



# Diaspora engagement mapping JAMAICA

## Facts & figures

### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1</sup>



Right to vote in national elections  
for citizens residing abroad<sup>2</sup>



Right to Vote from abroad<sup>3</sup>



### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **18.54%**  
Remittances inflow (USD million): **3,600**

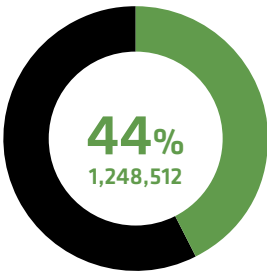
### Emigration



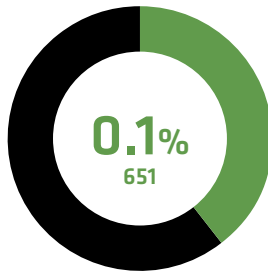
% of emigrants in  
total population



% of which  
in the EU



♂ 44%  
♀ 56%



♂ 50.8%  
♀ 49.2%

### Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the [World Bank](#) (2023).

### Top countries of destination



United States of America	910,748
United Kingdom	146,646
Canada	144,301
Cayman Island	12,602
Bahamas	8,510

## National Diaspora Policy 2022<sup>4</sup>



The National Diaspora Policy addresses the Government of Jamaica's (GoJ) commitment to pursue diaspora initiatives that are beneficial to national development and the wellbeing of the diaspora community. The policy's goal is that by 2030 there will be "transformative engagements and partnerships providing an enabling environment for the empowerment of the Jamaican Diaspora to realize their fullest potential...while optimizing contributions to national development." The policy highlights eight main goals, such as: increasing diaspora engagement in national development planning, recognizing diaspora networks, encouraging diaspora investment, promoting research of diaspora contributions to development, among others.

1 Chapter 2 of the Constitution of Jamaica

2 <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/veteran-jamaican-broadcaster-says-no-diaspora-vote>

3 <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/veteran-jamaican-broadcaster-says-no-diaspora-vote>

4 <https://jis.gov.jm/cabinet-approves-national-diaspora-policy/#:~:text=The%20National%20Diaspora%20Policy%20reflects,being%20of%20its%20diaspora%20population>

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2009** ● **Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan** aims at strengthening the involvement of the Jamaican diaspora in national development by establishing the Jamaica Diaspora Foundation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. Additionally, the plan seeks to develop a strategy for engaging a wide audience on the island and in the diaspora community to promote media literacy.
- 2017** ● **Jamaica's International Migration and Development Policy (IMDP)**. The White Paper states that an aim of the policy is to have modern mechanisms in place by 2030 to facilitate global technological advances in remittance transmissions and promote investment opportunities. This can improve accessibility to remittance sending for the diaspora community. The policy also calls for the extensive and continuous policy-relevant research training programmes for data and research on migration and development.

### » Trends and achievements

Almost 44% of Jamaicans live abroad, the majority residing in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. However, citizens with official residency status abroad do not have the right to vote. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT) has made it a priority to develop boards and commissions that focus on their diaspora population. It has over 20 diplomatic missions and 400 Foreign Service officers.

There has been progress in policy initiatives to expand on inclusivity and development of the diaspora population, as well as to bridge relationships between diaspora youth populations and Jamaicans living on the island, such as the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council. In June 2019, the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Minister, Senator the Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith, announced that the government is lobbying the support of Jamaicans living abroad for the creation of proposed Global Jamaica Diaspora and Global Jamaica Youth Councils. These councils would not only alleviate some of the responsibility of the Diaspora Advisory Board, but would offer more inclusivity throughout the diaspora population. The Global Jamaica Diaspora Council was established end of January 2020<sup>5</sup>. The Global Diaspora Youth Council was created in 2019 to sustain connections between young Jamaicans living abroad and the island<sup>6</sup>.

Remittances play a large economic factor for Jamaica, totalling approximately 16% of the country's GDP. Ultimately, the government encourages members of the diaspora to return home to work, raise families, invest, and retire.<sup>7</sup> This can also be seen in the inviting citizenship regulations – allowing people with grandparents from Jamaica to apply for citizenship. Additionally, the Jamaican government offers incentives in order to help returning residents and deportees move back to Jamaica; this includes assistance on moving and importing expenses.<sup>8</sup>

In 2023, after two years of deliberation, the main opposition party, People's National Party, made a historic decision to add a seventh division for the diaspora. This gives the diaspora functional representation in the major political party for the first time. It aligns with calls from the diaspora for a formal place in politics, though it remains to be seen the precise role and rights diaspora will be given in the party.<sup>9</sup>

Key areas the government focuses on for diaspora engagement are:

5 <https://mfaft.gov.jm/site/the-global-jamaica-diaspora-council/>

6 <https://www.facebook.com/GlobalJAYouth/about/>

7 <https://mfaft.gov.jm/jm/returning-to-permanently-reside-jamaica/>

8 <https://www.jacustoms.gov.jm/service/returning-resident>

9 <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/opinion/positively-engaging-the-jamaican-diaspora/>

**Diaspora Tourism:** The Jamaican diaspora accounts for approximately 7% of all stopover visitors to the island. The Jamaican government has noted this significant percentage and plans on creating specific programmes that will target said diaspora population – specifically youth and young adults, hoping to enhance their relationship with the island.

**Diaspora Philanthropy:** Jamaicans abroad continue to make significant donations to the country’s educational and health institutions. In 2017, over 9 million USD was donated by the Diaspora and Friends of Jamaica to Medical Missions, which offers free medical services to underserved populations in Jamaica.

**Export of Jamaican Products:** There has been a large demand from diaspora communities for Jamaican domestic products, helping the country increase their agricultural exports to the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Total exports grossed USD 554,952 in 2017, compared to USD 464,660 in 2016. The demand is typically for non-traditional exports like yams, sweet potatoes, papayas, pumpkins, etc. An increase in non-traditional exports helps the country financially while the demand for indigenous food products gradually increases.

**Economic Assistance Through Remittances:** Jamaica receives an average of USD 2.2 billion dollars annually in remittances, equating to approximately 16% of its GDP. In 2024, the number increased to USD 3.6 billion dollars, accounting for almost 19% of its GDP. The vast majority of remittances (90%) come from countries with the highest concentration of Jamaicans (Canada, UK, USA). A survey conducted by the Bank of Jamaica noted that roughly 85% of remittances are used to pay utility bills and for other basic expenses, proving to be very useful to the residents of Jamaica.

**Digital platform development:** In 2023, the government was working on two digital platforms to support its diaspora engagement under JAM-DEM (with IOM, see spotlight): the Diaspora Registration Portal or “ConnectMeJA” for communication and data collection (with IDB) and JAM-DEM virtual platforms or “JA Diaspora Engage” to facilitate investment, as a key outcome of the National Diaspora Policy. The platforms were launched at the 10th Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference in June 2024.

## Obstacles



**Lack of economic opportunities:** A main motivator of Jamaican migration is the search for better economic opportunities and family unification, resulting in historical outmigration from Jamaica to Canada, the UK and the United States.<sup>10</sup>

**Lack of overseas voting mechanism:** The process of voting outside of the country is neither clear, nor easily accessible. Consulates do not make voting abroad possible, but anyone registered to vote can travel back to Jamaica to do so. An option that may be impossible for many migrants.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://mfaft.gov.jm/jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Revised-DRAFT-NATIONAL-DIASPORA-POLICY-Jamaica-Version-11-June-2019.pdf> page 16

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.loopjamaica.com/content/veteran-jamaican-broadcaster-says-no-diaspora-vote>



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## SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

COMMUNICATION

### The Jamaica Diaspora Show

The online TV show which started in 2017 aims to be a communication tool for the Jamaican diaspora in the United States, Canada, and UK. The show discusses shared interests, activities and concerns related to a variety of topics, including crime, immigration, youth development, politics, health, economic growth. It goes out weekly and is accessible on [HPATV](#).

COMMUNICATION

### Jamaica Diaspora Conference

The first Jamaica Diaspora Conference (JDC) was held in 2004. It is the principal means by which the government engages with the diaspora. The conference takes place every two years and alternates with conference in countries of residence.

YOUTH

### Youth Forum 2022

In 2022, the Global Jamaica Diaspora Youth Council (GDYC) hosted the Youth Forum during the Jamaica Diaspora Conference. During the Forum, it was mentioned that youth mentorship can be a viable way to reimagine diaspora engagement post-COVID-19.

COMMUNICATION + NETWORK + YOUTH

### Diaspora Councils 2023

Jamaica has established two councils to assist the government in implementing its National Diaspora Policy and mainstream engagement with its diaspora to drive national development. The Global Jamaica Diaspora Council (GDC) has 30 members from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. It is chaired by the the State Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade. The youth branch, Global Jamaica Diaspora Youth Council (GDYC), has seven members aged 18-35, who are tasked to enhance youth participation in diaspora activities, in line with thematic area 7 of the National Diaspora Policy which states that ‘the promotion of cultural connectivity and linkages, as well as the creation of a sense of identity are key elements to strengthen the affinity of young Diasporans with Jamaica as they are more likely to have less affinity to Jamaica than their parents’. A forthcoming project proposed by the councils is a mentorship academy for young Jamaicans.

DIGITALISATION

### JAM-DEM 2019-2024 (Update 2024 progress)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT) is working with IOM and the Planning Institute of Jamaica on the project “Developing a Jamaican Diaspora Engagement Model for Development” (JAM-DEM). In 2023, this led to a feasibility study report on a framework for an enabling environment for diaspora investment. In 2024, the virtual platform “JA Diaspora Engage”<sup>12</sup> was established to facilitate access to investment and networking opportunities in the priority sectors of the Jamaican economy for Jamaican diaspora worldwide. The Diaspora Registration portal, “ConnectMeJa”<sup>13</sup>, was also launched as a mobile application designed to streamline registration, provide a database for diaspora members and facilitate better communication between the diaspora and the government.

12 <https://jadasporaengage.mfaft.gov.jm/>

13 <https://jadasporaengage.mfaft.gov.jm/node/61>



## The Southern Plains Agricultural Development (SPAD) Initiative 2024

The Agro-Investment Corporation, under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Mining, leads the implementation of the SPAD Initiative with support from the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Development Fund (UKCIF) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The initiative aims to improve crop production and economic stability of small- and medium-scale farmers in St. Catherine and Clarendon through diaspora investment and skills transfer. It was launched during the 10th Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference and reported to attract interest from diaspora investors.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD  
SECURITY, INVESTMENT,  
SKILLS TRANSFER

## Fusion Project 2024

The Jamaica Diaspora UK (JDUK) West Midlands branch launched the Fusion project with the aim to connect diaspora youth with their heritage to foster a sense of belonging and encourage their engagement with the country's development. The project offers participants, targeting young professionals aged 20 to 40, a two-week visit programme to explore study, investment, business and real estate opportunities in Jamaica while being exposed to their heritage culture and communities.

YOUTH

## Annex: List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

### Diaspora related institutions

- **National institutions**
  - At ministerial level

#### **The Diaspora Affairs Department (DAD)**

The DAD works to bridge relationships between the Jamaican government and the Jamaican diaspora population through activities, programmes, and projects. The DAD is also responsible for policy implementation and monitoring of the National Diaspora Policy.

#### **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT)**

This is the lead entity tasked with ensuring successful implementation of the National Diaspora Policy. The Jamaican Foreign Service's headquarters are located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and 20 diplomatic missions and consular posts in the Caribbean, North, Central, and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. MFAFT has roughly 400 Foreign Service officers who provide direct and indirect services to Jamaican and international communities on the island and abroad.

#### **The Office of the Prime Minister**

The Office of the Prime Minister aims at building partnerships with the diaspora to achieve the vision of shared prosperity for all Jamaicans through inclusive economic growth and meaningful job creation.

- At sub ministerial level

#### **The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) 1984**

An agency of the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MOFPS). The PIOJ is the foremost planning agency of the government that seeks to initiate and coordinate the development of policies, plans and programmes for the sustainable development of Jamaica. The PIOJ was established as a corporate body under the Planning Institute of Jamaica Act in April 1984. Formerly called the National Planning Agency in 1972 and the Central Planning Unit in 1955, the PIOJ was established specifically to strengthen the planning capability of the Government.

#### **Global Jamaica Diaspora Council 2020**

The council facilitates a relationship between Jamaica and the diaspora. The council was established in 2020 and hopes to create a pathway for increased engagement with the Jamaican diaspora. Members serve for three years, allowing them time to achieve agreed deliverables.



## **Diaspora Advisory Board** 2004

The Diaspora Advisory Board was established in 2004, as an advisory body to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. There are eight board members that reside globally, in the U.S., Canada, and the UK. They are responsible for diaspora affairs by working as a bridge between the government and Jamaicans abroad.

## **Jamaica Diaspora Foundation**

A non-profit organization that aims to strengthen links and support systems between Jamaicans abroad and on the island. The Jamaica Diaspora Institute is the operation arm of the foundation, which works to strengthen the entrepreneurial and business management skills of youth in Jamaica.

## **Joint Select Committee of the Houses of Parliament on Diaspora Affairs** 2009

Established in 2009, the Joint Select Committee of the Houses of Parliament on Diaspora Affairs elevated the relationship between the government and the diaspora, especially due to its bipartisan composition.

## **Diaspora organisations in Europe**

### **Association of Jamaican Nationals** UK

- ✔ **Development activities**
- ✔ **Integration activities**

The Birmingham-based association aims to benefit the people from Jamaica in the West Midlands and Jamaican nationals in Jamaica through education and training, relief of poverty, promotion of good health, providing support and activities that develop skills, capacities, and capabilities, among other things.

### **Association of Jamaicans (UK) Trust** UK

- ✔ **Development activities**
- ✔ **Integration activities**

The association works to improve the quality of life for Jamaicans, including the UK diaspora. It aims to provide support and advocacy for Jamaicans in the UK, share information and knowledge with the Jamaican High Commission, and raise funds and provide financial support to Jamaicans on the island.

### **Global Jamaica Diaspora Youth Group Council**

- ✔ **Development activities**
- ✔ **Integration activities**

The Global Jamaica Diaspora Youth Group has planned events for the global Jamaican youth community. They are committed to unifying Jamaicans by engaging, organizing, empowering, and investing in the Jamaican youth diaspora, ages 18-35. The council is endorsed by the Jamaica Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade. There are different chapters of the council all across the globe.

Read more about diaspora organisations in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"



## **Jamaicans Inspired UK**

### **✔ Development activities**

This youth-focused diaspora organization aims to mobilize 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> generation Jamaican diaspora living in the UK and Europe. The organization recognizes that remittances have a large economic impact on the Jamaican economy and teaches the diaspora about investment opportunities within Jamaica. The Jamaica Stock Exchange is a partner.

## **Jamaica Society Manchester UK**

### **✔ Development activities**

### **✔ Integration activities**

The society focuses on promoting Jamaican culture and supporting the Jamaican community – especially with their annual Independence Dinner and Dance event. The society visits the sick, promotes health awareness, and has built charitable and governmental ties over the years.

