigration, and Citizenship Agency (PICA) grants permission to remain.

The Skills Certificate provides a pathway for qualified CSME nationals to live and work in Jamaica. There is no requirement to demonstrate the unavailability of Jamaican workers before CSME nationals are granted a Skills Certificate, as is the case for other foreign nationals applying for work permits, which is explained below. Moreover, since CSME nationals can travel to member states without a visa, and are automatically allowed a stay of six months, a qualified jobseeker could relocate before finding a job or receiving a Skills Certificate. Therefore, the process of immigration for these workers is easier due to the ease of relocation and the relative ease of obtaining work authorisation. Nevertheless, delays in meeting the documentary requirements for Skills Certificates for CSME nationals who have legally entered other member countries may pose a challenge to such skilled nationals accessing formal work.

The free movement of all CSME nationals, regardless of qualifications, is being contemplated. The suggestion that the region would experience full labour mobility was made in July 2023, when CARICOM Heads of Government announced



Citizens of 93% of Commonwealth countries travel to Jamaica visa-free, compared to citizens of just 46% of non-Commonwealth countries.

a decision to, in their words, "work towards" the free movement of all CSME nationals within member countries by March 2024.³¹ The Heads of Government indicated that certain regulatory issues needed to be addressed, including the guarantee of certain basic rights; the governance of the regime was not announced. However, the existing CARICOM Agreement on Social Security, in effect since 1997, and the Protocol on Contingent Rights, signed in 2018 but not yet in force, could facilitate the process by allowing the portability of social security benefits and safeguarding the rights of immigrants' dependents.³² For this goal to become reality, however, it is certain that new arrangements—protocols and regulations—would be required.

A discussion of labour migration within CSME countries prompts consideration of the special situation of Haiti, a member state. CARICOM's total population (estimated) is 18 million people; the majority, almost 12 million, are Haitians.³³ A significant proportion of the Haitian population lack formal skills, and a considerable segment of Haiti's populace is engaged in unskilled or informal labour. Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic, where a majority of immigrants are Haitian, typically exhibit lower educational levels, with around 70 percent lacking proficiency in Spanish. Their work is predominantly concentrated in low-skilled sectors and occupations.³⁴ Thus there may be concerns that the free movement of labour in the region could lead to other CARICOM countries being

flooded with unskilled workers.

In a 2018 legal opinion, CARICOM's Office of the General Counsel asserted that Haitians should enjoy all the rights granted to citizens of other CSME countries; however, this is not borne out in practice.³⁵ Despite their full CSME membership status, Haitians share a similar status to non-CSME nationals outlined below because they have failed to meet the requirements to facilitate the CSME agreement.³⁶ Most Haitian citizens are required to obtain visas for travel to Jamaica and several other CARICOM member states.³⁷ Additionally, Haitians cannot benefit from CSME Skills Certificates or under the provisions of the Right of Establishment and the Right to Provide Services.³⁸

Non-CSME Immigrants

Outside of qualified CSME citizens, Jamaica's immigration laws distinguish between non-CSME Commonwealth citizens and non-Commonwealth citizens. Despite the technical distinction between the two groups, they face identical requirements immigrating to Jamaica.³⁹ The Commonwealth is a group of 56 independent countries, most of which are former colonies of the United Kingdom, and many of which have immigration laws that distinguish Commonwealth nationals from third state nationals.⁴⁰

For most people who cannot qualify for a CSME Skills Certificate, obtaining a work permit is a legal requirement to work in Jamaica. This policy entails submitting an

application to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, demonstrating that the applicant poses no security risk to Jamaica, will not become a financial burden on the public, and that no Jamaican is available for the intended job.⁴¹ Work permits can be issued with varying durations, ranging from one month up to three years, after which they may be renewed.

The work permit application process for prospective immigrants is challenging. Despite official indications that work permit decisions are typically rendered within six to eight weeks of a complete application, several stakeholders reported extended delays, with approvals taking up to a year.⁴² Several stakeholders indicated that the process lacks a clear and detailed tracking mechanism, which can be interpreted as a lack of transparency. However, MLSS indicated that tracking may be done through customer service, SMS, WhatsApp messaging, and Microsoft 365. Several stakeholders noted that the MLSS is currently in the process of revising the work permit application process which is expected to reduce processing times and increase transparency.

The bureaucratic hurdles for work permits in Jamaica are further compounded by the associated costs. There is an application fee of J\$17,250 (US\$111). The fee schedule in place until 2019 imposed costs ranging from J\$110,000 (US\$827) to J\$170,000 (US\$1,278) per permit per year, varying by industry. Subsequently, an updated schedule removed industry-based distinctions

and established an annual fee of J\$195,500 (US\$1,260) or J\$48,875 (US\$315) for every three-month period during which the permit is valid.⁴³ These costs alone, which do not include the administrative costs of preparing and submitting an application, represent 34 percent of the national annual basic minimum wage in 2023.

Some interviewees perceived the work permit application process to be more difficult for non-Commonwealth immigrants, but this is possibly due to the disparity in visa-free temporary travel between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth states. Citizens of 93 percent of independent Commonwealth countries travel to Jamaica visa-free, compared to citizens of just 46 percent of non-Commonwealth countries.⁴⁴ This gap is relevant to short-term travellers who can conduct business and do limited work without a permit.

The gap is also notable since short term, temporary visits, are usually predictive of later immigrant flows as those visitors establish relationships, enterprises, and opportunities that precede immigration.⁴⁵ Despite the differences in short term travel for Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth citizens, the lengthy and onerous work permit application process, appears to be the same for all non-CSME workers.

Exempted Persons

Certain groups may receive work permit exemptions, but many stakeholders indicated that they were not aware of those

provisions. The stakeholders who identified exempt groups referred to exemptions made to fill shortages in the health care and education sectors.⁴⁶

Typically, those qualifying for exemptions must obtain an exemption certificate by writing to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour.⁴⁷ Students, foreign dignitaries, teachers in approved institutions, public sector workers, and business owners are some categories of workers who may receive exemptions.⁴⁸ The law also allows granting work permits or exemptions at the portfolio minister's discretion.⁴⁹ In 2021, just 51 work permit exemptions were approved (there were 87 times as many work permit applications).⁵⁰

There are also exemptions permitted under Article Four of the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM (CARICOM and the Dominican Republic) and the European Union. Under the agreement, certain EU workers are permitted to work in Jamaica for periods ranging from 90 days (per calendar year) to three years, before leaving the country.⁵¹ These workers are: key personnel, graduate trainees, business services sellers, contractual services suppliers, independent professionals, and short-term visitors for business purposes. The reciprocal movement of labour is also permitted.





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Long Term Residence

Voluntary legal migrants and their dependents can eventually qualify for permanent residence allowing them to live and work in Jamaica without work or study permits. Applications for permanent residence status may be made after three years of being employed in Jamaica or immediately in the case of dependents of permanent residents, spouses of Jamaicans, or non-Jamaican retirees. Meanwhile, non-Jamaicans can generally apply for citizenship after living in Jamaica for five years. Applications for permanent residence or citizenship are made through the Passport, Immigration, and Citizenship Agency (PICA) and are decided by the Chief Executive Officer of PICA or the National Security Minister, respectively.⁵² Approval is usually dependent on the applicant proving that they are of generally good character and are capable of caring for themselves and their dependents.

Refugees may also benefit from long term residence status. Refugees may apply for protection only once they are in Jamaica. One exception is unaccompanied minors

who cannot benefit from refugee protections.⁵³ An application for refugee status may be denied, granted, or denied but with the applicant granted permission to remain in Jamaica for a limited period. In the latter two cases, the applicant would be allowed to remain for up to three years in the first instance, after which they may be allowed to remain for a further definite or indefinite period, during which time they would enjoy the right to work and other basic rights enjoyed by all Jamaicans.

Refugee matters are generally decided by specific government ministries with leadership from the ministry responsible for immigration (National Security in Jamaica). Refugee applications are initially adjudicated by an Eligibility Committee comprising of three officers from the ministries responsible for immigration (who chairs), foreign affairs, and justice. The Eligibility Committee makes recommendations to the Permanent Secretary in the ministry responsible for immigration. A Refugee Review Body, comprised of a retired judge, a retired diplomat, and a retired permanent secretary (or another former senior civil servant), reviews appeals to applications denied by the Permanent

Secretary and makes recommendations to the Minister responsible for immigration.

Assessing the Restrictiveness of Jamaica's Immigration Framework

Assessing the extent to which a country's immigration policies are liberal or restrictive is not straightforward. Cross-country comparisons may be thought to be a direct approach. However, there are several intersecting factors that may make those comparisons difficult. In general, the stock of immigrants (relative to the population), ease of entry, and the rights of immigrants post-entry represent general indicators.⁵⁴ Some countries may have policies that deter initial entry, but which afford substantial rights to those who have arrived and already in country. Countries could also have a mixture of entry requirements that depend on skill level, country of origin, or other factors that make it difficult to make definitive, objective statements about how restrictive their immigration policies are.

Immigration-oriented programmes targeting specific occupations appear to be more ad hoc than systematic responses to labour market challenges.

“There is no restriction (to immigration) since the law that Jamaicans should be given first priority to employment is not followed and everyone can bring people in. This implies that the Ministry’s verification of this requirement is not strong enough.”

- Private Sector Stakeholder 8

Jamaica’s immigration policies appear to be liberal. Jamaica has no immigration targets or quotas, and only around 0.3 percent of work permit applications are declined. However the Ministry of Labour and Social Security grants permits on the principle that the ratio of Jamaican to foreign workers does not exceed four to one, indicating that there is a possibility that increased application levels could cause an increase in the rate of declined permits.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, immigration-oriented programmes targeting specific occupations appear to be more ad hoc than systematic responses to labour market challenges.

Immigrants enjoy several rights in Jamaica. Jamaica permits dual citizenship, immigrants can access health services without verifying their immigration status, and they can benefit from social protection programmes such as the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and the

Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH). Furthermore, Jamaica supports contingency rights allowing family reunification. Foreign qualifications are recognised by the University Council of Jamaica, which is in line with UNESCO’s Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.⁵⁶

While the policy appears liberal, and immigrants enjoy many rights not afforded immigrants in other countries, the process itself is restrictive given its cost and onerousness. In addition to having to meet the legal requirements, applications may be delayed beyond the stated eight weeks if technical problems arise.⁵⁷ Furthermore, applicants must remain outside Jamaica while the application is being processed, or they must leave the country and return if the permit is approved while they are here. While these issues are reflective of the general diffi-

culties in navigating typical government bureaucracy which are generally slow and untransparent, they are nonetheless formidable obstacles to free movement of foreign workers into the country.

In Summary: Immigrating to Jamaica

The avenues for immigration to Jamaica differ based on the nationality of the potential immigrant. Those with familial connections to Jamaica, and citizens of CSME member countries have relatively smoother access to Jamaica’s labour market, with the exception of Haiti. In contrast, non-CSME citizens face a tedious and expensive work permit application process. Regardless of the pathway taken, immigrants who remain in Jamaica long enough will eventually have the option of seeking permanent residence, eliminating the need for a work permit. Understanding Jamaica’s immigration landscape was a necessary first step to ascertaining the potential for immigration to be considered as an option in Jamaica’s attempts to resolve its current labour market challenges, as will be set out in the next chapter.

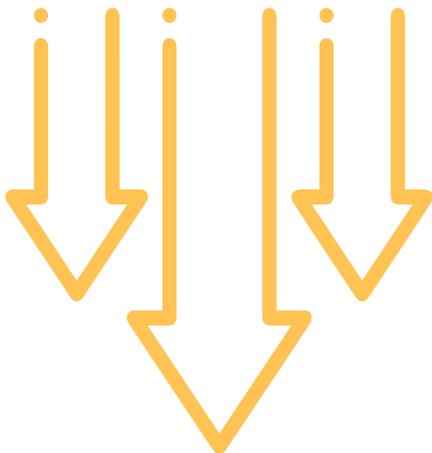
For most people who cannot qualify for a CSME Skills Certificate, obtaining a work permit is a legal requirement to work in Jamaica.





3

Labour Market Analysis



Recent surges in labour demand, coupled with decades of mass emigration, have depleted the pool of potential workers.

Jamaica's labour market situation in 2023 is characterised by an unprecedented low unemployment rate and a labour and skills shortage. Recent surges in labour demand, coupled with decades of mass emigration, have depleted the pool of potential workers. Labour force participation has increased, but only marginally, and the number of people who could potentially start working is limited. The labour shortage spans all skill levels and industries and is compounded by a scarcity of several specialised skills.⁵⁸ While enhancing training initiatives has been put forward as a solution, it is insufficient to meet the present labour demand and ensure future labour market dynamism. Meanwhile, the country's restrictive immigration processes pose obstacles to recruiting foreigners.

Low Unemployment and Rising Participation Rates

Jamaica's unemployment rate stands at a record low of 4.5 percent, underpinned by robust employment growth. The addition of over 164,000 net new jobs between 2015 and 2023 is equivalent to growth of 14 percent, compared to 2 percent employment growth for the preceding nine years.⁵⁹ Driving this surge are the Construction Sector and Global Services Sector (the latter comprising mostly business process outsourcing, commonly called BPO, entities), which together account

for 73 percent of newly created jobs. This dynamic has created a tight labour market and raised concerns that too many potential workers remain outside the labour force.⁶⁰

More than 720,000 people, one third of Jamaica's working age population, are outside the labour force. STATIN classifies as "outside the labour force" anyone who is 14 years or older and is neither employed nor seeking work.⁶¹ This includes full-time students and individuals physically incapable of working, who account for 40 percent of the group; those who "do not want to work" constitute the remaining 60 percent.⁶² The first two groups are unlikely to contribute meaningfully to the working population; students must remain in school to complete training and some people have limitations (advanced age, illness, disability, etc.) that will prevent them from being able to work. Therefore, continued employment growth will require more people in the third category to enter the labour market to meet demand.

Jamaica's labour force participation rate has increased only marginally over the last decade, but it compares favourably to peer countries. At 65 percent, Jamaica's 2023 labour force participation rate (the percentage of people 14 years and older who are working or seeking a job) is only 1.4 percentage points higher than the previous ten-year average.⁶³ However, Jamaica's la-

bour force participation rate surpasses the average of 59 percent for peers in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶⁴ Thus while addressing labour shortages is a developmental imperative, attempting to increase the number of economically inactive individuals entering the workforce may have limitations. Economic conditions and regional trends suggest that the potential for a significant transition of these individuals into Jamaica's labour market might be inherently constrained.

Beyond these general observations, the specific factors impacting why so many Jamaicans do not want to work are not empirically known. The absence of more granular data forestalls the development of evidence-informed policy solutions to this specific question. As such, the extent to which Jamaica can further boost its labour market participation rate in the present socio-economic context is uncertain.

Labour and Skills in Jamaica

Alongside the general labour shortage, as is to be expected in a low unemployment environment, a deficit of specific skills pervades several industries. Stakeholders and mechanisms monitoring skills-demand concur on the presence of these shortages.⁶⁵ While certain skill gaps, such as the shortage of nurses, have persisted over the years, they appear to have wors-

The addition of over **164,000** net new jobs between **2015** and **2023** is equivalent to growth of **14%**, compared to **2%** employment growth for the preceding nine years.

ened in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The worsening skills gap has been attributed to changing attitudes towards work by employees, and a perceived increase in emigration.⁶⁶

The skills shortages are broad and occur at all skill levels. Inadequate numbers of people are found in information technology, foreign languages, managerial positions, and technical and mechanical skills. Stakeholders also indicated a shortage of instructors and experienced workers who might serve as on-the-job trainers of less experienced workers.⁶⁷ Moreover, while it is reported by one skills demand monitor that professionals, technicians, and managers accounted for approximately 80 percent of vacancies in 2021, several other sources affirm that the shortage is not confined to high-skilled positions; there are also shortages of semi-skilled workers.⁶⁸

Specific industries in Jamaica grapple with skill deficits.⁶⁹ The Construction and Manufacturing sectors are short of specialist workers trained in modern techniques like green architecture and precision welding.⁷⁰ Likewise, the Tourism sector struggles to find qualified workers for various roles at all levels, especially entry-level workers, most of whom are attracted to higher paying positions in the Global Services (BPO) Sector.⁷¹ Even the BPO sector, which hires workers from a range of skill levels and backgrounds, is itself confronted with the scarcity of semi-skilled labour, leading BPO employers to lower their already-low employment qualifications and increase on-the-job training.⁷²

Public sector mechanisms to track skills demand do exist, but there are gaps in their coverage and application. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) collects labour force data through various means; its most comprehensive tool is its National Labour Market Survey. The last survey (2017) collected data from a sample of 660 companies and reported on information such as wages, skill levels, and employment of foreign workers. However, this survey is usually done only every five years, which is too infrequent to inform short to medium term labour

policy. However, studies by other state entities such as the HEART/NSTA Trust as well as job market monitoring mechanisms internal to the MLSS, such as the Hot Occupations Report, provide data that can indicate the state of the job market in intervening years.⁷³ Another concern with the National Labour Market Survey is the hesitancy of businesses to participate or give complete information: only 45 percent of targeted large and medium-sized enterprises completed the survey.⁷⁴

Greater collaboration could enhance the quality of data informing the government's understanding of the labour force and its dynamics. Entities such as the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority, Global Services Association of Jamaica, and the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica have taken steps to collect and report data on labour within their respective interest groups.⁷⁵ However, most interviewees indicated that they were not aware of any official channels to systematically pass information about shortages to central government and many appeared to be unaware of the major avenues used by the MLSS to collect labour market data. Public and private sector interviewees have noted past and current avenues of collaboration, but indicated that there is room for improvement.⁷⁶ A lack of rigorous labour market assessment data impedes the public and private sectors from effectively addressing and mitigating labour and skills shortages, but opportunities exist to resolve that shortcoming.

In Summary: Jamaica's Labour Market

Jamaica's labour market situation in 2024 features record-low unemployment rates alongside minimal growth in labour force participation, several specific skills shortages across multiple industries, and a general shortage of even entry-level workers. Despite mechanisms to track skills demand, the absence of effective data channels impedes addressing these shortages.

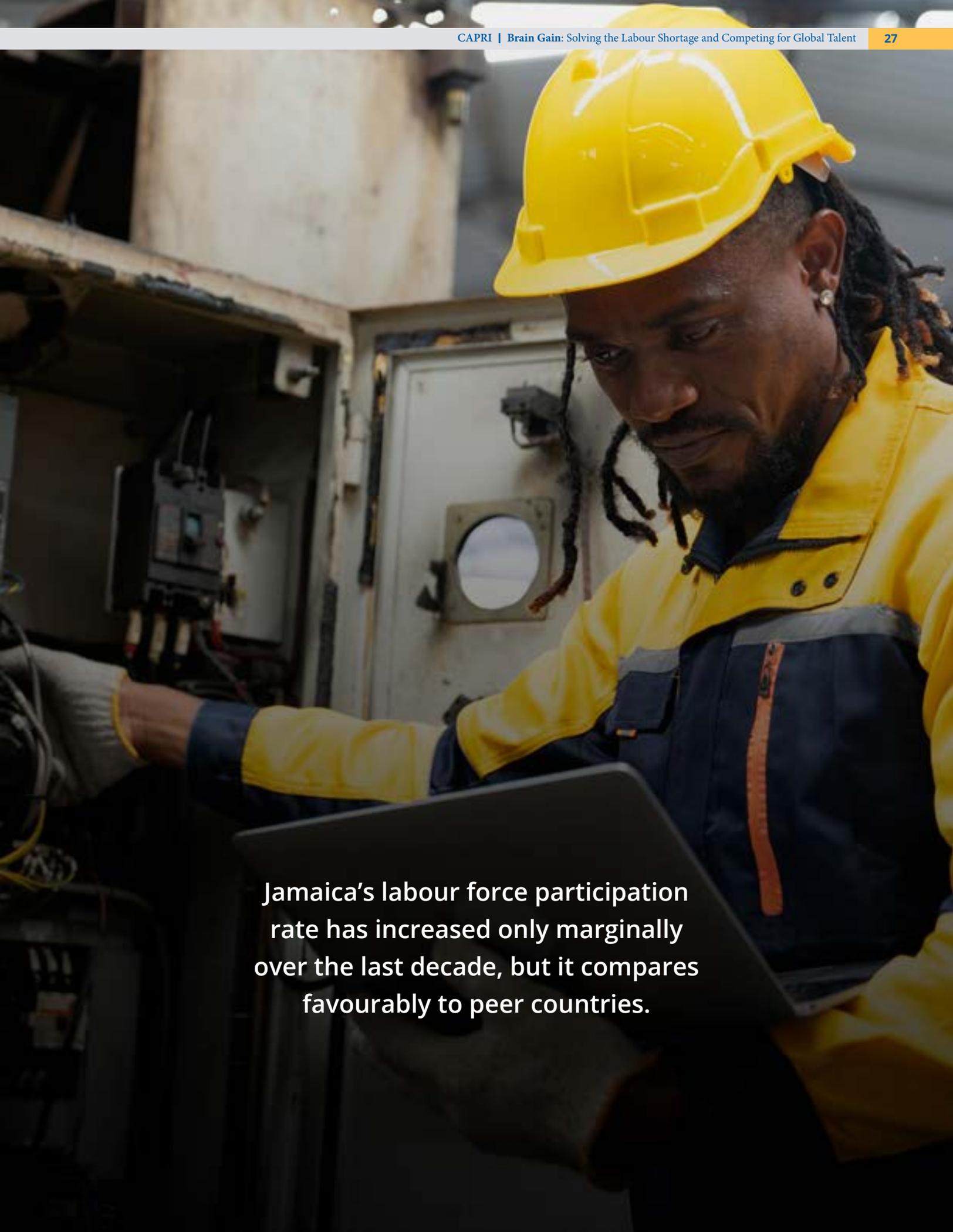
One option to meet the demand for la-

bour, skilled and otherwise, is to increase domestic training. However, many ongoing local skills shortages, such as those for specialist nurses and port technicians, occur alongside or because of a global shortage, in which case increased training cannot fill the demand, especially since the demand for skilled workers is projected to grow in the global north, to where there is already a long-embedded pattern of skilled Jamaicans migrating.⁷⁷ Bonding trained professionals has proved ineffectual, as they usually earn enough to repay their education costs after migrating.⁷⁸

Given the situation and the suboptimal prospects for addressing it effectively in the short term, the suggestion has been made that Jamaica might consider importing skilled workers to fill the gaps.⁷⁹ Jamaica's experience in having done so in the past, prevailing attitudes towards immigration, and the prospects for it to do so are now considered, in the context of attitudes towards immigration globally.

"...For example, even when HEART trains employees, they migrate. Last year, the Caribbean Maritime Institute trained about 300 truck drivers and nearly 100 percent of them migrated to Canada. Therefore, there is no surplus for the local labour market to get access to."

- Private Sector Organization of Jamaica

A man with dreadlocks, wearing a yellow hard hat and a high-visibility yellow and dark blue work jacket, is focused on a laptop. He is in an industrial or technical environment, with a control panel and various wires visible in the background. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the worker and his equipment.

Jamaica's labour force participation rate has increased only marginally over the last decade, but it compares favourably to peer countries.



4

Attitudes Towards Immigration



Demographic factors play a role in shaping attitudes towards immigration.

Global attitudes toward immigration have shifted over time. Between 2012 and 2014, there was a widespread inclination for people worldwide to prefer maintaining or increasing immigration into their countries, contrasting with the current global trend where few desire more immigration.⁸⁰ Views on immigration vary with geographic location, the state of a country's economy, age of the citizen, education, skill level, government policies, degree of cultural differences, and whether or not immigrants affect access to and delivery of public services. The attitudes of people in every major region of the world, with the exception of Europe, tend to be positive towards increasing immigration

However, certain sociodemographic characteristics (education/skill level, age, and employment status) are more consistently associated with favourable or opposing attitudes to immigration.⁸¹ In seven of the top 10 migrant destination countries (United States, Canada, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and France), the majority expressed support for maintaining or increasing immigration.⁸² In contrast, more than half of the respondents in the remaining three (Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and Spain) preferred decreased immigration levels.⁸³

More recent polls, although they covered

fewer countries, painted a different picture. In 2018, focusing on 27 countries (of which 10 were European), the majority of the attitudes towards immigration tended to negative or neutral.⁸⁴ The majority indicated that they preferred decreasing or maintaining immigration: 45 percent of people wanted fewer or no immigrants, while 36 percent wanted the number to stay the same. Only 14 percent of respondents were favourable towards immigration and indicated support for their countries to allow more immigrants. Similarly, in 2017, across 24 countries, 48 percent of people felt there were too many immigrants in their country and 27 percent were neutral.⁸⁵

Attitudes towards immigration are significantly influenced by a country's economic conditions. People in countries with high unemployment rates tended to harbour more negative views of immigration. Nearly half of the persons in countries with unemployment rates higher than 15 percent believed that immigration should decrease. High-income economies overall were more likely to perceive immigrants as filling unwanted jobs, while in lower-income countries, they were seen as taking jobs that citizens want.⁸⁶

Demographic factors play a role in shaping attitudes towards immigration. People with a university degree are more likely than those with lower levels of education to

support maintaining or increasing immigration in their countries.⁸⁷ Higher-skilled individuals are more positive towards immigration than their low-skilled counterparts.⁸⁸ Those younger than 54 are more likely to favour increasing immigration levels. Unemployed individuals who are actively looking for work are considerably more likely to want less immigration.⁸⁹

In general, public opinion and government policies towards immigration are aligned. When public opinion towards immigration is negative, government policies reflect an anti-immigration position, and vice versa.⁹⁰ This alignment, found in most cases, highlights the significance of public sentiment in informing government decisions on immigration.

The attitudes of people towards immigration is also influenced by their concerns about immigration placing pressure on public services in their country. Many people feel that immigrants are demanding too much in the way of social services. Across 24 countries, 49 percent of people agreed that immigration increased demand on public services in their country, to citizens' detriment, with another 27 percent remaining neutral in 2017. Over a period of six years, 2011 to 2017, people in countries (such as Turkey and Sweden), as opposed to other selected countries, increasingly became more concerned about immigration placing pressure on public

Attitudes towards immigration vary with geographic location, the state of a country's economy, age of the citizen, education, skill level, government policies, degree of cultural differences, and whether or not immigrants affect public services.

This belief was common across regions. The majorities in Europe and the US not only believed that immigrants came for work, they also considered that immigrants came to their country to seek social benefits (41 percent in Europe and 45 percent in the US). In the same way, in Australia, the attitudes of 75 percent of people towards immigration were negative because they viewed immigrants as people who came to their country to claim social benefits.⁹²

The degree of cultural differences between immigrants and natives is another factor that influences the attitudes towards immigration. Some people are more likely to be opposed to immigrants of a different origin, religion, and race or ethnicity. In most European countries, people often preferred immigrants who were culturally similar to themselves. For example, in the UK, people preferred immigrants who were white, English-speaking, European, and from Christian countries, while the least preferred immigrants were non-whites, non-Europeans and those from Muslim countries.⁹³ Outside Europe, it is different. In 27 African countries, 90 percent of people “would not care,” “some-what like,” and “strongly like” immigrants of a different ethnicity.⁹⁴

There is also a general inclination for people around the world to believe that immigrants are either a strength or burden in their countries. This, in turn, affects whether their attitudes towards immigration are positive or negative. Majorities in some of the largest migrant receiving countries in the world—the United States, Germany, the United

Kingdom, France, Canada and Australia (each hosting more than 7 million immigrants in 2017)—viewed immigrants as a strength rather than a burden because of immigrants’ work, talent, and skillset. Sixty-five percent of Australians felt that immigration had a positive impact on the economy.⁹⁵ By contrast, majorities in Hungary, Greece, South Africa, Russia, and Israel saw immigrants as a burden to their countries because they believed that immigrants took natives’ jobs and social benefits. With the exception of Russia, these countries each have fewer than five million immigrants.⁹⁶

In Barbados, empirical literature and documented cases in the media pointed to exclusion of immigrants in Barbadian society.⁹⁷ Media reports suggested that discriminatory treatment of CARICOM Community immigrants in Barbados still occurs.⁹⁸ In 2005, from polls conducted in the mid- to late-2000s, approximately 59 percent of respondents indicated that they did not support the (then) Prime Minister’s tolerance towards migration.⁹⁹ Following a change in government, another poll conducted in 2009 indicated that 70 percent of the population supported the government’s (restrictive) stance on migration.¹⁰⁰ Limited research and media reports suggested that there was xenophobia in Barbados, especially against Guyanese immigrants.¹⁰¹ In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), migration is on the rise and the conversation around migration is at an all-time high and continues to grow, in parallel with the increase in migration flows into the region.¹⁰² The number of tweets about migration in LAC increased

43 percent over five years (2017 to 2022). This increase suggests an uptrend in the salience of migration as an issue in LAC.

At the same time, there has been an increase in both the number of national public opinion polls on migration and the number of questions on migration-related issues in regional public opinion polls. Since 2020, the Latinobarómetro survey has included five questions about attitudes toward migration and migrants, with an emphasis on social harmony, work, crime, and public services.¹⁰³ An analysis of the conversation on social media and in regional and national opinion polls shows that xenophobic messages and opinions towards immigrants are on the rise. In 2017, xenophobic opinions towards immigrants were estimated at 4 percent but have since trended upward to 28 percent in 2021. These results were in keeping with the trend in regional and national surveys, which showed less acceptance of the migrant population.¹⁰⁴

In 2018, the top three topics in the conversation around migration were migration policy (22 percent), the visibility of migrants (19 percent), and security (18 percent). In 2022, the main topics of discussion changed to security (24 percent), migration policy (16 percent), and employment (9 percent). The increased importance of security, migration policy, and employment issues may be evidence of certain prejudices associated with the immigrant population in the region.¹⁰⁵

The increase in the conversation around security on social media shows growing public concern around rising crime rates



in relation to the arrival of immigrants.¹⁰⁶ Concern about rising crime rates following an increase in migrant arrivals was often one of the main fears related to immigration. In several LAC countries, there is a rise in negative associations between regional migration flows and crime rates.¹⁰⁷ However, public perceptions on immigrants driving up crime rates were misleading. In several countries (Colombia, Peru, and Chile), migration did not increase crime, therefore concerns about the relationship between migration and crime were apparently unfounded.¹⁰⁸

Public feelings of increased insecurity as a result of the arrival of migrants were also one of the key issues in regional and national surveys. The World Values Survey (WVS) found that 46 percent of respondents believed that migration caused an increase in crime. Particularly, in Colombia and Peru, more than 70 percent of respondents believed that immigration had caused an increase in crime (these are two of the countries that received the largest numbers of Venezuelan migrants in recent years). Furthermore, in the Latinobarómetro 2020 survey, 56 percent of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed that migrants increased criminal activity. More than 70 percent of respondents who shared this view were from Ecuador (79 percent), Bolivia (73 percent), Chile (72 percent), Peru (72 percent), and Colombia (70 percent).¹⁰⁹

Another common belief within communities that received sudden large-scale migration flows was that immigrants were linked to increased unemployment of natives and greater labour market com-

petition. In 2015, in the Latinobarómetro survey, 45 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that immigrants came to compete for jobs at the regional level. By 2020, the amount of respondents who shared this view increased to 60 percent. Similarly, in the WVS, 73 percent of respondents agreed that employers should prioritize native workers over immigrants when jobs were scarce.¹¹⁰

This report utilized social media, a non-traditional data source, to ascertain a sense of public opinion on migration in Jamaica (Appendix II for methodology and limitations of this data source).¹¹¹ The public attitudes/opinions of X (formerly Twitter) users on immigration liberalisation in Jamaica were negative, positive, and neutral. There were three main factors that influenced negative public attitudes of X users towards immigration liberalisation in Jamaica. Wages were the predominant issue put forward by tweeters sharing a negative sentiment, specifically with regard to perceptions and concerns about low wages for Jamaican workers. The general sentiment in this regard is Jamaican workers are not fairly compensated, and improving wages could ameliorate the labour shortage by incentivising persons to work who are currently outside of the labour force. A second negative view concerned the perceived impact of imported labour on local workers, in that immigrants would displace Jamaicans. Within this set of views, there was an articulated preference for investing in local training and education to fill skill gaps, instead of importing labour. An adjacent view was that government and the educational system are failing in

their role in addressing the labour market challenges, and a move to import labour, in this view has hidden motives related to that failure.

There were four factors influencing positive sentiments towards immigration liberalisation in Jamaica, according to the public opinions shared on X. The underlying rationale of positive views was a recognition of the labour shortage in Jamaica, and the consideration that it was a problem that needs to be addressed. Importing skilled workers, in this frame, would be one way of addressing the problem. A second view expressed here spoke to Jamaica's labour market problem comprising not only a lack of workers but Jamaicans' work ethic, and Jamaicans' perceptions of certain jobs as not worthwhile. As such, the holders of these views were open to employers getting labour from elsewhere.

Thirdly, there was acknowledgement that despite competitive compensation in some positions, high turnover remained an issue, suggesting that other factors contributed to the labour shortage. Lastly, there were positive sentiments indicating that increased labour immigration could create a more competitive labour market, possibly benefiting the country and creating a more attractive work environment. The neutral responses were geared at further understanding the labour shortage and the specifics of importing skilled workers, and what a renewed labour immigration policy would entail.





5

Effects of Immigration



The share that each source of tax contributes to revenue varies based on a country's specifics, given factors such as the level of informality, the size of the economy, and the share of trade to total GDP.

The issue of immigration can be sensitive, with opposition often rooted in concerns about its potential negative impact on the labour market outcomes of native workers. In countries with high unemployment, the perception is that immigrants will take jobs from native workers, which will result in higher native unemployment rates and/or lower wages. Jamaica finds itself in an unusual situation: it is experiencing nearly full employment, but this is an unprecedented and fairly new set of circumstances. The prevailing mindset appears to be that of a country where jobs are scarce and unemployment is high. Furthermore, the expected economic prosperity resulting from low unemployment has not fully materialised, leaving many Jamaicans still grappling with economic challenges, which perpetuates a poverty mindset that is inclined to be anti-immigration.

Assessing the evidence for or against immigration is a complex task, because the evidence on immigration's impacts is mixed. Immigration can be beneficial, harmful, or can even have no effect at all on a country's economic growth, per capita income, employment, wages, and productivity. These impacts are contingent on factors like the strength of labour market segmentation, the substitutability of native and immigrant workers, and labour market flexibility.¹¹² Specific features, such as less developed capital markets, limited openness to international trade, and constrained employment growth, can also



affect how and how quickly an economy adapts to an influx of immigrants.¹¹³

There are other considerations, besides the impact on jobs and the economy. These are related to how does a country absorb more people, how does the state cover the increased demand on public goods, and what are the social and cultural impacts. For example, discussions about immigration policy frequently involve speculation about how immigrants affect national demographics and the demand for common resources such as education, health care, infrastructure, and public goods. Immigration can alter population size, structure,

and trends, while also raising questions about whether immigrants contribute positively or strain public finances.¹¹⁴

This review of the literature on immigration's impact will explore what the evidence says.

Economic Growth

Immigration typically raises the share of employed individuals in the total population primarily because of the higher concentration of immigrants in the working-age population.

Immigration can be beneficial, harmful, or can even have no effect at all on a country's economic growth, per capita income, employment, wages, and productivity.



Immigration typically raises the share of employed individuals in the total population primarily because of the higher concentration of immigrants in the working-age population. This rise leads to the growth of the labour force and consequently increases GDP per capita.

This rise leads to the growth of the labour force and consequently increases GDP per capita.¹¹⁵ Immigrants also boost economic growth through their entrepreneurial activities and purchases of goods and services.¹¹⁶ This impact has been shown to occur in both high- and low-income countries.

In the United States, a high-income country, immigrants help the country to stay competitive and drive economic growth. Immigrants added US\$2 trillion to the US GDP in 2016, and US\$458.7 billion to state, local, and federal taxes in 2018.¹¹⁷ In 2018, after immigrants spent billions of dollars on taxes, they were left with US\$1.2 trillion in spending power, which they used to purchase goods and services, stimulating local business activity.¹¹⁸ Conversely, it has been calculated that limiting immigration would have negative effects on the economy, decreasing GDP by 2 percent over 20 years, shrinking growth by 13 percent, and cutting five million jobs.¹¹⁹

Migration contributes to economic growth in OECD countries, but the effect is greater in Lower-Income countries (LICs) than in Higher-Income countries (HICs).¹²⁰ Regions with higher migrant populations shares tended to have higher GDP per capita. On average, a 10 percent increase in the share of migrants in selected OECD countries for the period 2006 to 2019 was associated with a 0.15 percent higher GDP per capita, when accounting for time-variant and invariant regional characteristics. The effects were stronger for lagging regions, especially in lower-income regions. For the 25 percent of poorest regions in a country, the positive effect of migration on GDP per capita was more than twice as high at 0.36 percent. These positive effects indicate that

an increase in the migrant share helps poorer/lagging regions catch up with other regions in their country.¹²¹

Immigrants' positive impact on economic growth has also been evidenced in Upper-Middle-Income countries (UMICs), Lower-Middle-Income countries (LMICs), and Low-Income countries (LICs). For UMICs (Thailand, Dominican Republic, Argentina, South Africa, and Costa Rica), the contribution of immigrants can range from as low as 1 percent to 12 percent. In Thailand, migrants made up 2.2 percent of the labour force, and increased GDP by 0.5 percent, according to 1995 data. In 2005, the percentage of migrants in the Thai labour force doubled to 5 percent and the contribution to Thai GDP grew to 1.3 percent.¹²² Immigrants contributed between 4 percent and 5 percent of the Dominican Republic's GDP in 2010.¹²³ Like the Dominican Republic, immigrants' contribution to Argentina's GDP was in the same range at 4 percent in 2014.¹²⁴ Immigrant workers contributed 9 percent of South Africa's GDP and 11 to 12 percent of Costa Rica's GDP in 2011.¹²⁵ In Ghana and Kyrgyzstan, both LMICs, immigrants were estimated to contribute nearly 2 percent of Ghana's GDP and around 5 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2010.¹²⁶ Moreover, in Rwanda, a LIC, immigrants also contributed significantly to economic growth, adding between 10 and 13 percent of Rwanda's GDP in 2012.¹²⁷

In conclusion, literature on the impact of immigrants on a country's economy highlights that immigrants largely have a positive impact on the economic growth of a country through their contributions to the working age population and by extension, the economy.

Entrepreneurship

Immigrants could have an impact on the economy through their influence on entrepreneurship.¹²⁸ Immigrants can affect entrepreneurship in two main ways. The first is that immigrants may not only be employees, but instead be self-employed or they may create their own firms and be entrepreneurs themselves. The second is that the presence of immigrants can either increase or decrease the entrepreneurial activities of native individuals.¹²⁹ Immigrants may have skills that make it easier for native entrepreneurs to start or grow their business if they hire them.¹³⁰ A higher immigrant concentration is associated with a higher likelihood of native individuals being business owners. Specifically, a ten percentage point higher immigrant share in the population aged 15 and above is associated with a 0.6 percentage point higher likelihood that a native individual owns a business. This may appear as only a small boost to native entrepreneurship, however when considering that the share of the adult population who are business owners is a mere 1.9 percent, it is actually quite substantial.¹³¹ The presence of immigrants can also increase the entrepreneurial activities of native individuals because they may increase the availability of capital or the size of the domestic market and therefore make certain business ideas (that rely on additional capital or a larger market) more viable. On the other hand, increased levels of competition could put some existing firms out of business and decrease the entrepreneurial activities of native individuals.¹³²



In the US in recent decades, the trend in entrepreneurship and the growth of business startups has been downward. One proposed way to offset this trend was to expand immigration, especially among higher-skilled entrepreneurial immigrants.¹³³ This is because immigrants tend to be more entrepreneurial than the average US citizen.¹³⁴ Immigrants tend to take up entrepreneurial roles because of several reasons. Firstly, the migrant experience of taking a large risk to move to another country makes immigrant entrepreneurs less wary of taking on the risks associated with starting a business. Secondly, some entrepreneurs self-select into starting their own businesses because they do not have other options to work.¹³⁵ They initially may also face discrimination in the labour market.¹³⁶ Finally, many immigrants have access to high levels of social capital, which are social networks that exist in groups with similar backgrounds, values, or experiences, that allow them to locate resources and knowledge to start their own businesses.¹³⁷ In addition, the growing percentage of immigrants with college degrees in STEM fields may

make them more inclined to develop new products and to start businesses than the native individual.¹³⁸

Immigrants were twice as likely than native individual to start a business.¹³⁹ Immigrants tended to create more businesses of every size compared to natives.¹⁴⁰ Immigrant-founded firms were also 35 percent more likely to have a patent. The share of new firms with at least one immigrant entrepreneur grew from 31 percent in 1995 to 37 percent in 2008.¹⁴¹ Further, in 2021, the rate of new entrepreneurs for immigrants was 0.58 percent (meaning that an average of 580 out of every 100,000 adults became new entrepreneurs in a given month), which was substantially higher than that for native individuals (0.32 percent).¹⁴² This shows that immigrants play a disproportionate entrepreneurial role in a country's economy.¹⁴³ Among Fortune 500 businesses, immigrants started more successful businesses than natives.¹⁴⁴ First- and second-generation immigrants created approximately 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies. First-generation immi-



Immigrants tended to create more businesses of every size compared to natives.





grants also created 25 percent of all new firms between 2008 and 2012 in the US.¹⁴⁵

In the UK, the impact of immigrants on entrepreneurship was extensive as immigrants were behind one in seven of all UK companies. Immigrants' entrepreneurial activity was near double that of native individuals, such that over 17 percent of immigrants started a firm, compared to 10 percent of natives. As such, the UK relies heavily on entrepreneurial migrants to launch businesses, create jobs, and grow the economy. They also rely on immigrants to pass on knowledge to natives about their productivity and entrepreneurial skills.¹⁴⁶ In Canada, immigrants are also seen as more entrepreneurial than the native-born population as they are more likely to be self-employed. The propensity of immigrants, who had been living in a country for four to seven years, to own a business or to be self-employed surpassed that of the native population.¹⁴⁷

Immigrants, particularly high-skilled immigrants, contribute to increased innova-

tion in areas like entrepreneurship, establishment entry, and job creation. In the US, higher shares of high-skilled immigrants in the workforce led to increased entrepreneurial activity. The per capita effect of high-skilled immigrants on entrepreneurial activity far exceeded that of high-skilled natives.¹⁴⁸ In terms of firm creation, higher shares of high-skilled immigrants in the workforce led to higher rates of new firm creation. The effect of high-skilled immigrants on new firm creation far exceeded the corresponding effect of high-skilled natives.¹⁴⁹

Immigrants can also have negative effects on some niches of entrepreneurship. In the US, immigrants had a small, negative effect on both entry and exit of female entrepreneurs. Specifically, a 10 percent increase in the share of immigrants in the population lowers the entry and exit rates of female entrepreneurs by 10 percent and 5 percent, respectively, relative to the sample mean.¹⁵⁰



Immigrants are nearly twice as likely the native born population to start a business

In summary, it is seen that immigrants tend to be entrepreneurial, they start a disproportionate share of businesses in a country, and they influence the entrepreneurial activities of native individuals. This, in turn, makes a significant contribution to employment growth in the respective country.

Investment

Immigration of high-skilled workers attracts foreign direct investment (FDI), and helps firms find investment opportunities abroad. Immigration of workers attracts capital inflows because of the complementarity between capital and labour in producing goods and services. For a pooled sample of OECD countries, there was a small, positive relationship between net migration flows (defined as total migration inflow minus migration outflow over a five-year period as a share of the average population over the same period) and the sum of net FDI flows over five years as the share of total GDP over the same five years.¹⁵¹ In Germany across 16 states, a higher stock of immigrants (from high-income countries) significantly increased inward FDI from foreign countries over the period 1991 to 2002. One possible explanation for this effect was that immigrants assisted in interactions with foreign companies in their home country, thus helping overcome information problems.¹⁵² There is also evidence that a higher stock of immigrants has a

positive impact on the stock of international bank loans from the host country to the immigrants' home country (outward FDI). The effect was particularly large when the immigrants were high-skilled and the two countries did not share a common language, legal heritage, or colonial past (culturally distant). This suggested that immigrants were particularly important for facilitating cross-border financial flows when informational problems were severe.¹⁵³

As is the case for bank loans, there may also be a positive effect from immigration on outward FDI from the host country to the immigrants' home country. In the US, a larger immigration stock of both low- and high-skilled workers in the US in 1990 led to higher subsequent growth of outward FDI financed by US firms over the period 1990 to 2000. However, the channels through which immigration affected outward FDI differed for low- and high-skilled migrants. A possible explanation is that investors in developed countries (with little advance information about the quality of the labour force in developing countries) may observe a rather high productivity of immigrants despite their few formal qualifications, and take it as signal of the quality of the labour force in the home country of the immigrants. Therefore, they may be more positively inclined to invest there than they would be without that signal. High-skilled immigrants, by

contrast, may actively contribute to the creation of international business networks.¹⁵⁴ Another US study showed that there is a smaller effect of immigrants on outward FDI, whereby a one percent increase in the stock of high-skilled immigrants increased the stock of outward FDI from the US to the immigrants' home country by about 0.5 percent. The effect was slightly lower for an increase in the stock of all immigrants.¹⁵⁵

Moreover, for the average US state, doubling the number of immigrants from a given origin country increases the probability that at least one firm from that US state engages in FDI with that origin country by 4 percentage points. These effects persisted over generations and were primarily driven by a reduction in information frictions, suggesting that immigrants passed traits to their descendants that facilitated economic exchange with their origin countries, such as social ties to family and friends or knowledge of the origin country's language and culture. However, the effect of immigrants on FDI is highly concave (as all the relevant information is gradually exhausted), weaker if many people from the same or neighbouring origins live in the surrounding area (as relevant information is more likely to have already percolated), and stronger for destinations that are more distant and ethnically diverse (where information is plausibly harder to acquire).¹⁵⁶

“There have been delays/slowdowns in investments because of labour shortages. Work is taking longer than it should. Space is not being built out quickly enough in (the) BPO and logistics sectors.”

- Private Sector Stakeholder 2



Literature highlights that immigrants have been shown to increase foreign direct investments in their destination regions (even generations after initial arrival) as they reduce information frictions that make it more attractive for companies in the home country to invest.¹⁵⁷ However, the relationship may also go in the other direction and immigration may contribute to an increase in capital flows to the origin country of migrants.¹⁵⁸ An overly restrictive immigration policy has an opportunity cost of delayed or foregone investment opportunities. Multiple stakeholders gave accounts of separate instances in which companies considered Jamaica for investments but either delayed their plans or cancelled them altogether because of concerns about or problems with skill availability.¹⁵⁹ Even when they believed the skills to be available, companies may still be hesitant to invest in a country if they are uncertain that they'll be able to source labour internationally if the need arises.

Employment

The impact of immigration on native employment varies significantly depending on the region and specific circumstances. In regions where immigrants are not in direct competition with native workers for the same jobs, there is little evidence to associate increased immigration with higher unemployment rates among native workers. For instance, in Northern Italy, where a significant immigrant population is located, immigrants and natives generally do not compete for the same positions. Consequently, the employment outcomes of native Italians remain largely unaffected, and there is no substantial increase in unemployment rates among natives.¹⁶⁰ A similar pattern is observed in Germany, where the presence of immigrants has not led to apparent negative effects on native employment.¹⁶¹ In Austria, immigrants had little to no impact on the employment outcomes of young natives and the competition for jobs between immigrants and natives were zero or small. Therefore, young native Austrian males (below the age of 35) did not have a higher unemployment risk as a result of increased immigration.¹⁶² Migrants to

the UK also had little or no impact on the overall employment and unemployment outcomes. Where there was an impact, it varied across different UK-born groups with negative effects for the lower-skilled and positive effects for the higher-skilled. However, the magnitude of the impacts were generally small.¹⁶³

Conversely, in lower-income countries, the impact of immigration on employment is more pronounced. For example, Colombia has experienced a substantial influx of Venezuelan immigrants in recent years. On average, a one percentage point increase in the labour force due to Venezuelan migrants has resulted in a 0.1 percentage point reduction in employment among low-skilled Colombian workers. This represents a 0.18 percent reduction in employment relative to the average employment rate of low-skilled Colombian workers in 2015, before the influx of Venezuelan immigrant workers. The impact is particularly pronounced in specif-

ic border regions, such as La Guajira and Norte de Santander, where the presence of Venezuelan immigrants has led to a 3.4 percentage point decrease in employment. This is equivalent to a 5.6 percent reduction in employment relative to the average employment rate of all workers in 2015.¹⁶⁴

Downward effects nevertheless tend to be short-term. As new migrants enter labour markets, they can affect the native-born population's employment in the short term. This was seen in some European regions, where an increase in the stock of immigrants, especially for poorly-educated workers from lower-income regions, caused a decrease in the growth in native-born employment rates. However, this effect disappears over time, as labour markets adjust. However, regions with higher levels of GDP per capita were faster to absorb new workers, resulting in little or no effect on the native-born workforce, especially those with higher

education. In a ten-year period, the effect of the increase in labour force due to immigration disappeared for less-educated native-born workers, while it turned positive for highly educated workers.¹⁶⁵

Wage Effects

Wage effects vary based on the skill complementarity or substitutability of migrants to native workers. In Italy, for example, the presence of immigrants whose skills complemented the local workforce led to higher wages for native workers, as it addressed labour constraints for certain low-skilled jobs. As immigrant workers filled this labour gap, they removed constraints on firm output, leading to increased native wages. However, when additional immigrants exceeded a certain threshold, they started competing with native workers, which negatively affected native wages. This threshold was reached when immigrants constituted 7.7 percent of total employment.¹⁶⁶

“A more liberal immigration policy could potentially be detrimental to the local workforce. Companies could potentially negotiate downwards payment for individual workers and reduce wages”

- Private Sector Stakeholder 3

When immigrants and native workers share high substitutability in terms of skills and job roles, especially in low-skilled positions, wages are expected to decline.¹⁶⁷ In a case where immigrants are substitutes for native workers and both doing similar jobs and both are low skilled, wages are expected to fall. When all immigrants are low skilled, immigration will lead to a decrease in wages of low-skilled native workers.¹⁶⁸ In the EU, migration resulted in a 5 percent reduction in wages for low-skilled workers.¹⁶⁹ The fall in wages occurred for two rea-

sons. Skills required for low-skill occupations are easier to acquire and are less specialised. This facilitates increased competition for these jobs, which reduces wages. Second, the willingness of migrant workers to accept lower wages. This usually stems from the economic insecurity faced by the migrant workers.¹⁷⁰

Where immigration has had more of an impact on wages is within low-wage service jobs. In the UK, immigration primarily affected wages in low-wage service jobs, where immigrants acted as

substitutes for native workers in similar positions. A one percentage point rise in the share of migrants relative to UK workers in low-wage service jobs led to an average wage reduction of about 0.2 percent.¹⁷¹ Recent immigrants to the UK had a slight downward impact on native wages at the bottom of the wage distribution, where recently arrived immigrants were more concentrated than natives. However, native wages at higher percentiles of the wage distribution, where the concentration of immigrants was lower relative to natives, slightly increased.¹⁷²



Demographics intersect with the impact of immigrants on wages. In the US, the influence of immigrant increases on native-born workers' earnings varied by demographic groups, including white and black native-born Americans and more and less educated individuals. White native workers experienced wage decreases, while black native men saw slight increases. The impact was generally negligible, regardless of whether immigrants acted as substitutes or complements for specific native-born groups.¹⁷³ More recently in the US, immigrants also have a small and mixed impact on the wages of native workers. There is a strong pos-

itive correlation of an increase in immigrants with changes in average wages of natives, particularly there were positive effects on the wages of highly educated natives. However, there were small negative effects on the wages of less educated natives.¹⁷⁴

There is also evidence that large influxes of unskilled workers can have no negative effect on wages. In the Dominican Republic, large numbers of unskilled Haitian immigrants did not negatively affect the wages of local workers. Haitian immigrants predominantly work in unskilled and informal roles in agriculture and construction, complementing the rela-

tively more skilled local workforce, rather than acting as substitutes.¹⁷⁵

Productivity

The impact of immigration on productivity may be positive or negative, but it is generally positive. How the impact is considered and measured depends on the definition of productivity, the characteristics of immigrants, the institutional arrangements, the complementarity between immigrants and natives, as well as natives' response to immigration.

“There is a sense that bringing in workers increases unemployment, but the opposite is likely true because people are brought in for a finite amount of time to impart knowledge to other workers. This process wouldn't be pursued if the job could be equally provided by a local.

- Wayne Chen, Caribbean Employers Confederation



Immigration has accounted for **80%** of Europe's and **32%** of North America's population growth.

In advanced economies, immigrants contribute positively to innovation and productivity, both in the short and medium term.¹⁷⁶ Highly skilled immigrants, particularly those with higher levels of education and engaged in higher-skilled occupations and/or in skill-intensive industries, make positive contributions to productivity developments through their technical skills, market knowledge, language skills, and cultural understanding.¹⁷⁷ Skilled migrants make positive contributions to business operations and innovation with their specialized skills and their broader advantages to employers. Higher-skilled immigration may have a positive impact on the training of native workers, which in turn boosts their productivity.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, employers may experience both skill-based and wider benefits to employing migrants, which lead to increased productivity and competitiveness.¹⁷⁹ This positive impact on productivity is evident in the UK, where skilled migrants often specialise in roles requiring analytical and quantitative skills, boosting productivity in key sectors such as finance or IT sector.¹⁸⁰

Low-skilled migrants have an impact on productivity as well, generally by complementing populations that are made up of high skilled labour and which are short of low skilled labour. They fill essential roles for which native workers are in short supply, allowing the native population to take on more complex tasks. For example, when low-skilled migrants take up more manual routine tasks, the native population can and do take up more complex occupations. One instance of this, referred to as the “nanny effect”, is when low-skilled migrants provide housekeeping and childcare services and thus allow

native-born women to return to work, or work longer hours. In fact, when more low-skilled migrants are present, more high-skilled females participate in the labour force.¹⁸¹

In the UK, a 1 percent increase in the stock of immigrants in the services sector was associated with a large increase in labour productivity within the firm.¹⁸² In the same way, another study examining productivity by region and sector found that immigration was positively associated with labour productivity. There was a positive and significant association between increases in the employment of migrant workers and labour productivity growth, whereby a 1 percent change in immigrant share in employment was associated with an increase in labour productivity of 0.06 percent to 0.07 percent.¹⁸³ Other empirical work done on advanced economies showed a 1 percent increase in the migrant share of the adult population resulted in an increase in GDP per capita and productivity of approximately 2 percent.¹⁸⁴ This increase came primarily from an increase in labour productivity, instead of an increase in the workforce-to-population ratio.¹⁸⁵

A study that focused on the manufacturing sector indicated that in both low-skill or high-skill industries, immigration did not lower labour productivity but rather that productivity increased more slowly in states that received more immigrants relative to other states. This slower productivity growth may be the result of the gradual process of assimilation for many immigrants and the negative effect on productivity growth may disappear as immigrants acquire language skills and familiarity with US labour market insti-

tutions.¹⁸⁶

Immigration can impact total factor productivity, contributing to increased output growth that cannot be solely attributed to more inputs, such as more equipment or more workers.¹⁸⁷ This was evident in the case of 50 US states, where a rise in the immigrant population significantly increased total factor productivity. This outcome is explained by an efficient specialization of immigrants and natives in manual-intensive and communication-intensive tasks, resulting in an overall efficiency gain.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, across several countries, immigration positively influenced productivity by increasing total factor productivity, reflecting greater diversity in productive skills and, to some extent, a higher rate of innovation.¹⁸⁹

Another example that supports the positive relationship between immigration and total factor productivity was in Israel, where there was a surge in labour productivity and total factor productivity that coincided with the integration into the workforce of highly skilled immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the second part of the 1990s. Research found that immigration was negatively correlated with productivity in low-tech industries, but in high-tech industries the results pointed to a positive relationship, highlighting how immigrants enhanced productivity in high-tech companies, suggesting complementarities between technology and the skilled immigrant workforce.¹⁹⁰ However, the relationship between immigration and total factor productivity could also be negative.

Demographics

A change in the migration policy to address economic concerns could potentially have the secondary effect of altering the size and composition of the population, which warrants assessment. Migration flows change the size, age structure, and trajectory of a population and this has implications for the provision of social services, government spending, and general development planning. Jamaica's population has been ageing and has recently started to decline, largely due to the emigration of young, working-aged people.¹⁹¹ The consequence of this is a rising dependency ratio as the remaining population of working age people have to support a larger share of students and retirees who are net consumers of social services. The following section considers the potential impact of immigration on Jamaica's population dynamics.

A substantial influx of immigrants can boost a nation's total population, but it typically has a negligible impact on future population growth, as immigrants increase birth rates only marginally and have little impact on death rates.¹⁹² Population growth is determined by natural increase (the difference between births and deaths) and net migration. A large flow of immigrants into a country (to exceed emigration) can contribute to population growth directly, by increasing the headcount, and indirectly by increasing total future births. For example, from 2000 to 2018, immigration accounted for 80 percent of Europe's and 32 percent of North America's population growth.¹⁹³ Moreover, countries like Australia have effectively used immigration policy to counter population ageing, sustain the size of the workforce, and optimise population structure by attracting young immigrants.¹⁹⁴

Immigration has been shown to modestly increase the birth rate in high-income countries, but this is not usually sustained. The increase in the birth rate, however, has a limited impact on fertility due to immigrants' small share of the total population.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, as immigrants' skill levels increase, they tend to converge with host country fertility rates

and have fewer children, particularly when they enter the labour force and access social security.¹⁹⁶ Thus, skilled worker migration does not meaningfully affect birth rates and subsequent population growth.¹⁹⁷ The impact on UMICs is more marked. For example, continuous immigration into Türkiye (formerly Turkey) has temporarily mitigated a slowdown in the population growth rate among native Turks, but as immigrants age, this effect diminishes.¹⁹⁸

Immigration typically does not impact the death rate due to "the healthy immigrant effect."¹⁹⁹ This phenomenon arises from the socio-economic advantage of people who typically migrate and the selectivity of host countries, which results in immigrants tending to have a lower health risk when they first arrive. This effect gradually dissipates in the medium term, usually within ten years, as immigrants experience health decline, comorbid conditions, and disabilities.²⁰⁰

Immigration has mixed effects on a country's population structure. Immigration marginally reduces the share of dependent people in the population without altering the long-term dependency ratio.²⁰¹

This is because as immigrants age, they offset previous effects on the age structure of the population.

Fiscal Implications

The fiscal impact of immigration is generally small and positive, and depends on migrant and host country characteristics.²⁰² The impact is determined by the various stages an immigrant passes through in the host country: arrival, labour market participation, and retirement. Newly arrived immigrants often represent a fiscal burden until they gain education and integrate into the labour market, eventually contributing through taxes.²⁰³ In contrast, working immigrants typically represent a net fiscal benefit because they contribute more in taxes than they demand in social services, depending on their skill level and labour market dynamics.²⁰⁴ Immigrants in the retirement stage typically represent a fiscal cost, especially in countries with robust welfare systems. In economies of all sizes the evidence shows that working age immigrants contribute positively to the fiscal balance, an effect which increases with time of residence.²⁰⁵



The positive fiscal impact of immigrants is more pronounced when they are more skilled and can quickly enter the labour market. Skilled immigrants earn more and contribute more in taxes than semi-skilled and unskilled immigrants, who often take up lower-paying jobs.²⁰⁶ Nonetheless, evidence from the US shows that unskilled immigrants are less of a fiscal cost than unskilled natives.²⁰⁷ The prompt integration of immigrants into the labour market, which is dependent on host country policies, enhances their fiscal impact.²⁰⁸ Additionally, working age immigrants who migrate alone generally have more positive fiscal impacts than families, students, and refugees, at least initially.²⁰⁹

The fiscal impact of immigrants in high-income countries is tied to the host nation's economic performance and welfare systems. Economic growth and stability are good predictive factors of the fiscal impact of immigrants: when the economy is uncertain, such as in countries with large budget deficits, and in periods following economic recession, immigrants, like natives, tend to be net fiscal burdens.²¹⁰ The contribution of immigrants is inversely related to the size of the welfare state: the more generous the welfare state, the less positive the impact of immigration.²¹¹

Though there is less evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), it appears that the characteristics of developing countries tend to limit the potential for immigrants to contribute to and benefit from public finances. Tax collection (public revenue relative to GDP) is positively correlated with a country's income level, so immigrants, like natives, tend to pay fewer taxes in poorer countries.²¹² However, immigrants are often ineligible for certain social transfers, and thus benefit less from public expenditure.²¹³ Reduced immigrant contributions are also offset by lower social spending in these countries. Migrants thus contribute to and receive less from the welfare systems in these countries. Despite this, the overall impact in LMICs is generally positive (albeit small), with an estimated impact of approximately 1 percent of GDP, which is higher than the fiscal impact of



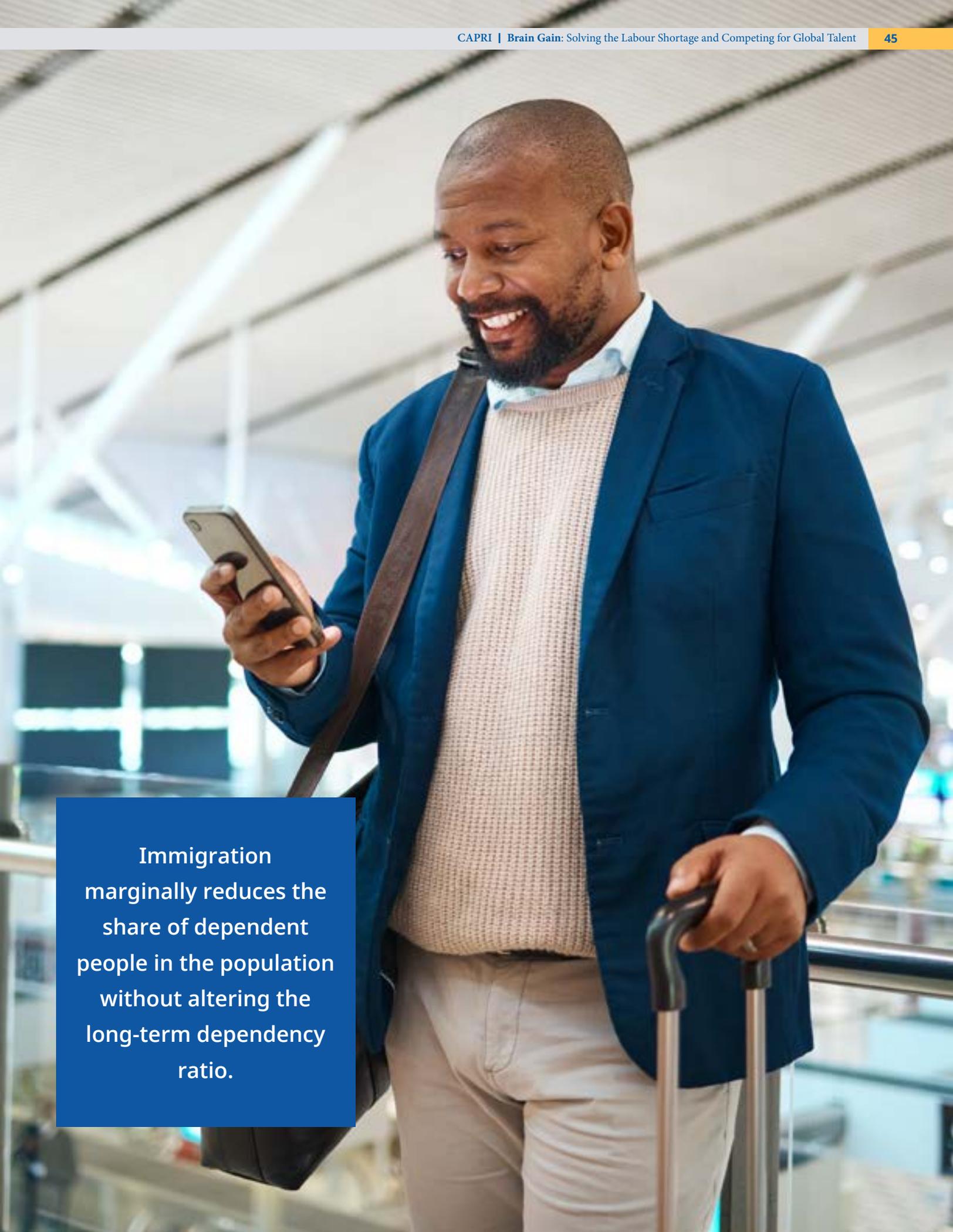
the native population.²¹⁴

In LMICs where immigrant populations are more educated and have a greater share of working-age people and higher employment rates than the native population, the fiscal contribution from immigrants is even larger. For instance, in Rwanda, where most immigrants are of working age and work in high-productivity sectors, they contribute three times as much in taxes and benefit less from public expenditures than the general population.²¹⁵ In South Africa, immigrants experience lower unemployment rates, at 18 percent (compared to the 28 percent national average) and contribute more per person to the fiscal budget at 17-27 percent (compared to the 8 percent national average).²¹⁶

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the evidence on attitudes towards immigration, its effects, and implications. The effects of immigration on employment, wages, entre-

preneurship, investment, and productivity are complex and context-dependent. While it is generally observed that immigrants have a positive impact on economic growth and productivity, this varies based on factors such as skill complementarity/substitutability and labour market dynamics. In terms of demographics, immigration can temporarily boost a country's population size but typically has a negligible impact on long-term population growth. The fiscal impact of immigration is generally modest, but positive, and varies depending on the immigrant's skill level, the stage of their journey in the host country, and the host country's economic performance and welfare systems. This understanding of the effects of immigration on wages, employment, entrepreneurship, investment, productivity, demographics, and public finances provides a basis for forecasting the implications of immigration for Jamaica. By taking into account Jamaica's specific circumstances and dynamics, we can seek to assess how increased immigration might impact Jamaica.

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a blue blazer over a beige sweater and light-colored trousers, is smiling while looking at his smartphone. He is holding the handle of a suitcase with his left hand. The background is a bright, modern interior, possibly an airport or a transit hub, with large windows and structural beams.

Immigration marginally reduces the share of dependent people in the population without altering the long-term dependency ratio.



6 Implications for Liberalising Jamaica's Immigration Policy



Skilled immigrants earn more and contribute more in taxes than semi-skilled and unskilled immigrants, who often take up lower-paying jobs.

The preceding analysis suggests that immigrants generally have a negligible impact on wage and employment outcomes, though it depends on the country's circumstances and the skill level of the immigrants relative to the native labour supply. The impact of immigrants on economic growth and productivity is generally positive. Therefore, it is likely that increased immigration to Jamaica could increase productivity and economic growth. However, the experiences of relatively poorer regions and unskilled workers of experiencing reductions in incomes and small increases in unemployment indicate that in Jamaica, there is a need to maintain restrictions on low-skilled workers who may diminish incomes for the majority of Jamaica's existing workforce. Preventing this income decline does not require a complete ban on unskilled workers, who can still contribute to total productivity growth through substitution and complementarity effects. The studies above also reveal the potential of well-managed immigration flows, particularly of skilled immigrants, to increase Jamaica's labour force and slow premature ageing brought on by emigration. Immigration would also likely improve Jamaica's fiscal balance if workers are skilled, but semi-skilled and unskilled workers would need to be integrated into the formal economy to achieve the same. Consideration should also be made of migration duration and social security benefits, especially in the context of economic cri-

ses, during which immigrants may become net beneficiaries of public finance.

Jamaica's immigration policy, relating to tax incentives and special economic zones, and the role of statutory deductions and employment tax credits. These all form the basis of the following policy recommendations that the research suggests could bridge the identified gaps.

The limited demographic impact of immigration on demographic trajectory is relevant to Jamaica's planning. In 2021, Jamaica had a fertility rate of 1.4 births per woman which is well below the Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan target of 2.1 (replacement rate). This low and falling fertility rate is contributing to population decline. This is further exacerbated by high net emigration, which the Vision 2030 Plan correctly recognised would continue due to the large income differences between Jamaica and destination countries and the population ageing in those countries which is driving labour demand.²¹⁷ While well-managed immigration can indefinitely postpone Jamaica's population ageing. This is because immigrants, who are typically more skilled, tend to have fewer children.

Jamaica's fiscal position stands to be positively affected by selective immigration which favours highly skilled, working-age,

temporary migrants, but is unlikely to be adversely affected by migrants who do not meet these criteria. Skilled migrants will more easily integrate into the formal labour force, earn more, and pay more taxes, while withdrawing fewer benefits. While semi-skilled and unskilled workers will earn and contribute less, especially if they work among the 40 percent of informally employed Jamaicans, they also benefit less from public spending. Jamaica's social spending is comparable to regional peers and lower than that of advanced economies, which indicates that immigrants' possible negative contribution to the fiscal balance is lower.

The Prospect of Importing Skilled Labour

Despite having a relatively unskilled population from which thousands of skilled and experienced workers emigrate annually, Jamaica has not actively pursued an attempt to attract skilled workers to spur economic growth. Apart from Haiti and Cuba, Jamaica has the lowest immigrant population in the Caribbean region, accounting for less than one percent of its residents, compared to 5 percent for Trinidad and Tobago and 12 percent for Barbados. Yet immigrants tend to have higher education levels than the general population, and could potentially help replenish the skills lost to emigration.²¹⁸

Despite having a relatively unskilled population from which thousands of skilled and experienced workers emigrate annually, Jamaica has not actively pursued an attempt to attract skilled workers to spur economic growth.



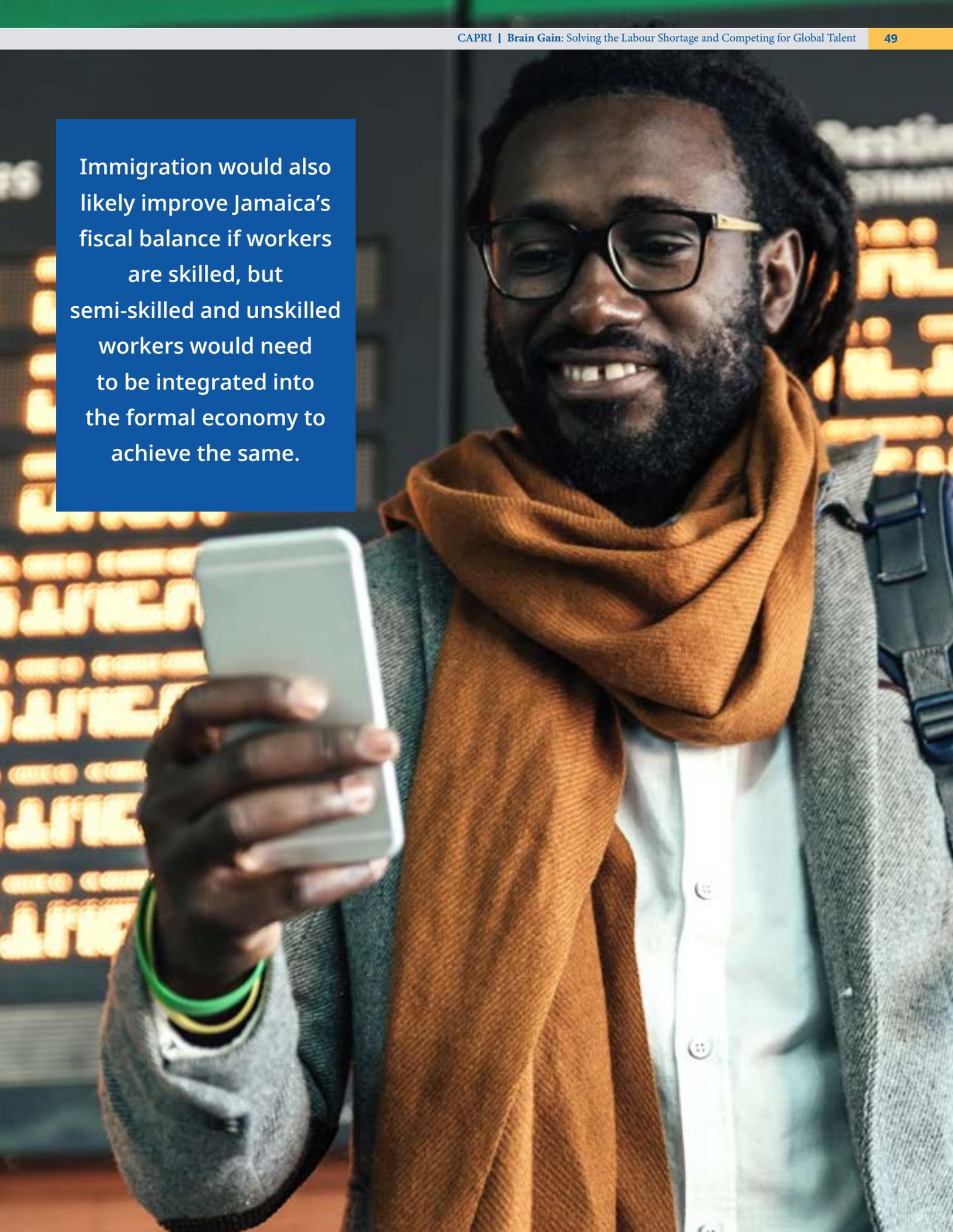
The contribution of immigrants is inversely related to the size of the welfare state: the more generous the welfare state, the less positive the impact of immigration.

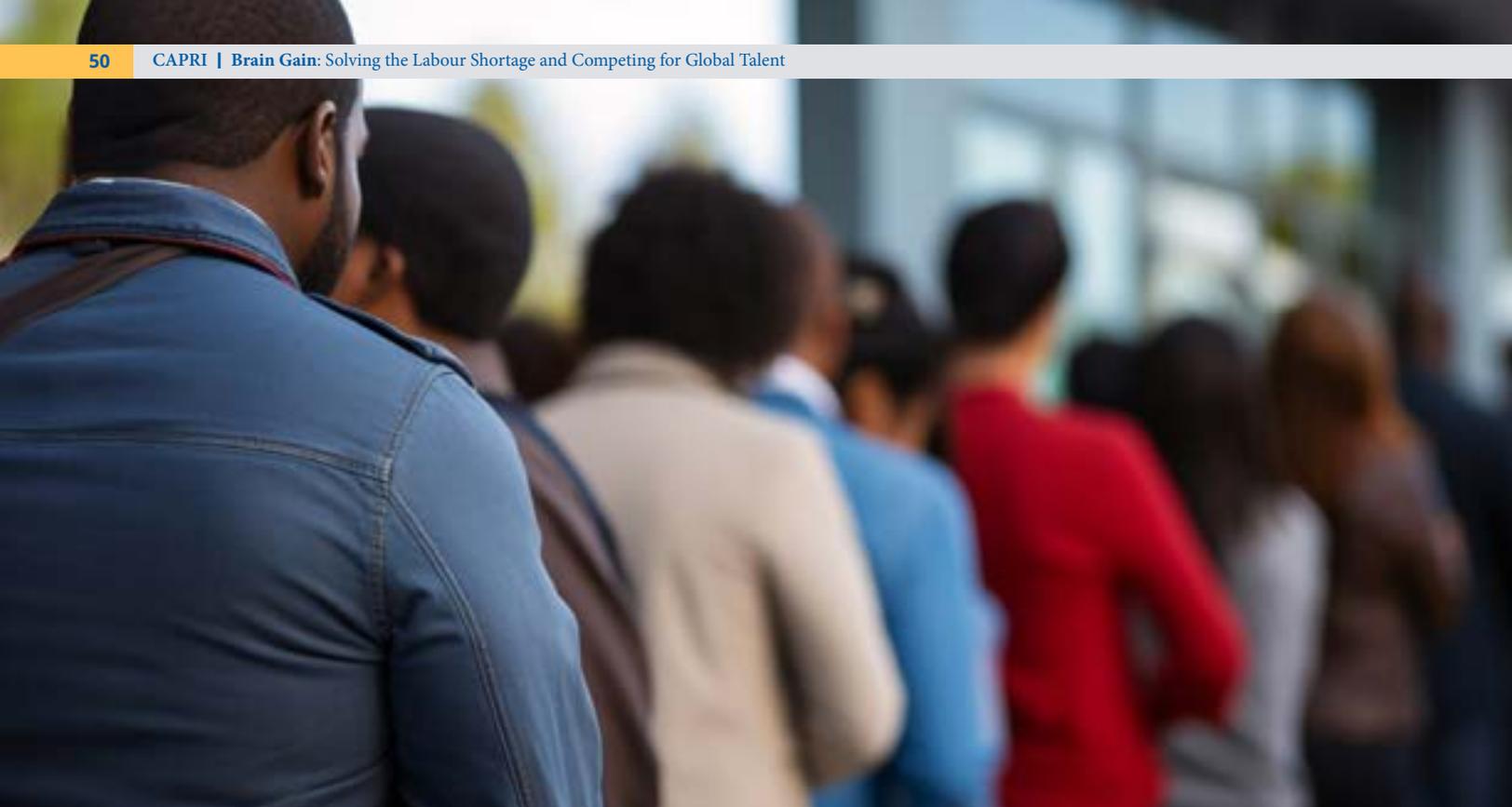
The idea of using immigration to alleviate Jamaica's skills shortage has gained traction, but there are concerns.²¹⁹ There is an assumption that importing workers, particularly skilled workers, has the potential to fill the existing gaps, and trigger a cascade of benefits, including enhanced innovation, increased investment, and heightened productivity. However, ad hoc measures taken in the past to recruit workers from countries such as China, Cuba, Ghana, and Nigeria have faced challenges. These include re-emigration to even wealthier countries after residing in Jamaica for long enough to satisfy English language requirements, cultural barriers, and pushback from locals.²²⁰ These and other observations add weight to the concern that Jamaica is not attractive enough to potential immigrants.²²¹

International migration is a difficult and costly process that most people will never undertake. Firstly, that 3.6 percent of the world's population are voluntary migrants is indicative of the relatively low rates of cross-border movement.²²² Beyond cost and difficulty, migration requires overcoming informational, linguistic, and financial barriers. Moreover, Jamaica ranks in the bottom half of all countries by per capita income and, out of 134 countries, it ranks 55th and 79th in attracting and retaining talent, respectively.²²³ Jamaica is not an internationally attractive immigrant destination, so easing immigration restrictions is more likely to modestly increase immigration numbers than lead to a flood of immigrants.

These factors strengthen the argument for liberalising and streamlining Jamaica's immigration framework. If it is already difficult, expensive, and unattractive to immigrate to Jamaica, then the government should proactively reduce these barriers that prevent employers from getting the labour they need. This would make it easier for the market to capture the foreign labour it requires, without causing the harms that are typically associated with mass immigration.

Immigration would also likely improve Jamaica's fiscal balance if workers are skilled, but semi-skilled and unskilled workers would need to be integrated into the formal economy to achieve the same.





7 Recent Developments in Migration Policy



JAMAICA ranks in the bottom half of all countries by per capita income and, out of 134 countries, it ranks 55th and 79th in attracting and retaining talent, respectively.

Many countries are experiencing problems of labour and skills shortages and as such, these countries are adjusting and further developing their migration policy to target these problems. Jamaica might do well to consider the recent developments in migration policy as well as measures adopted by other countries facing tight labour markets and skills shortages. In 2022, several OECD countries announced sweeping changes to their migration policy frameworks. Some countries, including Sweden, Finland, and Germany, have gone as far as announcing a migration policy “paradigm shift”, although the purpose and intended impact on net migration of these reforms varies. While many countries are focusing on attracting immigrants to address labour and skills shortages, several committed to decrease overall migration levels.

Both Sweden and Finland are adopting stricter migration policies. In October 2022, the new Swedish government announced a series of changes with the overall aim to reduce net migration. One of the proposed reforms include stricter conditions for low-skilled labour immigration, including a higher salary threshold. Similarly, in April 2023, the Finnish government announced its intention to raise the bar for work-based immigration and apply stricter language and residence requirements for foreigners to obtain cit-

With a focus on increasing labour migration, several countries have raised the national quotas or targeted number of immigrant workers, implemented new visa streams, adopted new migration laws to facilitate labour migration.

izenship in order to reduce immigration levels. The post-Brexit immigration system in the United Kingdom also aimed to make migration more selective by limiting low-skilled migration.

On the other hand, other countries are focusing on facilitating legal migration to increase overall immigration levels. Their aim is to fill labour gaps, through more flexible admission conditions, increased quotas, and streamlining of immigration procedures and processes. Spain has reformed its Immigration Law to streamline migration policy procedures with the overall aim to address persistent labour shortages and attract legal migrants into needed occupations. The reform facilitates and expands access to work permits and streamlines migration processes for different categories of migrants, includ-

ing students and seasonal workers. In March 2023, the German Government adopted the bill to reform the German Immigration Act for Skilled Workers. By July 2023, it was enacted in law and broadened the eligibility criteria for the EU Blue Card by relaxing several of the requirements for labour immigration of skilled workers and facilitating temporary low-skilled labour migration.²²⁵ The Australian Government is currently reviewing its immigration system and has identified a rebalance in temporary and permanent programmes as a key area to attract and retain global talent. In line with this, the government has announced an aim to create more pathways for permanent residency for skilled migrants in the future. Other policy changes include reforming the occupational shortage and streamlining intra-company transfers.

Many OECD countries are struggling to fill labour vacancies due to labour shortages and a lack of skilled labour. Attracting immigrants from abroad to support economic recovery and address labour shortages has thus become a priority in migration agendas in many countries.

With a focus on increasing overall labour migration, several countries have raised the national quotas or targeted number of immigrant workers, implemented new visa streams, adopted new migration laws to facilitate labour migration procedures, together with other measures. Several OECD countries have raised the national quotas or targeted number of immigrant workers to ease workforce and skills shortages and support economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia and Canada have announced increased immigration targets in their latest migration plans. For 2023, Italy and Norway increased quotas for third-country national workers. Italy further introduced a new law to issue future quotas every three years instead of annually and extend the validity of residence permits issued for family reasons, indefinite contract work, and self-employment from two to three years. In July 2023, Italy announced even higher quotas for 2023-2025.

In 2023, Austria increased its quota for seasonal workers by about 15 percent among other changes aimed at facilitating labour migration. Finland, prior to

the change in government, adapted its immigration legislation to increase work-based annual immigration to address skilled labour shortages, and introduced a fast-track plan for specialists by extending the long-term D visa to students, researchers, and employees with a certified employer and their family members. In 2022, the US H-2B programme, which allows employers to hire migrant workers for temporary and seasonal jobs, reached record numbers as the government raised the fiscal year 2023 allocation with 64,716 supplemental visas for businesses who would suffer “irreparable harm” if unable to secure the workers requested.

New visa streams to attract workers have also been put in place. Australia wants to improve access to permanent residence for skilled migrant workers to attract more highly skilled immigrants and move away from temporary labour migration. In July 2022, the Australian Government introduced the Temporary Residence Transition (TRT) stream under the Employer Nomination Scheme visa. This stream is designed for Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa holders whose

employers wish to sponsor them, and the eligibility for the TRT stream was reduced from three years to two years of employment with the sponsoring employer and enables employers to address skills shortages by ensuring a permanent employer-sponsored pathway is available for a wider range of occupations.

Slovak Republic and Slovenia have adopted new laws to facilitate labour migration procedures. In March 2023, Slovenia made amendments to the law on the employment of foreigners to address labour shortages by speeding up the recruitment of immigrant workers from abroad or through status changes while ensuring adequate working conditions and fair remuneration. In January 2023, the Slovak Republic, adopted a new law that expands the categories of workers who are exempt from labour market testing and allows non-EU nationals on Single Permits to remain employed while their renewal application is pending. This is also with the purpose of addressing labour shortages.

Other measures to enable immigrants to fill labour shortages include facilitating legalisation processes of undocumented workers. The French government has put forward a new immigration bill that will facilitate the legalisation process for undocumented workers already in the country who are active in sectors with labour shortages, while at the same time providing for swifter deportations. As part of a larger reform of its immigration system, Spain is introducing a regularisation programme to allow those who have lived in Spain for at least two years to regularise their situation in order to fill positions that are in demand, subject to training. The eligibility requirements and geographical scope for self-employment have also been relaxed.

In Germany, in addition to the significant overhaul of its labour migration system outlined above, a further new law, effective as of January 2023, allows migrants with long-term “tolerated status” to obtain a temporary residence permit for 18 months, subject to certain conditions such as having resided in the country for the past five years.²²⁶ During this time, they are given a chance to fulfil the legal



requirements for longer-term residence.

In contrast to the policies above, there are also policy changes that will increase the barriers for immigration, and particularly for low-skilled migrants. While Sweden has announced measures to promote high-skilled migration through a new model for more efficient processing of work permit applications and the establishing of international recruitment units, the government also aims to cut low-skilled migration by raising the minimum salary requirement. As of October 2023, the minimum threshold salary requirement will double. Australia has also announced an increase in the minimum threshold salary. As of July 2023, Australia increased the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT), which had remained constant since 2013.

Many OECD countries are struggling to fill labour vacancies due to labour shortages and a lack of skilled labour. Attracting immigrants from abroad to support economic recovery and

“We are in a talent war.”

- Human Resource Management Association in Jamaica

address labour shortages has thus become a priority in migration agendas in many countries. This is manifested in changes or reform to the migration policy framework, increases in national targeted levels of labour immigration, more skill-selective policies, and efforts to facilitate immigration processes more generally.

Therefore, with regard to Jamaica liberalising its migration policy and allowing immigrants to more easily enter the labour

market to address labour shortages, there is evidence that this approach is being adopted by several other countries. Those countries are addressing their labour shortages and lack of skilled labour by making changes to their migration policy with the aim of increasing labour immigration and making immigration procedures and processes more efficient.





8

Models for Selective Labour Migration Policy



Employer-led systems are demand driven in that they rely on employers to select immigrants to fill existing vacancies.

As mentioned above, many countries are experiencing labour and skills shortages; attracting immigrants from abroad through skill-selective policies is one way that can be used to address this. There are different models for selective labour migration policy that allows immigrants to work in a country and these include the employer-led (demand-driven) model, the points-based (merit-based) systems, and the hybrid model, which is a combination of the employer-led and point-based models.

The Employer-Led Model

Employer-led systems are demand-driven in that they rely on employers to select immigrants to fill existing vacancies. Employers identify needs and select immigrants who are then admitted to work in a specific job, as long as their employer has met legal criteria set by the government. These criteria range from onerous requirements that employers supply certification that they can find no suitable domestic workers to do a job in question, at least, for the wages on offer, to requiring employers to agree to comply with certain labour-market conditions vis-à-vis both immigrants and their co-workers, to, in certain instances, occupation-wide or employer-specific waivers that exempt them from labour-market tests.

The government plays an important role



in setting broad criteria that prospective immigrants must meet (minimum salary or education and experience requirements) as well as requirements for employers, including that the jobs on offer be available to local applicants, and that foreign workers are not used to affect the outcome of a dispute with organized workers. Governments always retain the final say over admission. They review nomination applications to ensure eligibility and screen immigrants before admitting them into the country, to both establish their identity and meet security protocols, thus preventing fraud and safeguarding the integrity of the system.

Employer-led systems usually offer most employment-based visas on a temporary basis; in some cases, immigrants may gain permanent resident status provided they meet certain criteria (such as length of residence). Most temporary employment-based visas are linked to a specific employer and in some instances even a specific job. In such cases, the work visa can be rescinded if a worker leaves their employer, requiring that person to leave the country. Increasingly, governments offer temporary workers a time-limited opportunity to find a new job, effectively making the initial visa “portable.”

The points-based system selects economic-stream immigrants on the basis of their human-capital attributes, awarding points for certain skills, education levels, language proficiencies, professional experiences, and age and other personal characteristics.

With the increase in Venezuelan immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago, there was an increase in the labour force participation rate from 59 to 63 percent.

The advantage of employer-led systems lies in the ability to match immigrants with jobs and admit them on that basis. By selecting immigrants to fill certain jobs and screening their qualifications and experience to ensure they meet the stated requirements, the host country can reduce the problems of unemployment and underemployment that some new arrivals have faced under various points-based selection systems.

Criticisms of this system include that employers have too much power over foreign employees on temporary work visas. Other concerns range from the potential for lowering wages for all workers in similar jobs, to employers favouring foreign workers as a cheaper and more reliable option than local workers. Most important, relying on foreign workers enables policymakers and employers to postpone the long-term investments in technology or training and education necessary to close current and emerging gaps between demand and supply. Finally, while employer-sponsored programmes are an effective tool for filling jobs, they are not effective in addressing the longer-term needs of the labour market and broader economy. For workers who end up staying on a longer-term basis, another issue is that when jobs become redundant, or a firm downsizes (or fails), the firm essentially “socializes” the costs of supporting, retraining, and placing the foreign worker in a new role.

The Points-Based Model

The points-based, or merit-based system, selects economic-stream immigrants on the basis of their human-capital attributes, awarding points for certain skills, education levels, language proficiencies, professional experiences, and age and other personal characteristics. In these

systems, governments set the criteria for awarding points, and update the criteria and their absolute and relative value. This can be done on a regular basis to respond to changing labour-market priorities or to information on the integration outcomes of previously selected immigrants. As a result, the design and eligibility requirements of points systems vary by country. The points system tends to be most successful in countries with strong executive powers over immigration that may be used to adjust the system’s criteria and numerical values on a regular basis in response to changing needs or priorities.

A points-based model appeals to governments for several reasons.²²⁷ First, it provides a streamlined solution for policymakers wishing to select and admit people with in-demand skills, yet linked to longer-term economic and labour-market objectives, instead of relying on employers to find and recruit the workers they currently need. Second, the flexibility of the system enables policymakers to create a dynamic but orderly system that has adaptability at its core.²²⁸ Policymakers can adjust selection criteria on the basis of ongoing evaluation of labour-market and social integration outcomes, as well as estimates of future labour-market needs. Third, it offers a transparent way to select prospective economic stream immigrants, relying on clear and objective criteria that can build confidence (and procedural certainty) among prospective immigrants and host-country publics alike.²²⁹ From a political perspective, points systems also help convey to voters that policymakers are being proactive in trying to anticipate the country’s needs and prioritize its economic interests by choosing immigrants on the basis of their ability to integrate

successfully and to thus make long-term contributions to the country.

One of the disadvantages of this model is that flawed selection criteria have proven difficult to address. It is difficult to differentiate among similar qualifications on paper, take the presence and value of “soft skills” into account, and estimate the quality and value of on-the-job training. Matching employers with immigrant workers (and vice versa) is also a challenge. In addition, new immigrants may often struggle to connect with the professional and social networks that might help them find work quickly, and employers can struggle to evaluate foreign qualifications or experience relative to domestic standards.

Hybrid Approach

As points-based selection systems have matured, policymakers have gradually overhauled their design so as to pay closer attention to employer needs and to factors that promote labour-market and social integration. As a result, points systems now include more “demand-side” criteria. These criteria include awarding points for job offers, awarding points for factors linked to better integration outcomes, and making a job offer or experience in an in-demand occupation compulsory.

The increasing importance assigned to job offers amount to a hybrid approach to selecting economic migrants, one that pays attention to employer needs while still using a points-based system to assess and select from pools of prospective immigrants.²³⁰ This approach has proved popular among countries with longstanding points systems looking to improve labour-market outcomes (such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) and among countries with employer-led selection systems that are experimenting with using points tests to assess applicants seeking to enter through employer-sponsored routes.

Hybrid selection systems have gained in popularity because they allow policymakers to take the best attributes of both demand-driven and points-based systems, and thus improve outcomes for

immigrants, their employers, the broader economy, and society at large.²³¹ Specifically, selecting immigrants based on a range of human-capital criteria improves the competitiveness of firms (and the broader economy), and encouraging employer sponsorship is linked to stronger labour-market integration outcomes.

Model for Selective Labour Migration Policy - Case of Jamaica

Among the three models of selective labour migration policy the question arises as to which would suit Jamaica given its specific labour and skills shortages. If Jamaica were to adopt the employer-led

model, which primarily focuses on labour market needs, private employers will be able to select the foreign workers they need, with the government playing a hands-off role that focuses on enforcing immigration and employment rules. However, if Jamaica were to adopt the points-based model, which primarily focuses on human capital considerations, the government will be able to select immigrants, awarding points for professional experience, a job offer, education, proficiency in English language, and other factors, based on an ostensibly clear and objective selection criteria. The government and policymakers can also adjust the system's criteria and distribution of points in response to changing estimates of labour demand or evaluations of selected immigrants' integration outcomes. Finally,

if Jamaica were to adopt the hybrid model, the government will have more flexibility of addressing not only the current labour market needs, but human capital considerations (as they will be able to use points to assess and select pools of prospective immigrants). The best model selection for Jamaica will be dependent on the government's objectives and priorities as it relates to the development of the current migration policy.



Case Study: Venezuelan Migrants in Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago is situated 12 km (7 miles) northeast of Venezuela and this close geographic proximity has historically enabled migratory movements.²³² Over the last few years, due to economic and political crises in Venezuela, its nationals have fled to neighbouring countries, including Trinidad and Tobago.

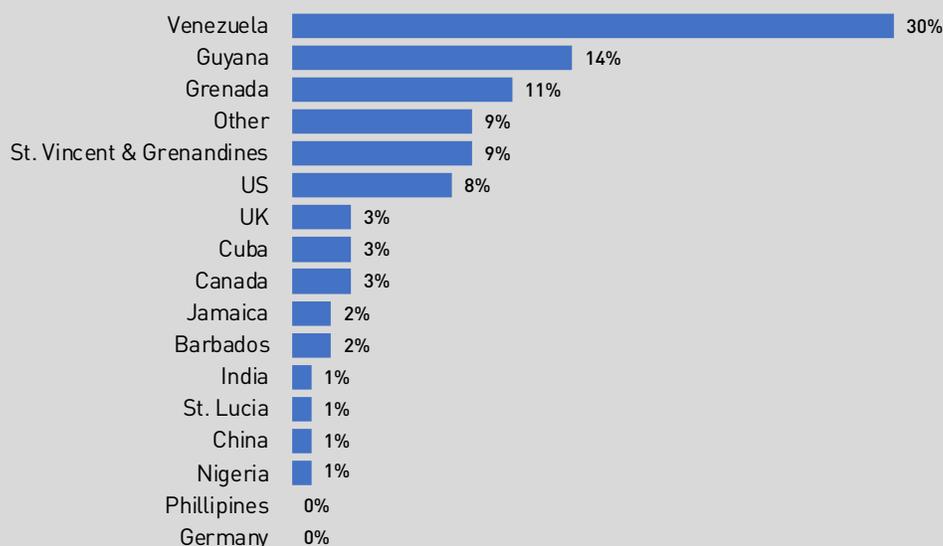
In April 2019, the government of Trinidad and Tobago imposed a registration system for Venezuelan migrants because many Venezuelans entered the country by irregular means and were not registered.²³³ The registration authorised Venezuelan nationals in irregular circumstances to work for a period of one year in Trinidad and Tobago, upon successful screening procedures.²³⁴

In 2020, Venezuelans were the main source of the foreign-born population in Trinidad and Tobago as they accounted for 30 percent of immigrants (Figure 2).²³⁵ In 2020, the number of Venezuelans in Trinidad and Tobago was estimated to be 33,400.²³⁶ As at December 2022, there were approximately 35,300 Venezuelan refugees and asylum seekers registered with the Government or humanitarian organisations in Trinidad and Tobago. Amongst Caribbean countries, Trinidad and Tobago has the highest share of Venezuelans in its population.²³⁷ As of January 2023, an additional 9,200 Venezuelans had obtained regularisation of their migration status, while 4,000 were still waiting.²³⁸

The largest source of immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago is Venezuela.



Source Countries of Immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago, 2020.



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Population Division, International Migrant Stock 2020.

Impact of Venezuelan Migrant Workers on the Labour Market in Trinidad and Tobago

The labour market in Trinidad and Tobago is likely to be affected in areas which include wages, labour force participation rate, productivity, and ageing population. The first labour market implication of Venezuelan migrants is decreased wages for unskilled native labour. The influx of Venezuelan migrants causes the income of the owners of capital to rise because of the immigration surplus. However, this comes at the expense of the workers in Trinidad and Tobago who experience a fall in their wages, whereby the wage is significantly lower than the wages prior to the massive inflow of Venezuelan migrants.²³⁹ This is the case when the immigrants and native workers act as substitutes whereby both are low-skilled workers. The assumption is that all Venezuelan migrant labour will be classified as unskilled due to the language barrier. The inability to speak the native language of the migrant's host country means that

skilled migrants cannot engage in the high-level communication necessary to be successful in applying for jobs that require skilled workers. As a result, the only jobs available to skilled migrants (who do not speak English) are those requiring unskilled labour.²⁴⁰

Secondly, there is increased labour force participation. The labour force participation rate was 59 percent without Venezuelan labour, however it was 63 percent with Venezuelan labour in 2017.²⁴¹ Therefore, as a result of the introduction of the Venezuelan migrant workers into the labour force, the labour force participation rate increased.

Furthermore, the presence of the Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago can result in a change in the output mix of goods and services both produced by and imported into the economy. The influx of Venezuelan migrants will result in an increase in the demand for goods and services they use. This increase in demand will require local entrepreneurs to either increase production or import the goods demanded by the Venezuelan migrants. The resulting economic output

mix of the Trinidad and Tobago economy is therefore likely to change.²⁴² To add, an increase in the number of migrants expands the income capital because capital has more labour to work it more intensively. Therefore, the return to capital is higher.

Lastly, Venezuelan migrants can reduce the economic impact of Trinidad and Tobago's ageing population. The number of persons over 60 increased by 37 percent (49,500 people) between 2010 and 2017.²⁴³ This increase in the proportion of the elderly population has been shown to negatively impact economic growth primarily due to a fall in the labour force participation rate.²⁴⁴ A higher proportion of elderly people also means that the dependency ratio is high. A high dependency ratio will yield a lower average standard of living because there are more dependent people who are outside of the labour force (not economically active). The working age population (economically active), who are part of the labour force, face a greater burden in supporting these elderly people. Therefore, the influx of some 40,000 Venezuelan migrants can expand the working age population,

increase the labour force participation rate, and by extension positively impact the country's economic growth.²⁴⁵ This is because most migrants are of working age. In fact, in 2020, the age distribution showed that the largest percentage of the immigrant population was in the 20–39 age group, at 6 percent.²⁴⁶

We saw above that the labour market in Trinidad and Tobago is likely to be affected in several ways. The negative impacts

of the increase in immigrant workers on the labour market are that the wages of the native workers will be reduced and the average standard of living will be lowered through the increase in the proportion of the elderly population, and the subsequent high dependency ratio. However, the positive impacts of the increase of immigrants include an increase in the productivity of labour and a reduction in the economic impact of the aging population by sustaining the working age population. The pres-

ence of immigrant labour is also expected to have a positive impact on the output mix of goods and services both produced by and imported into the economy, resulting in larger quantity of goods produced.





9 Conclusion



Immigrants can occupy roles that free up native workers to enter the labour force or to transition to more suitable jobs.

As Jamaica faces an unprecedented shortage of labour and skills, acting as a constraint on growth, its immigration policy has not changed to reflect the needs of the current labour market. Emigration from Jamaica far outpaces immigration (as is the case with most other Caribbean countries). The outcome of that imbalance is that one in three Jamaicans resides overseas, but fewer than one in one hundred people residing in Jamaica are foreign nationals. Combined with a comparatively weak education system, this migration gap has resulted in an untrained workforce facing a growing demand for semi-skilled and skilled labour. These shortages extend across several industries and involve specific occupations and specialisations. Meanwhile, it remains difficult and expensive to immigrate to Jamaica despite immigration having the potential to alleviate the ongoing problem.

The preceding analysis of international experience demonstrates that managed immigration can be beneficial while posing limited risks. Immigrants increase productivity by increasing the available human capital, transferring skills, and increasing labour force participation and the efficient use of labour via the labour complementarity effect. Therefore, immigrants contribute to economic growth, particularly when labour is skilled, in

which case their contribution can be greater than the average native worker. However, mass low-skilled immigration has been shown to increase unemployment and reduce wages among low-skilled workers, while increasing the wages of some semi- or high-skilled workers in a few limited cases. Finally, immigrants are unlikely to adversely impact the government's budget as they usually contribute more and benefit less than similarly skilled natives.

It is unconstructive to frame the substantive case in favour of increased immigration as mutually exclusive to the need for improving education and training levels among Jamaican workers. Immigrants can occupy roles that free up native workers to enter the labour force or to transition to more suitable jobs. Immigrants can also contribute to skills transfers to native workers and facilitate economic expansion by establishing the right mix of labour. This includes the development of certain new industries which require immigrants if the local expertise is unavailable or insufficient. Finally, immigrants can contribute to entrepreneurship, innovation, and job growth, improving economic opportunities for all workers.

The levels of immigration to Jamaica should be reflective of the government's economic growth targets, without undue bureaucratic and monetary distortions. At present, the non-transparent, lengthy,

and costly process of immigration serves as a disincentive to potential immigrants. This is redundant since immigrants (or their potential employers) already face a cost barrier, including relocation costs, and since immigrants will likely need to fulfil several requirements, such as proving qualifications and health and security status. Notwithstanding, immigrants should be integrated into the domestic economy, and this does warrant some due diligence to ensure that their qualifications are universally recognised and that they can exercise labour rights on par with those enjoyed by Jamaicans.

The levels of immigration to Jamaica should be reflective of the government's economic growth targets, without undue bureaucratic and monetary distortions.

As Jamaica faces an unprecedented shortage of labour and skills, acting as a constraint on growth, its immigration policy has not changed to reflect the needs of the current labour market.

Recommendations

The primary outcomes of a change to immigration policy should be an efficient and transparent immigration system that permits employers to obtain the skills they need, and positions Jamaica as a more attractive destination country for independent skilled workers. This would be in line with the Hybrid Model of selective immigration described above, but with less intervention by the central government. This system should be matched with collaborative efforts to facilitate firm and industry level skills transfers and learning. As is consistent with international norms and Jamaica's current laws, immigrants should retain a pathway to permanent residence and access to public social services, including opportunities to further develop their skills.

**1**

The government should amend the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) Act to eliminate the requirement for a work permit to specify the name of an employer and the place of employment of the permit holder.²⁴⁷ This would enable a potential immigrant to freely change employers or to legally take on additional employment. Employers and immigrant employees would retain the right to enter into legally binding contracts that outline the terms of employment, including minimum employment durations and relocation costs.

The government should amend the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) Act to eliminate work permit holding fees. The work permit application fee should remain insofar as it covers the cost incurred by the state in processing the application.

2**3**

In the absence of an immediate policy reform, the Minister of Labour should use their discretion under Section 8 of the Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens Act to pre-emptively exempt from the work permit requirement occupational categories that are experiencing persistent shortages. Occupational categories should be decided through consultations between the MLSS, private sector organisations, and labour unions.

Recommendations



4

The MLSS should remove from the work permit application process the need for employers to prove that actions have been taken to recruit Jamaican workers. The process may retain requirements to report on criminal history, remuneration, skills, firm information, and other such data.

Jamaica's National Visa Policy currently under draft should establish a category of visas that allows highly skilled citizens of any country to move to Jamaica for 3-12 months and search for a job. Granting of the visa should be dependent on the skills possessed and the transfer of funds into a domestic blocked account sufficient to cover living expenses for the time the visa is valid.²⁴⁸ Visa holders should be able to begin working immediately upon finding a job or establishing an enterprise.

5



6

The capacity of the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) to verify international qualifications, particularly those obtained in developing countries, should be expanded. This may involve a one-off payment from government or a loan to improve existing systems, but operating costs including maintaining upgrades, database subscriptions, should depend on fees collected by the UCJ in conducting its business.



Appendix 1: Elite Interviews

Methodology

This study assesses the likely economic and social impacts of increased immigration to Jamaica and the regulations governing immigration by analysing primary data and secondary research. The impact of immigration on the labour force, productivity, and society are explored at all skill levels: unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled. Data gathering involved interviews with stakeholders and representatives of relevant organisations in Jamaica, supplemented by secondary research from national and international organisations, including civil society and academia.

The primary data consisted of 13 one-on-one interviews with representatives from labour unions, employer and private sector organisations, and government agencies. These interviews shed light on the legal and regulatory framework governing immigration to Jamaica, and provided insight into the varying positions of different stakeholders. Interviewees helped to clarify the gap between the practice of immigration policy and the officially stipulated restrictions, enriching the study with thematic insights. These insights included views on the policy positions necessary for effective implementation of any recommendations the study should offer. Among these stakeholders were individuals and groups that would likely be directly involved in or affected by a change in immigration policy; they provided insight into anticipated impacts, and how they may be enhanced or mitigated.²⁴⁹

This study also depended on the analysis of secondary research on the impacts of immigration in other countries, particularly developed nations, upon which most of the literature on immigration is based. This was necessitated by the unavailability of adequate quantitative data for Jamaica. Studies assessing immigration impacts are typically conducted after an influx of immigrants, enabling the use of robust quantitative methodologies. However, Jamaica has not had immigration in a sufficient quantity and diversity (of skill levels) to enable the use of those methodologies.²⁵⁰ Moreover, the country lacks comprehensive data about already-arrived immigrants for national-level and skill-level analysis. Therefore, this study consolidates experiences of other countries to forecast the potential consequences of a more liberal immigration policy for Jamaica.

The methodology outlined above clarified Jamaica's present labour market conditions, revealed fresh insights into the immigration phenomenon in developing countries, and situated a global body of research in the local context, all serving to inform considerations of immigration policy reform.

Appendix 2

Non-Traditional Data Analysis of Views Expressed on Social Media Platform X

Limitations

In this report, X (formerly Twitter) data is considered as a source of public opinion on the proposal to liberalize immigration to address Jamaica's labour and skills shortage. This is done recognizing this data's inherent limitations and potential biases. Approximately 9 to 12 percent of the Jamaican population uses Twitter, but the active engagement of these users in political discussions is unknown. X users in Jamaica thus do not constitute a representative sample, introducing sample bias. The digital divide and varying Twitter usage across demographics may further skew perspectives. Factors such as the platform's tendency to create echo chambers, the presence of bots, anonymity, and algorithmic promotion fostering extreme opinions, and the character limit constraining nuanced expression are also concerns in using this data source. Despite these limitations, the absence of alternative public opinion data warrants consideration of these opinions as an indicator of public sentiment on immigration liberalization in Jamaica.

Methodology

This analysis was done using a sample of over 200 tweets, posted to X's platform between July to November 2023. This time period was used based on currency and the relevancy of the topic in public discourse. Keywords such as "skilled labour", "migrant labour", "import labour", "migration", "labour shortage" and other related words and terms were utilized to find relevant tweets. Quote tweets, replies on articles discussing this topic, as well as original tweets were also assessed. In an effort to mitigate selection biases, any tweet discussing the selected topic was considered in the analysis. Tweets were grouped and categorized, given a tweet ID and tweeter ID, to maintain anonymity and evaluate the tweet text solely.

The numbering system was as follows. The first number of each tweet ID denoted the thread to which the tweet belonged. These numbers were assigned ordinally, based on the order of selection of each tweet. This number was separated by a period, and the subsequent numbers denoted the replies to the thread and replies to each reply. For example, tweet 1.1.1 denotes the first reply to the first reply of the first thread selected. Tweeter IDs were also assigned ordinally, and each poster given the name "User" and a number denoting order of selection. Therefore, this took the form @User1...@Usern.

After the tweets had been collected and categorized, they were evaluated based on whether they expressed positive, negative, or neutral sentiments towards the immigration of skilled workers to enhance the Jamaican labour market. Positive being "in support of skilled labour immigration", negative being "not in support of labour immigration," and neutral expressing neither positive nor negative views. The key theme/point being made in each tweet was also summarized and recorded.

Appendix 3

List of Stakeholders Interviewed

Stakeholder Code	Stakeholder Organization	Interviewee(s) Name(s)	Interview Date
Stakeholder 1	Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association	Richard Coe, Vice-President	August 30, 2023
Stakeholder 2	Private Sector Organization of Jamaica	-	August 3, 2023
Stakeholder 3	Public Sector Stakeholder	-	August 25, 2023
Stakeholder 4	Private Sector Stakeholder	-	August 11, 2023
Stakeholder 5	Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority	-	August 4, 2023
Stakeholder 6	Private Sector Stakeholder	-	July 21, 2023
Stakeholder 7	Caribbean Employers' Confederation	Wayne Chen, President	July 31, 2023
Stakeholder 8	Private Sector Stakeholder	-	August 25, 2023
Stakeholder 9	Union Stakeholder	-	August 3, 2023
Stakeholder 10	MSBM Professional Services Unit	Diane Edwards (Director)	August 11, 2023
Stakeholder 11	Public Sector Stakeholder	-	November 10, 2023
Stakeholder 12	Human Resource Management Association of Jamaica	-	September 26, 2023
Stakeholder 13	Public Sector Stakeholder	-	November 23, 2023



Endnotes

¹ The detailed methodology is contained in an appendix.

² Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility,” International Organization for Migration, July 2023, <https://rosanjose.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1446/files/documents/2023-07/data-report-trends-in-caribbean-migration-and-mobility.pdf>; The Caribbean region in the section refers to 29 countries and territories. The Caribbean countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. The Caribbean territories include Anguilla, Aruba, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten (Dutch part), Turks and Caicos Islands, and United States Virgin Islands.

³ Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility”; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division; An immigrant is someone who has been living for one year or longer in a country other than the one in which he or she was born. An emigrant is an individual who has left their country of birth/usual residence to live in another country.

⁴ UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination and Origin: Table 1,” 2020, www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock.

⁵ Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility”; UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination and Origin: Table 1,” 2021.

⁶ Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility”; UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination and Origin: Table 1,” 2021.

⁷ UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020: Destination and Origin: Table 1,” 2020, www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock.

⁸ UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020, Table 1.”

⁹ Calculations done using Population (total) 2020 data; World Bank, “World Development Indicators,” 2020, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.

¹⁰ Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility”; Intraregional migration is migration among Caribbean countries/territories. Extraregional migration is migration where immigrants are coming into Caribbean countries/territories from outside of the Caribbean region.

¹¹ Regional Data Hub, “Data Report: Trends in Caribbean Migration and Mobility”; Given that UNDESA figures are based primarily on population censuses, more recent migration movements within the region (for example, of Venezuelan migrants and refugees) may not be fully reflected in the dataset as of 2020.

¹² Valerie Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean: A Policy Review,” Migration Policy Institute and Inter-American Development Bank, March 2023, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0004769>.

¹³ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁴ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁵ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁶ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁷ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁸ Lacarte et al., “Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Caribbean.”

¹⁹ Based on UNDESA, “International Migrant Stock 2020, Table 1”; Total migrant stock at mid-year by origin and major area, region or country of destination, from 1990-2020.

²⁰ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, “Statistical Bulletin 2021,” April 2022, 32, www.lmis.gov.jm/intelligence/section/research.

²¹ Several interviewees and public commentators have indicated that Jamaica is unlikely to attract more immigrants by easing immigration restrictions because of its relatively low wages and high levels of violent crime. Even if this is entirely accurate, it is a separate question from the potential impacts of increased immigration. Furthermore, it is a secondary consideration to whether the existing framework presents an additional barrier to immigration that requires review.

²² Planning Institute of Jamaica and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica, “National Policy on International Migration and Development,” White Paper, April 2017, www.pioj.gov.jm/policies/migration-policy/; The National Policy on International Migration and Development outlines the laws, framework, and facilities related to migration, but with a focus on emigration and the return migration of Jamaican nationals.

- ²³ Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, Suzette Martin-Johnson, and Zelris Lawrence, “Migration in Jamaica: A Country Profile 2018,” IOM - UN Migration, April 26, 2018, 74, <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-jamaica-country-profile-2018>.
- ²⁴ Passport, Immigration, and Citizenship Agency, Jamaica, “Unconditional Landing,” n.d., www.pica.gov.jm/immigration/unconditional-landing.
- ²⁵ PICA, “Unconditional Landing.”
- ²⁶ Persons who marry Jamaican nationals may also apply for work permit exemption from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, (after one month of marriage).
- ²⁷ Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago participate in the CSME. Thw Bahamas, Haiti, and Montserrat are CARICOM member, but are not participants in the CSME.
- ²⁸ “CSME - CARICOM Single Market and Economy,” Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago, n.d., <https://foreign.gov.tt/services/csme/>; “Caribbean Single Market Economy,” Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Jamaica, n.d., www.lmis.gov.jm/article/50; According to Stakeholder 13, Jamaica recognises twelve categories of workers.
- ²⁹ Stakeholder 11
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⁶⁶ Several stakeholders attributed the skills shortage to pandemic-era shifts such as employees placing a greater emphasis on flexibility and work/life balance, a rise in entrepreneurship or own account work in the gig economy, and increased emigration following the removal of travel restrictions. The data indicate that there was a decline in post-covid emigration: Alecia Smith, “Drop in number of Jamaicans emigrating to US,” *Observer*, August 14, 2023, www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/drop-in-number-of-jamaicans-emigrating-to-us/.

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⁷¹ Private Sector Stakeholder 6.

⁷² Private Sector Stakeholder 4, Zoom interview, August 11, 2023.

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²⁴⁸ A blocked account is a financial account that does not grant the owner unlimited or indiscriminate access to the funds within the account. In this case, the account owner would transfer their total living expenses into the account before their visa is approved and would be permitted to withdraw only a fraction of the total deposit monthly.

²⁴⁹ Interviews were conducted between July and November 2023, and their anonymised responses are integrated into the report in various formats.

²⁵⁰ Immigrants constitute just 0.7 percent of Jamaica’s population and are predominantly skilled workers. These characteristics would make it difficult to assess the potential economy-wide impacts of larger migration flows constituting workers of varying skill levels.

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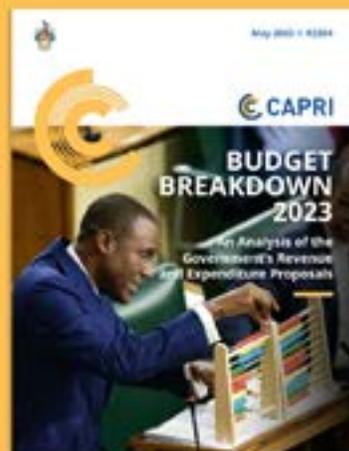
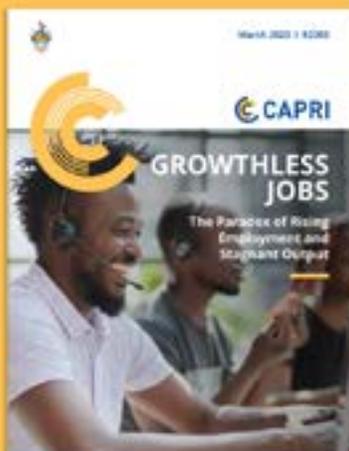
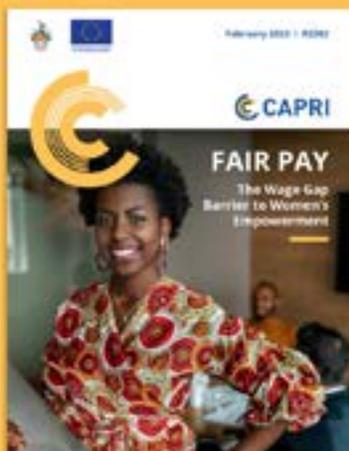
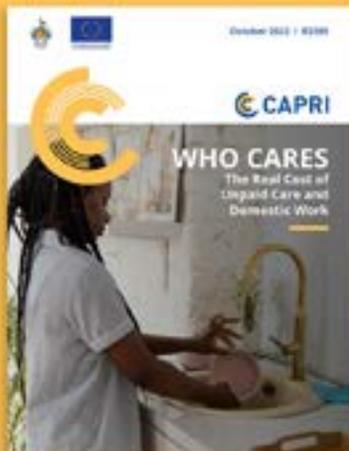
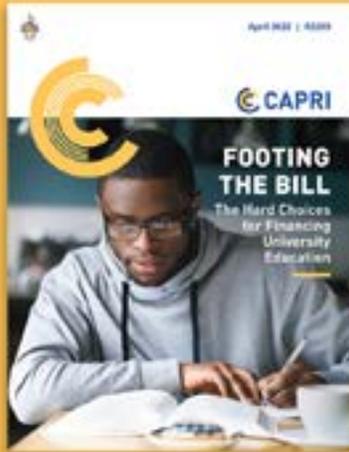
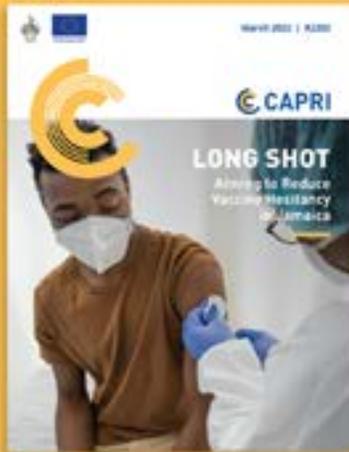
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