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Jamaica: Creativity, talent and the rise of global services

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Abstract

While services account for more than 70 per cent of Jamaica's exports and nearly all foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, most trade and investment promotion policies were originally designed for goods and have only gradually been adapted to the specific characteristics of services. Over the past two decades, however, the country has developed a more tailored institutional and strategic framework, combining long-term national strategies – such as the National Export Strategy, the National Foreign Trade Policy and the National Investment Policy – with specialized programmes led by the Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO), the national trade and investment promotion agency.

This new framework has targeted three strategic service sectors: tourism, global digital services (GDS) and film, animation and music (FAM). Each plays a distinct role in Jamaica's economy: tourism drives investment volumes and generates extensive local linkages; GDS fosters job creation, skills upgrading and export diversification; and FAM contributes to branding, cultural visibility and spillovers into other sectors such as digital services and tourism. Between 2017 and 2023, these three sectors accounted for about one-third of total capital expenditure but an overwhelming 93 per cent of the new jobs generated by JAMPRO's clients, underscoring their combined strategic relevance.

The agency has coupled export promotion with attracting FDI and business-linkage development, while leveraging instruments such as Export Max, audiovisual incentives and the special economic zones (SEZs) regime adapted to service activities. Complementary initiatives illustrate how demand-driven skills development, business facilitation and targeted finance are integrated into the broader services promotion agenda, which is supported by a more integrated approach to public-private coordination.

Despite structural challenges – such as skills shortages, limited access to finance and data gaps – Jamaica's trajectory illustrates how services-specific strategies can be gradually embedded into broader development agendas. Jamaica's case underscores the importance of institutional continuity, stakeholder alignment and policy adaptation.

Key points

Main elements of Jamaica's export promotion strategy:

- Long-term national strategies such as the National Export Strategy (NES), the National Foreign Trade Policy (NFTP) and the National Investment Policy (NIP) progressively incorporated services sectors as priority areas.
- Creation of specialized programmes such as Export Max and the Film Commission's incentives, which support export readiness, investment promotion and company visibility.
- A strong institutional role for JAMPRO, which combines export promotion, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and linkage creation, with an increasing focus on services.
- A demand-driven skills development programme, combined with the strengthening of JAMPRO's capacity to promote exports and attract FDI in knowledge-based services (KBS) sectors.
- Implementation of sector-specific initiatives targeting global digital services (GDS); film, animation and music (FAM) and tourism niches, including talent development and ecosystem support.
- Adaptation of the special economic zone (SEZ) regime to attract service-sector investment, with tailored fiscal and non-fiscal incentives.
- Public-private coordination mechanisms involving ministries, regulators, business associations and training institutions.

Main achievements and impacts:

- Consolidation of services as Jamaica's main export and investment driver, with tourism driving investment volumes and local linkages; and GDS and FAM fostering export diversification and sophistication as well as job creation. Taken together, these three sectors accounted for about one-third of total capital expenditure and 93 per cent of new jobs generated by JAMPRO's clients between 2017 and 2023.

- Increased participation of services firms in SEZs and efforts to foster linkages with local talent and suppliers.
- Recent steps to improve services measurement and inter-agency coordination, including the creation of joint working groups and alignment with national policies.

Challenges:

- Persistent data gaps that hinder the design and monitoring of evidence-based policies for service exports.
- Skills shortages in high-demand areas such as animation, cybersecurity and business analytics.
- Limited access to finance for small service firms due to lack of physical collateral and risk perception.
- Uneven export readiness and international exposure among service firms.

Good practices:

- Gradual adaptation of traditional trade and investment promotion tools to the specific characteristics of services (intangibility, customization, regulation).
- Integrated approaches to skills training and investment promotion are more likely to catalyse export-led economic growth and job creation.
- Institutional continuity and multisectoral governance through JAMPRO and national strategies with clear implementation structures.
- Emerging integration of diaspora engagement, workforce training and business facilitation into the services promotion agenda.
- Use of fiscal incentives under SEZs and alignment of promotion instruments with broader development priorities (e.g., digital economy, youth employment, cultural identity).

Services exports and FDI dynamics over the past two decades

Services are the dominant sector in Jamaica's economy, accounting for 69.0% of total employment, 60.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), 73.4 per cent of exports in 2024, and 80.6% of FDI inflows (see Figure 6.1). Over the past two decades, services have increased their share of employment, exports and FDI, while their contribution to GDP has slightly declined. Between 2005 and 2024, commercial services exports (balance of payment basis) expanded at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.4 per cent, reaching US\$ 5.3 billion and generating a structural trade surplus of US\$ 1.8

billion in 2024 (see Figure 6.2). Although Jamaica's share of regional and global service exports declined, most of the contraction occurred during the first decade. Over the past 10 years, Jamaica's services exports have accelerated, growing at a slightly faster pace than the global average (CAGR of 6.0 per cent and 4.9 per cent, respectively).

Within the services sector, tourism plays a central role in terms of investment, employment, exports, trade surplus and linkages with other industries (WTO, 2024). The relative importance of this activity has grown in recent years. On average,

Figure 6.1: Services' share in Jamaica's GDP, employment, total exports and FDI,^a 2005–2025 (%)

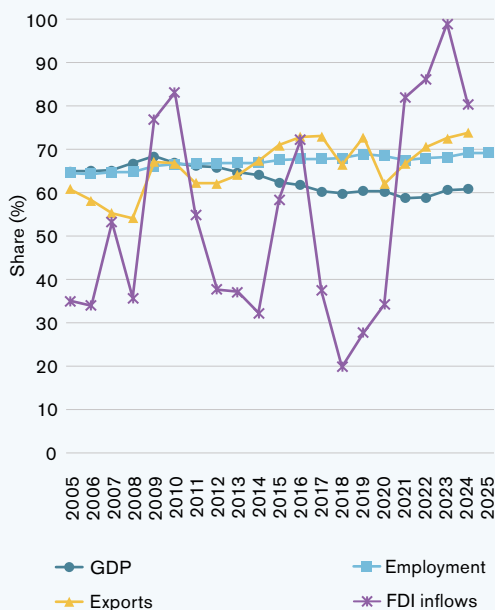
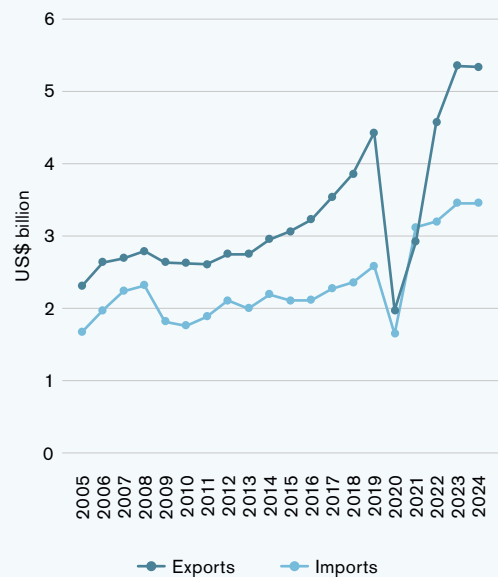


Figure 6.2: Jamaica's commercial services exports and imports, 2005–2024 (US\$ billion)



Source: Developed by the authors with data from the WTO (trade), the World Bank (GDP and employment) and the IDB (FDI inflows).

Note: ^a FDI inflows include investments in information technology and communication and tourism.

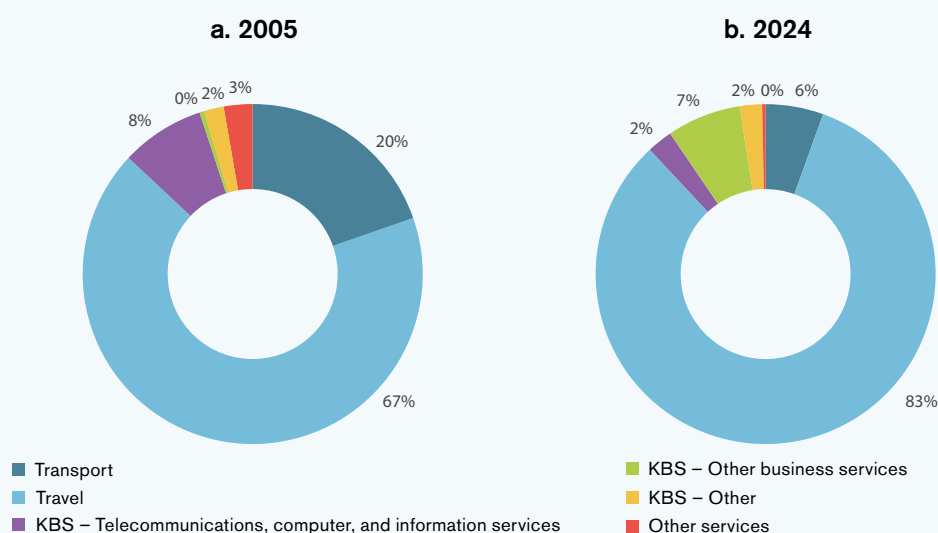
tourism accounted for one-third of total FDI inflows between 2005 and 2023, and its share nearly doubled in the aftermath of the pandemic. Travel exports have also grown more rapidly in Jamaica than in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the rest of the world. Contrary to global trends, the share of the travel category in Jamaica's commercial services exports increased from 67.3 per cent in 2005 to 82.6 per cent in 2024 (US\$ 4.3 billion). In contrast, transport exports declined both in absolute and relative terms over the same period.¹

In the period 2005–2024, KBS – which include four categories within the balance of payments classification: charges for the use of intellectual property; telecommunications, computer and information services; and personal, cultural and recreational services (Giordano et al., 2024) – gained modest relevance, increasing from 10.3 per cent to 11.6 per cent of commercial services exports (US\$ 607 million in 2024). However, their growth was slower as compared to the global average (5.1 per cent and 8.2 per cent, respectively).

Moreover, their composition changed significantly, particularly within the so-called “global digital services” sector.² In 2005, most KBS exports were related to telecommunications, computer and information services, which declined between 2009 and 2013 and then remained flat in absolute terms, resulting in a net decrease (–1.9 per cent CAGR between 2005 and 2024) and a substantial loss of market share (from 8.0 per cent of total service exports in 2005 to 2.4 per cent in 2024).

This contrasts with trends observed in global trade, where such services grew at a 10.6 per cent CAGR and represented the most dynamic category. Conversely, other business services – negligible in 2005 – rose steadily in Jamaica driven by the expansion of business process outsourcing (BPO), outpacing global growth (20.9 per cent and 7.7 per cent CAGR, respectively) and accounted for 7 per cent of total services exports in 2024. Other KBS (including audiovisual services) continued to represent 2 per cent (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Composition of commercial services exports (%), 2005 vs. 2024



Source: Developed by the authors with data from WTO Stats.

Note: KBS – knowledge-based services.

As a result of this evolution, KBS exports accounted for 3 per cent of Jamaica's GDP and 8.5 per cent of its total exports in 2024, well above the LAC averages of 1.2 per cent and 4.6 per cent, respectively. On a per capita basis, the

country exports US\$ 221 in KBS, compared to just US\$ 127 in the LAC region (see Table 6.1). Considering KBS exports per inhabitant, Jamaica also outperforms most economies at comparable levels of development.³

Table 6.1: Exports of knowledge-based services in Latin American and Caribbean economies

Value (US\$ million)		Share of total exports (%)		Share of GDP (%)		Per capita (US\$)	
LAC ^a	77,179	CRI	24.1	CRI	9.5	CRI	1,710
BRA	28,111	URY	20.4	BLZ	6.6	URY	996
MEX	9,527	BLZ	14.3	URY	4.3	ATG	644
ARG	9,377	ARG	9.7	JAM	3.0	BLZ	547
CRI	9,105	JAM	8.5	ATG	3.0	BHS	537
COL	5,687	COL	8.5	SUR	2.5	PAN	236
URY	3,491	SUR	7.5	SLV	2.0	JAM	221
CHL	3,358	GTM	7.4	NIC	1.6	ARG	199
DOM	1,862	BRA	7.3	DOM	1.5	SUR	173
GTM	1,428	DOM	6.6	BHS	1.5	DOM	172
PAN	1,066	SLV	5.9	ARG	1.5	CHL	167
PER	934	ATG	5.3	COL	1.4	BRA	132
SLV	719	LAC ^a	4.6	BRA	1.3	LAC ^a	127
JAM	607	NIC	3.6	GTM	1.3	SLV	112
HND	436	PAN	3.5	PAN	1.2	COL	108
ECU	333	BHS	3.4	HND	1.2	GTM	80
NIC	310	CHL	3.0	LAC ^a	1.2	MEX	72
BLZ	225	HND	3.0	CHL	1.0	TTO	71
BHS	219	MEX	1.4	MEX	0.5	NIC	45
SUR	112	PER	1.2	TTO	0.4	HND	41
TTO	101	TTO	1.0	PER	0.3	PER	27
BOL	83	ECU	0.9	ECU	0.3	ECU	19
ATG	67	BOL	0.8	BOL	0.2	BOL	7
PRY	21	PRY	0.2	PRY	0.0	PRY	3

Source: Developed by the authors with data from WTO and the IMF.

Notes: ^a Weighted average.

Glossary: ARG – Argentina; ATG – Antigua and Barbuda; BHS – Bahamas; BLZ – Belize; BOL – Bolivia; BRA – Brazil; CHL – Chile; COL – Colombia; CRI – Costa Rica; DOM – Dominican Republic; ECU – Ecuador; GTM – Guatemala; HND – Honduras; JAM – Jamaica; LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean; MEX – Mexico; NIC – Nicaragua; PAN – Panama; PER – Peru; PRY – Paraguay; SLV – El Salvador; SUR – Suriname; TTO – Trinidad and Tobago; URY – Uruguay.

Jamaica has also emerged as the leading hub for KBS suppliers in the English-speaking Caribbean. According to the Global Services Association of Jamaica (GSAJ), approximately 110 companies operate in these sectors, employing around 59,500 people. These firms contribute an estimated US\$ 1 billion to the economy through wages, office leasing, utilities and other expenditures (JAMPRO, 2025a).

Jamaica's KBS exporters include multinational enterprises such as Alorica, HGS, Startek, Sutherland Global Services, Teleperformance and Xerox, as well as local firms such as Itel, MC Systems and TCS. They serve a wide range of industries: retail, technology, media, financial services and insurance, medical, legal services, public sector, education and professional services, travel and tourism, and healthcare. The sector's portfolio includes web and software development,

e-commerce, digital marketing, cloud computing, data analytics, customer support, technical assistance, back office operations (finance, accounting, human resources), market research, claims processing, debt collection, graphic design, telecommunications, banking and logistics, amongst others (JAMPRO, 2017a; ITC and UK International Development, 2025; JAMPRO, 2025a). Jamaica also has a long-standing tradition in audiovisual services, including film production, music and more recently, animation (Robinson, 2019).

Jamaica outperforms the regional average in several categories of export determinants – including regulatory environment, talent and digital infrastructure – although a significant gap remains compared to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (see Table 6.2). Moreover, as real-time client

Table 6.2: Key drivers of competitiveness in knowledge-based services, selected indicators – Jamaica, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and OECD, 2023

Area	Indicator	Unit	Jamaica	LAC ^a	OECD ^b
Regulatory framework	Worldwide governance indicators (simple average) ^c	Score (-2.5 to 2.5)	0.19	-0.12	0.46
	Control of corruption		-0.11	-0.18	0.45
	Government effectiveness		0.41	-0.15	0.45
	Political stability and absence of violence/ terrorism		0.38	-0.03	0.45
	Regulatory quality		0.10	-0.15	0.45
	Rule of law		-0.17	-0.15	0.47
	Voice and accountability		0.56	-0.11	0.47
Talent	Network Readiness Index – People pillar ^d	Score (0 to 100)	42.50	38.25	53.91
Connectivity	Fixed broadband subscriptions ^e	per 100 people	15.98	17.14	35.99
	Individuals using the internet ^e	% of the population	90.00	77.02	91.50

Sources and notes:

^a Simple average. 26 economies (IDB members) except where otherwise indicated.

^b Simple average. 38 economies except where otherwise indicated.

^c Simple average of five indexes measuring perception of control of corruption, government effectiveness, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, regulatory quality, rule of law, and voice and accountability (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010). Source: World Bank.

^d The People pillar of the Network Readiness Index assesses the application of information and communications technology (ICT) across three facets: individuals, enterprises and public sectors. LAC: 19 economies. Source: Portulans Institute (Dutta and Lanvin, 2024).

^e 2023 or last available data.

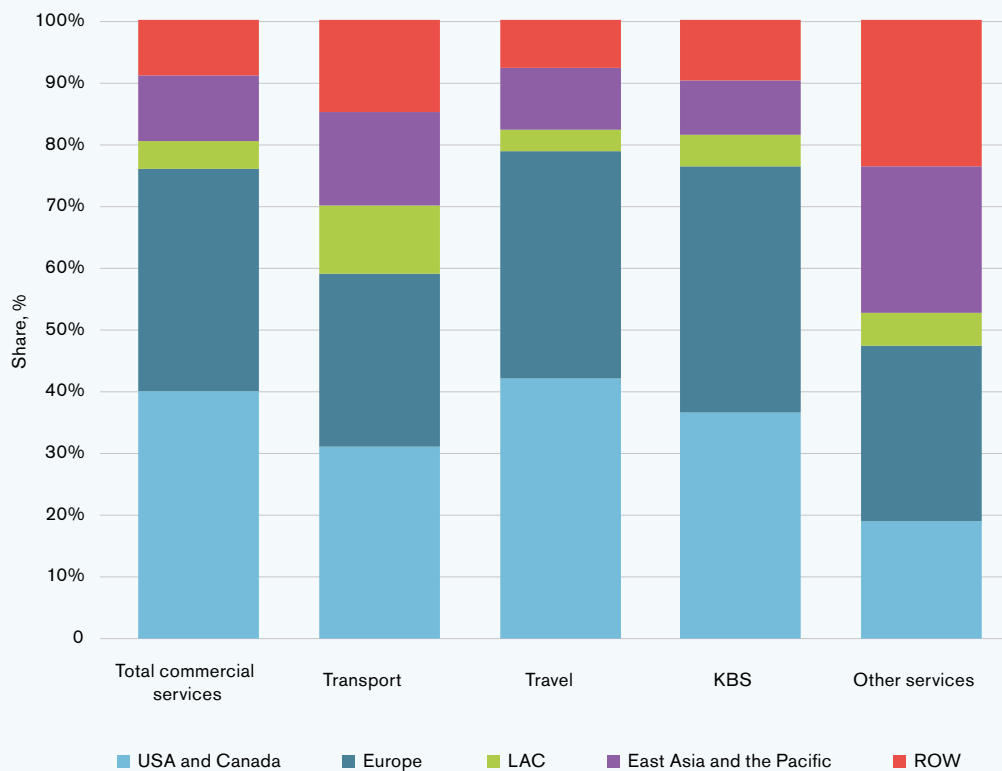
Source: International Telecommunication Union.

interaction is critical in most KBS segments, Jamaica's status as an English-speaking nation offers a clear advantage for serving key markets such as Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Jamaica also benefits from cultural and historical affinities with these economies, as well as a favourable location in terms of proximity and time zone.

According to estimated data from the World Trade Organization (WTO)-OECD's Balanced Trade in Services Dataset (BaTiS), the United States and the United Kingdom are the top two destinations for all categories of Jamaica's services exports.

The United States and Canada together account for 40 per cent of total services exports, including 42 per cent of travel, 37 per cent of KBS and 31 per cent of transport services in 2023. European economies absorbed 36 per cent of Jamaica's services exports and are the leading destinations for KBS (40 per cent), as well as 37 per cent of travel and 28 per cent of transport services. Beyond the United Kingdom, other significant European markets include France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Exports to LAC remain limited (only 4 per cent), with Barbados, Brazil, Guyana, Mexico and Panama being the main partners (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Share of commercial services exports by sector and destination, 2023



Source: Developed by the authors with data from BaTiS (WTO).

Note: LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean; ROW – rest of the world.

Overall strategy and institutional architecture for services exports and FDI promotion

This section explores Jamaica's strategy for the services sector, with a focus on the institutional architecture and the main initiatives to foster exports and attract FDI, which are recognized by Jamaica as key drivers of economic growth and sustainable development.

Jamaica's institutional framework for service exports and FDI promotion shows an interesting evolution over time, reflecting a transition from policies originally designed for goods and tourism to a broader strategy that explicitly prioritizes GDS and FAM. The strategy for developing services sectors is grounded in long-term planning and a coordinated approach involving key ministries, public agencies and the private sector. This underscores the government's commitment to align stakeholders, but it also increases challenges for implementation.

Jamaica's approach combines broad-based initiatives – such as the NES, the NIP and the SEZ regime – with sector-specific strategies (discussed on page 176), as well as cross-cutting policies that directly or indirectly support service development. One such example is the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2022–2029 (NSTIP) (MSET, 2022). This policy promotes the development of science, technology and innovation through science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, research and development (R&D) incentives and infrastructure investments, among other tools, transforming Jamaica's economy towards the production of more knowledge-intensive, higher-value-added goods and services. The NSTIP also includes specific initiatives to promote the use of science and technology in the tourism industry.

Institutional architecture

Several institutions are involved in services exports and FDI promotion in Jamaica (see Table 6.3). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign

Trade (MFAFT) is responsible for formulating and coordinating trade policy in collaboration with other public and private stakeholders, primarily through the Jamaica Trade Policy Advisory Group. The MFAFT also leads Jamaica's trade negotiations. Jamaica has trade agreements that liberalize trade in services with 41 counterparts, 11 bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and double taxation agreements (DTAs) with 26 jurisdictions. The number of trade agreements with services provisions and DTAs is above the regional average (26 and 7, respectively) (Giordano et al., 2024), although Jamaica has fewer BITs in force, with the regional average standing at 14.

Other ministries involved in trade in services include the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce (MIIC); Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Science, Energy, Telecommunications and Transport; and the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation (WTO, 2024). The MIIC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the country's main strategies to foster exports and investment (NES and NIP, respectively).

JAMPRO, a statutory agency under the MIIC, was established in 1990 to promote export and investment opportunities to both domestic and international investors. Compared to other promotion agencies, JAMPRO targets a wide range of economies and sectors. However, approximately three-quarters of the support provided to multinational companies is directed towards North American firms and over 80 per cent is focused on non-financial services (Volpe Martincus et al., 2021).

Priority export and investment sectors include BPO, FAM, logistics and tourism (WTO, 2024). JAMPRO is headquartered in Kingston, with additional offices in London, Montego Bay, New York and Toronto. The Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce appoints JAMPRO's board of directors, comprising 12 members. Four represent public institutions while eight, including

Table 6.3: Main institutions involved in services exports and FDI promotion in Jamaica

Institution	Role
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade	Formulates and coordinates trade policy in collaboration with other public and private stakeholders
Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce	Oversees investment and export promotion policies; leads the NIP and NES; chairs the NIP Task Force.
Jamaica Promotions Corporation	Lead implementing agency for export and FDI promotion; supports investors and exporters; focuses on priority sectors, including several service activities.
Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority	Regulates and supervises the SEZ regime; key for service-sector investment under incentive frameworks.
Global Services Association of Jamaica (private sector)	Represents the interests of KBS firms and works closely with the government on relevant issues for trade in services.

Source: Developed by the authors.

the Chairman, are from the private sector.⁴ JAMPRO is headed by a president and structured into four strategic divisions, each led by a vice president. These strategic divisions are:

- **Marketing and opportunity packaging**, which develops initiatives to increase brand awareness and generates leads for both JAMPRO and Jamaican exports.
- **Exports**, which supports the internationalization of Jamaican companies, with a focus on selected sectors such as film, animation and music, through export promotion and facilitation.
- **Investment and linkages**, which identifies investment opportunities, attracts FDI and fosters connections among key stakeholders.
- **Finance and corporate services**, which oversees the efficient use of JAMPRO's financial and operational resources.

The Jamaica Trade Board (former Trade Board Limited) is a regulatory agency under the MIIC responsible for issuing export and import licences. Although it has traditionally focused on trade in goods, it has more recently expanded its functions to include capacity building, digital facilitation and trade readiness – including for services exporters.

Lastly, the **Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA)** is responsible for regulating

and supervising the primary regime for services, namely the SEZs.

Jamaica's institutional architecture for services exports and FDI promotion also involves some industry associations and public-private partnerships (PPPs). For instance, the GSAJ represents the interests of KBS firms and works closely with the government on relevant issues for trade in services and the Creative and Cultural Industries Council is a public-private entity supporting creative industry exports.

The National Export Strategy and the National Foreign Trade Policy

Jamaica has adopted a long-term vision to promote exports based on multi-year strategies and services that have progressively become a key component of these policies. The 2001 New Trade Policy aimed at increasing and diversifying exports of goods and services, but it did not include specific provisions for services, besides a focus on the implications of the following agreements established by the WTO: General Agreement on Trade in Services, the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights and the Trade-Related Investment Measures agreements (Hylton, 2001).

The first NES (NES I) was implemented between 2010 and 2013, in line with the National Development Plan launched in 2009. Its main

objectives were to strengthen Jamaica's export capacity and to improve the country's overall trade performance, with services identified to play a key role in reaching those goals. NES I included cross-cutting industry strategies (skills development, innovation and technology, energy, national image and branding, trade promotion, financing, etc.), as well as sector-specific strategies for eight industries, including entertainment (with a focus on FAM); and ICT services (comprising software, BPO and telecommunications). Actions included in the functional strategies were also concentrated in these activities. For example, NES I aimed to enhance human capital by implementing specific training and education programmes in each priority sector.

For the selected industries, NES I defined specific targets of exports, new foreign and local investment projects, financing, and the development of business community capabilities, among other objectives (MIIC et al., 2009). In the aftermath of the global slowdown following the financial crisis, results were mixed. While service trade data are not directly comparable to the strategy's export targets, these targets were likely achieved. By 2013, commercial service exports were only 4 per cent higher than in 2009, but KBS outperformed, growing by 38 per cent. Within this category, other business services (including BPO) and personal, cultural and recreational services (including education and entertainment) had more than tripled, while telecommunications, information and computer services had declined by 48 per cent.

In 2015, Jamaica launched a follow-up strategy (NES II) that involved a shift from a broad, resource-intensive plan that sought to cover multiple sectors and cross-cutting issues, to a more selective, market-driven strategy. The goal was to develop a competitive export supply tailored to the needs of foreign customers. Building on lessons from the first NES, Phase II focused on a smaller number of initiatives and priority sectors. It also sought to strengthen institutional capacity for policy design and implementation by ensuring adequate human and financial resources and establishing a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework.

NES II (2015–2019) was designed by the Trade Support Network (JAMPRO, MIIC, MFAFT, the Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association (JMEA) and the Jamaica Trade Board) together with the Commonwealth Secretariat. It prioritized five sectors – including film and animation and ICT-enabled services – and five cross-cutting strategies (logistics and supply chain management, market access and trade information, export financing, standards and quality management, and capacity building) (The Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016).

The provisions of NES II were integrated into the NFTP (2017–2022) that replaced the 2001 New Trade Policy. The policy agenda emphasized the need to strengthen the enabling environment for services exports by addressing structural gaps in data, standards and market access. Priorities included building a robust statistical system in collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Committee of Statisticians and industry associations to better analyse performance.

The aim was to align promotion strategies with the private sector and the NES, promoting linkages among different services and between services and other industries, and accelerating the development of accreditation systems and mutual recognition agreements to facilitate entry into key markets. Regional collaboration was also seen as essential, reflecting an understanding that services trade growth depends not only on national initiatives but also on harmonized standards and collective action within CARICOM (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, 2017).

Concerning cultural and creative industries, the NFTP highlights the need to move beyond talent development to systemic support for international competitiveness. It calls for fostering innovation through education, strengthening marketing capacity abroad and creating an enabling trade environment. Attention is also placed on leveraging existing flexibilities in trade agreements and, critically, on improving data collection to measure the sector's true export value, recognizing that without reliable evidence, planning and market access negotiations remain constrained (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, 2017).

These shifts codify the good practice of long-term, services-aware planning while acknowledging persistent data constraints that the policy seeks to address.

The National Investment Policy

Jamaica's National Investment Policy (NIP), launched in 2022, signals an effort to establish a coherent framework to attract both domestic and foreign investment. While Jamaica already grants national treatment to foreign investors with few restrictions (WTO, 2024), the NIP seeks to transform this openness into effective competitiveness by reducing regulatory uncertainty, aligning incentives and strengthening linkages with the domestic economy. Its design reflects recognition that the investment climate depends not only on openness but also on the efficiency, credibility and coordination of institutions. The policy is implemented through a coordinated approach involving the public and private sectors and civil society, under the oversight of the National Competitiveness Council, which is tasked with improving the business environment (MIIC, 2022).

The Policy is embedded in a wider reform agenda that includes the Business Environment Reform Agenda (BERA), the PPP initiative, the SEZ regime and the NSTIP. The NIP is also in line with several sectoral strategies, including some related to KBS, tourism, logistics and creative and cultural services (MIIC, 2022).⁵ The NIP identifies these high-potential service sectors as priority areas, confirming Jamaica's intent to move towards investment that diversifies the economy and generates higher value added.

This Policy is based on five principles: business efficiency, public sector cohesiveness, global competitiveness, transparency, and sustainability. The implementation is structured in three levels (direction, coordination and execution) (see Figure 6.5). JAMPRO is the lead implementing agency and its mandate goes beyond promoting and facilitating investments, and includes the revision of the national investment map, strengthening aftercare and fostering domestic linkages.

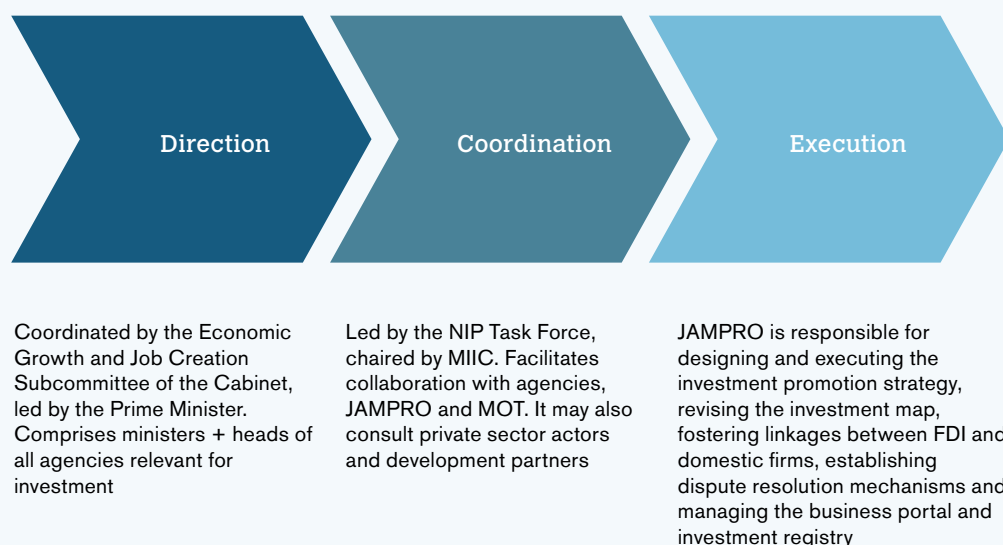
The NIP identifies 11 key policy areas, each with specific objectives and actions. These include multi-stakeholder planning, regulatory streamlining, promotion of sustainable investment, protecting investors and intellectual property rights, improving labour and immigration policies, optimizing investment incentives (i.e., by monitoring the impact of investments vis-à-vis the cost of fiscal incentives and implementing non-fiscal benefits), enhancing Jamaica's participation in global value chains and increasing investor retention (see Figure 6.6).

Measures adopted under the NIP framework include:

- **Jamaica Business Gateway:** A government-led initiative that operates as a one-stop shop platform for business-to-government (B2G) transactions. This platform improves the ease of doing business by digitizing and automating over 150 procedures.
- **Government Efficiency Index (GEI):** This index includes a component related to aftercare, retention and investment, which measures the concerns of the business community in conducting business. Thus, the GEI is already enabling the government to understand these concerns better and improve efforts to develop a business-friendly environment and facilitate processes.
- **Defining priority projects:** Builds on one of the strategies of the NIP intended to increase investments, job creation and knowledge transfer.
- **National Competitiveness Council:** A public-private initiative, it was established in 2010 to advance policy advocacy, research and public awareness of reforms needed to improve the business climate. Its activities are related to governance (development and/or amendment of the regulatory framework), digital transformation, institutional strengthening and business process re-engineering.

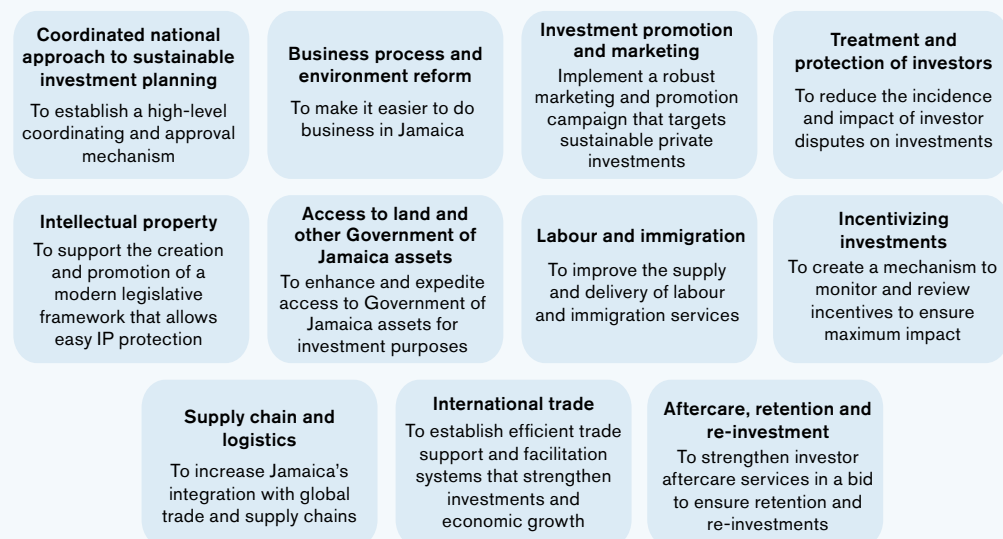
As of March 2025, 34 per cent of policy strategies had been completed, 25 per cent were ongoing or under continuous implementation and 40 per cent were delayed.

Figure 6.5: Implementation of the National Investment Policy



Source: Developed by the authors based on MIIC (2022).

Figure 6.6: National Investment Policy: policy issues and goals



Source: Developed by the authors based on MIIC (2022).

The special economic zones regime

Most outsourcing firms operate under Jamaica's SEZ regime, which offers a range of fiscal incentives. Eligible service activities include BPO, ICT, R&D, creative services and logistics. Firms in tourism, telecommunications, real estate, healthcare and financial services may operate within SEZs, but under a different regime – the Omnibus Incentives Act – which also offers some fiscal incentives.⁶ JAMPRO actively promotes SEZs as a tool to attract service-sector investments, particularly in digital services and BPO. The GDS sector accounts for approximately 70 per cent of firms operating in SEZs (Hall, 2023).

Companies can operate either as “occupants” in an existing SEZ or as “developers” of new zones and both are eligible for similar benefits.

These include a reduced corporate tax rate (7.5 per cent), exemptions on customs duties and general consumption tax (GCT), employment and promotional tax credit and capital allowances. However, certain benefits vary depending on the company's status (see Table 6.4).

To qualify for benefits under the SEZ regime, developers must have a paid-up capital of at least US\$ 1.5 million. Occupants must also invest a minimum of US\$ 25,000 and allocate at least US\$ 50,000 to SEZ-related activities during the first year of operation. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) must invest US\$ 25,000 in infrastructure or equipment and are granted up to four years to meet the full eligibility requirements (JAMPRO, 2017b). JSEZA and MIIC are creating a framework to enable IP-related companies, including some KBS activities such as film production and software development, to benefit from the SEZ regime (Williams, 2024).

Table 6.4: Tax benefits for services companies under the special economic zone (SEZ) regime

Benefits	Developer	Occupant
Corporate income tax (effective rate after approved tax credits)	7.5% (instead of 12.5%)	
Customs duty exemption	Yes	
Exemption from income tax on rental income	Yes	
GCT exemption on all goods and services entering the SEZ	Yes	
Employment tax credit	Yes	
Promotional tax credit (R&D and training)	Yes	
Capital allowance	Yes	
Environmental levy payable	Yes	
Stamp duty payable	50%	
Exemption from income tax dividend	No	Yes
Asset tax relief	No	Yes
Exemption from transfer tax	Yes	No

Source: Developed by the authors with data from JAMPRO (2017a).

Sector-specific strategies for services trade development

Jamaica's efforts to promote services trade have focused on two broad sectors: tourism and KBS. Tourism has traditionally been a key component of the Jamaican economy. Still, the country has developed strategies to attract FDI, strengthen linkages with local providers and develop exports in specific niche areas, such as medical and educational tourism. The promotion of KBS is based on the need for export diversification and sophistication. The focus on this industry includes global digital services and film, animation and music.

Tourism

Jamaica is the leading tourist destination in the Caribbean, attracting both stopover arrivals and cruise passengers. Over the past two decades, travel has accounted for more than three-quarters of the country's services exports. Despite the sector's development, Jamaica has implemented several policies aimed at increasing both the number of travellers and their average spending by enhancing the visitor experience and strengthening linkages with local communities (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The policy mix combines a funding mechanism with linkage programmes, community-based initiatives and instruments to develop skills and innovation.

In 2002, Jamaica launched the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, which provided a comprehensive framework to guide the country's tourism sector through 2010. Its goal was to reposition Jamaica as a competitive and distinctive destination by leveraging its natural and cultural assets, while expanding the economic benefits of tourism across regions and social groups. Key pillars included improving the visitor experience, diversifying attractions beyond traditional beach resorts, promoting heritage and eco-tourism and ensuring environmental sustainability.

To implement the plan's recommendations, Jamaica established the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) in 2004. The fund was restructured in 2018 and remains operational. TEF is managed by the Ministry of Tourism and is financed by a fee on cruise and

air passengers (US\$ 2 and US\$ 20, respectively). Its objectives include improving the quality and diversification of tourism, protecting and promoting natural and cultural heritage, building capacity in the tourism sector, supporting marketing initiatives to strengthen Jamaica's brand and fostering community development (WTO, 2024; TEF, 2024)

Maximizing the positive impact of tourism on the local economy has been a consistent priority in Jamaica's tourism policies. Notable initiatives include the Tourism Linkages Network (TLN), active since 2013, which promotes synergies between tourism and sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and entertainment by fostering the consumption of goods and services that can be competitively provided locally. Another example is the Community Tourism Policy and Strategy (2015) aimed at developing an international competitive community tourism subsector – in other words, to support sustainable, export-ready local initiatives that align with national policies and generate broad social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits (Ministry of Tourism, 2020).

The tourism sector was deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the government implemented the Tourism Networks Policy and Strategy (TNPS) in 2020, aiming to diversify tourism and increase its resilience by fostering linkages with local production through the sustainable consumption of locally sourced goods and services (WTO, 2024).

The strategy is implemented through the TLN – formally integrated into the institutional structure of the TEF – and promotes the development of five tourism-related networks: gastronomy; health and wellness (physical fitness programmes, spa visits, medical treatment, health farms, beauty treatments, among others); sport and entertainment (cricket, golf, basketball, etc.); knowledge (development of tourism-business skills); and shopping. The TNPS is based on five pillars: access to new markets, development of new products, attraction of new investments, building new partnerships, and human capital development in the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism, 2020).

The TLN is built on a strategic partnership involving public and private organizations, including the Ministry of Tourism, the Jamaica Tourist Board, JAMPRO, the Jamaica Business Development Corporation, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority, the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association and the JMEA.

Its flagship programme, Speed Networking, facilitates direct interactions and collaboration between buyers and MSME suppliers. Since its launch in 2016, the Jamaican economy has benefited by close to JMD 1 billion (US\$ 6.4 million) through this initiative. The number of participants has increased over time, rising from 110 providers in 2019 to 140 in 2025, and satisfaction rates are high, with 94 per cent among hotels and 80 per cent among suppliers reporting a positive experience (CMC, 2025; Salmon, 2025; Hohnholz, 2021).

TLN's initiatives align with the tourism-related networks mentioned above and encompass a wide range of activities. Key efforts include the development of a master brand for gastronomy tourism (Taste Jamaica); support for international events such as Reggae Month, the Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee Festival, Taste Jamaica at the South Beach Wine and Food Festival, World Sustainable Gastronomy Day and international conferences on strategic topics such as tourism, wellness and technology.

Additional activities focus on capacity building and human capital development, including training and seminars, product development workshops, a spa standards and certification programme, and support for local fashion designers. TLN has also launched a platform to showcase shopping options across Jamaica (shoppinginja.com). Other initiatives aim to foster the digital transformation of tourism-related MSMEs and to support farmers in supplying sustainable food to hotels, amongst other efforts (TEF, 2024).

Through the National Export-Import Bank of Jamaica (EXIM Bank) and Jamaica National Small Business Loans, the TEF also offers loan facilities to finance tourism projects developed by MSMEs. Eligible projects must generate a share of their revenue from tourism-related activities and focus on creating jobs and developing sustainable tourism (WTO, 2024; TEF, 2024). In 2016, the TEF committed to providing up to JMD 1 billion (US\$ 6.4 million) to EXIM Bank for lending to

MSMEs on a revolving basis, with amounts repaid being made available for further on-lending. Indeed, as of 31 March 2024, the total disbursed by the TEF was JMD 1 billion (US\$ 6.4 million).

The TEF also entered into similar agreements with the Jamaica National Building Society to provide up to JMD 310 million (US\$ 2 million) to finance entrepreneurs in the tourism industry (2007) and a maximum of JMD 50 million (US\$ 319,000) for lending for tourism projects related to energy efficiency (2014). As of the end of March 2025, the total disbursed by TEF under these agreements was JMD 257.7 million and JMD 20 million, respectively (TEF, 2025).

The Tourism Entertainment Academy fosters integration between the tourism and entertainment industries by building skills related to performance excellence, entrepreneurship and direct industry connections with Jamaican artists. The pilot programme focuses on reggae, jazz and comedy.

Jamaica has also been promoting higher value-added tourism with a focus on innovation and skills development at different levels. The TEF established the Summer Internship Programme to help young people gain industry experience, enabling more than 4,000 interns to work in 137 organizations over the past decade. In addition, the HEART/NSTA Trust developed a job-readiness programme for new entrants to the tourism industry.⁷ The Jamaica Centre for Tourism Innovation, a division of the TEF, delivers globally recognized certifications, strengthening management, analytics and service quality across the industry. The TEF has also created a database of certified professionals to help match skilled workers with tourism companies.⁸

Concerning innovation, the NSTIP 2022–2029 introduced actions aimed at fostering innovation and applying science and technology in tourism to increase the value added of tourism-related products and services, improve tourist safety and security and contribute to the sector's sustainability. Another relevant TEF initiative is the Tourism Innovation Incubator, which supports innovative projects within the sector (MSET, 2022).

JAMPRO complements these efforts by promoting tourism-related investment opportunities, particularly in infrastructure, education, health

and wellness tourism, and linkages with MSMEs. In conclusion, Jamaica's tourism strategy combines infrastructure development, community engagement and value-added diversification to enhance sustainability and economic inclusion.

Taken together, Jamaica has built a structured tourism policy ecosystem and travel exports in Jamaica have outperformed global exports of the industry. However, the country still faces challenges in increasing value added. While visitor receipts and arrivals have recovered quickly since the pandemic, productivity indicators – such as real exports per accommodation worker and per international visitor – remain below pre-pandemic levels, suggesting incomplete upgrading.⁹

Knowledge-based services

Jamaica's strategy for KBS is centred on two main subsectors: GDS and FAM. In GDS, the policy trajectory reveals a clear shift from an initial emphasis on job creation and scale under the National Outsourcing Strategy (NOS) (2015) towards sophistication, resilience and value added in the Global Digital Services Sector Strategy (GDSS) (2022). This evolution has been supported by operational projects such as the Global Digital Services Project (GDSP) and the Technology Innovation District Accelerator, which link skills development with export promotion, as well as brand and market-access initiatives such as Upsource Jamaica and UKTP.

The FAM sector, in turn, has been promoted through a combination of fiscal incentives, institutional support from the Jamaica Film Commission and targeted programmes such as JAFTA Propella, FilmLab JA and the Jamaica Screen Development Initiative (JSDI), reflecting a parallel strategy to build capacity and global visibility.

Global digital services

Jamaica has promoted GDS for more than a decade. The approach has shifted from a scale-first outsourcing model focused on rapid job creation to an upgrading agenda, raising value added through skills development, innovation, branding, targeted FDI attraction and support that helps local firms access strategic export markets.

- **National Outsourcing Strategy (2015–2020):** In 2015, Jamaica adopted the NOS based on four strategic pillars (the policy and incentive framework, labour market development, infrastructure, and market expansion). This strategy prioritized scale, aiming to position Jamaica as a competitive outsourcing hub by rapidly creating jobs. By March 2020, employment exceeded the target by 20 per cent. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed job growth in KBS and led to the establishment of a skills development programme, which is discussed below (JAMPRO, 2025a; MIIC, 2022).
- **Global Digital Services Sector Strategy (2022–2025):** Approved in 2022, the GDSS reflects a shift in emphasis, focusing on upgrading sophistication and building resilience in Jamaica's KBS sector. It seeks to change the services mix between low- and high-value segments from 80:20 to 60:40. It also aims to attract both foreign and domestic investment, increase the participation of local firms, foster entrepreneurship, boost sector revenues, generate employment and support economic diversification (Avasant, 2022). Given that a qualified workforce is essential to achieve these goals, talent development is a key component of the GDSS (JAMPRO, 2021).

GDSS identifies high-potential segments, including knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) (market research, business and financial analysis, digital content creation and distribution); BPO (omnichannel customer support); information technology outsourcing (ITO) mobile and web development, digital commerce); and vertical specialization (e.g., services focused on a specific activity such as tourism and digital government services).

The GDSS set a target of 70,400 jobs by March 2025. Employment rose steadily since the approval in 2022 and reached 62,000 jobs by March 2024. However, it declined by 11.4 per cent year-on-year in March 2025. This contraction highlights the sector's vulnerability to both global dynamics (reshoring, artificial intelligence) and domestic constraints (cost of doing business) (JAMPRO, 2025a), underscoring

the importance of the current policy shift towards resilience.

- **Global Digital Services Project:** Complementary projects have played a catalytic role by aligning skills training with investment promotion and directly supporting the upgrading process. A good example is the GDSP, funded by the IDB and implemented by JAMPRO to support the NOS and the GDSS between 2019 and 2024. The project generally aimed to promote the growth of global digital services by providing GDS companies with better-skilled workers and enhancing JAMPRO's capacity to expand exports and attract FDI into higher value-added segments. Close collaboration between the Global Services Sector Skills Board and the HEART/NSTA Trust was essential to achieving this goal.

The project results were extremely positive. High-value services rose to represent 43 per cent of total GDS exports, employment in the GDS sector grew by 47.6 per cent between 2018 and 2024 and its contribution to Jamaica's GDP increased from 4.7 per cent to 5.5 per cent during the same period. Over one-third of graduates from certified "finishing schools" were formally employed one year after completing their training and their wages had risen by 14.4 per cent. For those who completed the Apprenticeship Programme, salaries increased by 36 per cent within 12 months (IDB, to be published).

Additionally, GDSP can be associated with the 3.3 per cent increase in the value of GDS exports, a 43 per cent share of high-level subsegments of GDS beneficiary firms (up from around 20 per cent prior to the programme), and an achievement of US\$ 33.4 million in capital expenditure (CapEx), albeit under the established target of US\$ 45.9 million (IDB, to be published). The programme's demand-driven approach also helped the GDS remain resilient during the COVID-19 crisis.

This project offers a strong example of how integrated approaches to skills training and investment promotion can effectively catalyse export-led economic growth and job creation.

- **Technology Innovation District (TID) Accelerator Project (2024):** More recent initiatives focus on diversifying markets and strengthening Jamaica's tech ecosystem by providing firms with international exposure and new opportunities. As part of the GDSS, Jamaica created the TID, a one-year, cohort-based programme designed to help technology firms become competitive exporters of digital services. Sixteen companies participated in the programme and took part in trade missions and international fairs in North America, significantly boosting collaboration, exposure and brand awareness (JAMPRO, 2025a).
- **United Kingdom Trade Partnerships (UKTP) Programme (2025):** Under the UKTP initiative, Jamaican service firms can benefit from incentives to expand their business in the UK market. The UKTP aims to boost exports from MSMEs in the African, Caribbean and Pacific economies to the United Kingdom under its European Economic Partnership Agreements. It is funded by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and implemented by the International Trade Centre. In Jamaica, the programme supports 10 KBS companies in their internationalization efforts by providing targeted coaching, export marketing training and assistance to participate in business-to-business (B2B) events, and an exploratory mission to the United Kingdom (ITC and UK International Development, 2025).
- **Upsource Jamaica:** With the aim of attracting investment to more sophisticated outsourcing service sectors, Jamaica is developing the "Upsource Jamaica" brand focused on specific outsourcing niche sectors, including shared services, legal services, medical processes, finance and accounting, software development, cybersecurity and data analytics (JAMPRO, 2025a).

A summary of the main initiatives to promote GDS exports in Jamaica is provided in Table 6.5. More recently, the government has established a working group with JAMPRO, the Port Authority of Jamaica, and JSEZA to continue strengthening the GDS sector. This group will focus its work on raising awareness of Jamaica as a strategic destination

Table 6.5: Main initiatives to promote global digital services

Initiative	Period	Short description
National Outsourcing Strategy (NOS)	2015–2020	National strategy to rapidly scale employment in outsourcing through incentives, skills, infrastructure and market expansion.
Global Digital Services Strategy (GDSS)	2022–2025	National strategy to shift Jamaica's global digital services towards higher-value services and jobs.
Global Digital Services Project (GDSP)	2019–2024	IDB-funded programme aligning skills and attracting FDI to shift into high-value segments of global digital services.
Technology Innovation District (TID)	2024	One-year accelerator to support tech firms in becoming digital service exporters.
Upsource Jamaica	2025	Branding initiative to position Jamaica internationally in specialized outsourcing niche sectors.
UK Trade Partnerships Programme (UKTP)	2025	UK-funded initiative to diversify export markets, supporting KBS firms' entry into the United Kingdom.

Source: Developed by the authors.

for investments; skills development (including adaptation of education programmes); optimization of processes, institutions, regulations and incentives framework; strengthening the value proposition for this sector; development of an incubator and accelerator programme for MSMEs in KBS; and increasing the share of KPO from 20 per cent to 40 per cent of outsourcing services (JAMPRO, 2025a).

Film, animation and music

Jamaica has long recognized and promoted its cultural and creative industries. In 2007, these sectors were included as a strategic priority area of the "Vision 2030 Jamaica: National Development Plan". This plan highlighted the need to foster these industries to develop their potential linkages to entertainment, education, science and technology, intellectual property rights, media, industrial development, tourism, and the preservation of the environment and national heritage (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2007).

The NFTP also identifies cultural and creative industries as priority sectors and contemplates actions to develop skills, strengthen marketing capacity abroad, leverage trade agreements and improve data collection to measure the sector's true export value. The policy recognizes that without reliable evidence, both strategic planning and market access negotiations remain constrained (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, 2017).

Within the cultural and creative industries, music has traditionally been Jamaica's main export category, while film and animation have gained momentum more recently. The FAM sector is strategically positioned within the services agenda. According to JAMPRO, FAM is the third-largest contributor to Jamaica's GDP, mainly through its linkages to other activities.

Policy design in Jamaica treats the sector as a lever for export diversification, enhancing "Brand Jamaica" visibility and generating spillovers into tourism and digital services. The current toolkit combines horizontal fiscal incentives with sector-specific facilitation through JAMPRO's Film Commission and programmatic pipelines, as well as dedicated finance. The underlying logic is to transition from project-based attraction of foreign shoots towards a more resilient ecosystem by coupling investor attraction with domestic capability-building. The following initiatives illustrate this approach:

- Under the **Fiscal Incentives Act**, in operation since 2014, the FAM sector benefits from employment tax credits and customs duty waivers on imported production equipment. Additionally, buildings used in this industry may also qualify for capital allowance for income tax purposes (CIIF, 2022).

- **Jamaica Screen Development Initiative:** Launched by the Government of Jamaica in 2024, the JSDI financing initiative provides funding for eligible screen-based projects, covering pre-production, production and post-production, as well as marketing, distribution and participation in film festivals and markets. The programme offers production rebates, grants and no-interest loans.
 - **JAMPRO's initiatives:** The Jamaica Film Commission at JAMPRO has supported the audiovisual industry since 1984, with current work focused on film, animation and music. The Commission's activities include the promotion of export and investment opportunities with a focus on synergies between local and international clients, sector development initiatives through collaboration with key stakeholders, promoting Jamaica as a global film business location (e.g., by participating in global events), providing film production advisory and facilitation services, and advocating policy improvements (Robinson, 2019).

JAMPRO additionally backs the film industry through strategic alliances with key stakeholders. Some examples include:
 - **JAFTA Propella:** A joint initiative of JAMPRO, the Jamaica Film and Television Association (JAFTA), and the CHASE Fund established in 2016 to finance production and support participation in workshops and international festivals.
 - **FilmLab JA:** An acceleration programme offered by JAMPRO, The British Council and JAFTA focused on supporting the internationalization of Jamaican film and television companies, particularly their expansion into the United Kingdom (JAMPRO, 2017c).
 - Other incentives include the Film Fund and the UK-Jamaica Co-Production Treaty. In the case of animation, JAMPRO's support includes the organization of the "KingstOOon Animation Festival" and several skills development programmes (e.g., Business of Sustainability for Studios, Train the Trainers, Creative Industries Education and Employment) (Benjamin, n.d.).
- Over the past three years, JAMPRO's clients in the FAM industry created between 70 and 125 jobs that generated on average 2,000–2,500 temporary jobs. In the fiscal year 2023–2024, 122 film productions were registered, including high-profile HBO and Netflix productions. In the following two fiscal years, the number of productions and expenditure decreased to 90 and 65 productions, respectively, reflecting the global effects of stalled or cancelled major Hollywood productions (JAMPRO, 2025a).
- A summary of the main initiatives to promote FAM exports in Jamaica is provided in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Main initiatives to promote film, animation and music services

Initiative	Period	Short description
Fiscal Incentives Act – audiovisual benefits	Since 2014	Provides tax credits and customs waivers for production equipment and capital allowances for building construction.
Jamaica Film Commission (JAMPRO)	Since 1984	Supports film, music and animation through promotion, facilitation and policy advocacy.
JAFTA Propella	Since 2016	Funds film production and supports participation in training and international festivals.
FilmLab JA	Since 2017	Acceleration programme for filmmakers to develop international co-productions with the United Kingdom.
Jamaica Screen Development Initiative (JSDI)	Since 2024	Public financing programme for screen-based projects, including grants, rebates and no-interest loans.

Source: Developed by the authors.

Services-related export and investment promotion programmes and tools

This section focuses on the main initiatives to foster services exports and investments, highlighting specific programmes and tools developed by JAMPRO and other institutions to build firm capabilities that address supply constraints (including export readiness, quality, market knowledge) and to reduce transaction costs and information frictions that affect demand (including buyer intermediation, investment facilitation, and aftercare).

Export promotion

JAMPRO's programmes

JAMPRO's programmes reflect a broad approach that combines export promotion and capacity building to position Jamaican services more competitively in global markets. Public-private collaboration plays a key role in this approach. The programmes focus on priority sectors, including service industries such as medical and wellness tourism, film, television and online content, animation, and ICT and BPO services. In practice, the balance between breadth (reaching many firms) and depth (intensive, customized support) shapes outcomes. Broader tools raise awareness and basic readiness, while cohort-based interventions concentrate resources on firms with higher probability of export success. However, the Exporter Readiness Checker that assesses a firm's preparedness for exporting is currently tailored to goods rather than services.

JAMPRO promotes the internationalization of Jamaican services by stimulating both local supply and demand from abroad. To attract potential importers, JAMPRO provides information on the local services market, organizes reverse trade missions and hosts matchmaking events to connect international buyers with Jamaican firms. For services exporters, JAMPRO offers a range of support services, including conducting training sessions on export procedures and requirements, facilitating participation in international trade fairs and outbound trade missions, and providing both standard and

customized market intelligence. It also helps exporters connect with international buyers and delivers targeted business development assistance to address specific challenges.

Within this architecture, the Export Max programme represents the depth end of the spectrum, prioritizing intensive, multi-year firm upgrading and market access support. This programme aims to foster competitiveness and sustainability of Jamaican MSMEs through internationalization and is implemented by JAMPRO in partnership with the Jamaica Business Development Corporation and the JMEA (Williams, 2025).

Participating companies receive mentorship and support on capacity building, advocacy and market access for more than two years. Export Max is organized in two phases. In the first phase, companies receive specialized technical training focused on export development and promotion, alongside small-group sessions tailored to address identified weaknesses. The second phase emphasizes market penetration, supporting MSMEs' engagement in strategically aligned trade shows, targeted inward and outward missions, and specially arranged meetings with buyers and distributors. Throughout both phases, the programme offers coaching on general business practices, market entry and growth strategies (JAMPRO, 2025b). As part of the programme's recent renovation, JAMPRO also established an Exporter Facilitation Team to engage directly with exporters, identify bottlenecks and guide them through regulatory processes.

As in many programmes of this nature, there is a trade-off between reach and individual impact. Export Max's customized support has helped participating companies increase sales and enter new markets, but the number of beneficiaries remains limited (see Table 6.7): only 145 firms have participated since the programme's inception in 2011. Participation, however, has expanded from 15 firms in the first edition to 50 and 60 in the third and fourth cohorts, respectively, when the programme – originally designed for goods producers – was

Table 6.7: Evolution of the Export Max programme

Cohort/Period		Phase I (2011-2013)	Phase II (2014-2017)	Phase III (2019-2022)	Phase IV (2024-2026)
Participating companies	All sectors	15	20	50	60
	Global digital services	0	0	5	6
	Creative industries	0	0	6	8
New markets penetrated (all sectors)		33	N/A	25	N/A
Sales growth (all sectors)		31%	213%	120%	N/A

Source: Developed by the authors with data from JAMPRO.

broadened to include service providers. The current edition includes six firms in the GDS segment and eight in the creative industries.

Financing

Since internationalization often requires substantial investment, MSMEs usually face multiple barriers to access foreign markets, particularly credit constraints and information gaps. Traditional lenders typically demand collateral and financial records that many service firms cannot provide, limiting their ability to scale or take advantage of export opportunities. In fact, Jamaican companies in the professional and other services sectors face higher interest rates than the all-sector average, regardless of firm size or the currency borrowed, except in the case of local currency credit for small firms (Bank of Jamaica, 2024).

To help address these challenges, the EXIM Bank of Jamaica provides low-cost financing to direct and indirect exporters in sectors such as tourism, ICT, creative industries and other service industries. Financing can be used for working capital, equipment purchases, facility upgrades, receivables financing, debt restructuring and market research. Recognizing that financial support alone is not sufficient, the Bank also established a Business Advisory Service Unit to serve as an information hub and facilitate knowledge transfer to MSMEs. This unit aims to strengthen business planning, improve organizational practices and enhance firms' export readiness, thereby complementing financial products with capacity-building services (EXIM Bank, n.d.).

FDI promotion

JAMPRO's programmes

JAMPRO focuses on promoting investment in selected sectors, including entertainment and creative industries, BPO and tourism (WTO, 2024). It supports investors through a variety of services, including assistance with business approvals (such as work permits, visas, duty waivers, certifications and licences), provision of market intelligence, site selection support and matchmaking with local suppliers and key stakeholders. It also engages in business advocacy to facilitate a favourable investment environment (JAMPRO, 2017a).

JAMPRO also identifies investment opportunities in strategic niche areas. In the case of KBS, these include computer services, BPO, management consulting, e-commerce, audiovisual services and education, among others. Investors can also benefit from public financing, with the government offering up to US\$ 5 million for investment in infrastructure projects in the GDS industry.

Between 2017/18 and 2022/23, tourism accounted for 20 per cent of total actual CapEx generated by JAMPRO's local and foreign investment projects. Since GDS and FAM require fewer physical assets, their contribution to total investment has been more modest (11 per cent and less than 1 per cent respectively) (see Figure 6.7). Nevertheless, GDS were responsible for more than three-quarters of the new jobs created by JAMPRO's clients during 2017/2018 to 2022/2023 (see Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.7: Capital expenditure generated by JAMPRO's clients in selected sectors. Value (US\$ million) and share of total (%), 2017/18 to 2023/24 fiscal years

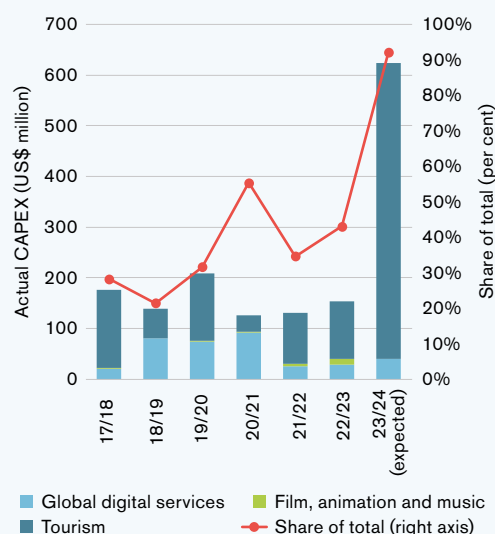
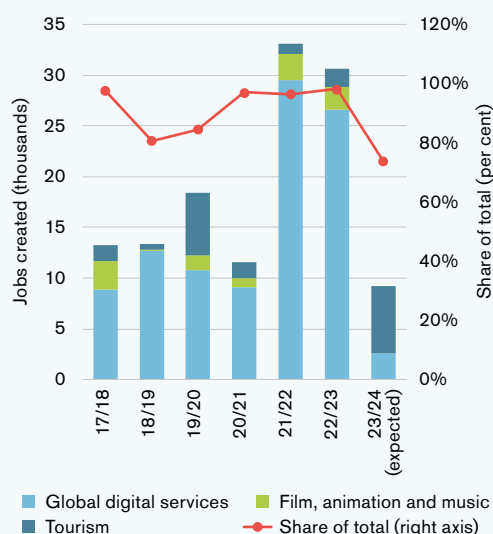


Figure 6.8: New jobs by JAMPRO's clients in selected sectors. Jobs (thousands) and share of total (%), 2017/18 to 2023/24 fiscal years



Source: Developed by the authors based on JAMPRO.

Notes: Global digital services: Outsourcing and ICT-enabled services (2017/2018 to 2021/2022) and global digital services since 2022/2023.

This divergence reveals a structural pattern: tourism drives investment volumes, while GDS drive direct employment creation. This is not surprising, and it is related to the nature of these activities.

Taken together, tourism, Global Digital Services (GDS) and food and agro-manufacturing (FAM) accounted for approximately one-third of total projected capital expenditure (CapEx) but about 93 per cent of the projected new jobs generated by JAMPRO's clients during fiscal year 2023/2024. For fiscal year 2024/2025, these sectors were expected to account for 45 per cent of new projects, 92 per cent of projected CapEx and 74 per cent of projected employment, with tourism alone representing 86 per cent of projected CapEx and 53 per cent of projected employment (JAMPRO, 2025c).

During the 2023/2024 fiscal year, JAMPRO revamped the "Linkages" programme aimed at

fostering local activities through their connections with FDI projects. This programme is at the early stages of implementation and includes B2B meetings and hosting linkages forums.¹⁰

Other relevant complementary initiatives

In 2024, the MFAFT launched the "JA Diaspora Engage" platform. This initiative aims to attract diaspora-led investments, promote entrepreneurship, facilitate knowledge transfers and drive innovation in priority areas. It provides information on investment opportunities, regulation, policies and mentoring, among other topics. The diaspora platform complements both tracks by mobilizing capital, expertise and buyer networks that matter disproportionately in services.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Jamaica's trajectory in promoting exports and attracting investment in its services sectors reflects a gradual but deliberate process of adaptation and institutional learning. While the country has long depended on services for its export earnings and FDI inflows, its policy frameworks, institutional arrangements and promotion strategies were initially shaped by the logic and requirements of goods trade.

Over the past two decades, Jamaica has taken important steps to develop a more services-specific trade and investment promotion model aimed at increasing sophistication, creating more and better jobs and generating linkages between exporters and local communities. These steps include adopting multi-year strategies that elevate services, approving a National Investment Policy to streamline and coordinate investment promotion, adapting the SEZ regime to services activities, and rolling out JAMPRO-led programmes and sector strategies that combine skills, facilitation and branding.

These efforts have not always been linear or systematic. Still, they offer valuable insights for other developing economies seeking to unlock the potential of knowledge-based services and other dynamic services activities. Jamaica's case confirms that structural transformation in services requires not only technical instruments but also institutional continuity, stakeholder engagement and strategic clarity.

Good practices

One of Jamaica's main strengths lies in its long-term policy commitment to trade and investment promotion. The adoption of the national strategies for exports and investments, both of which explicitly prioritize selected services sectors, signals a strategic shift towards recognizing the growing importance of KBS and the creative economy. While not all elements have been fully implemented or updated, these frameworks provide a reference point that helps to coordinate sectoral efforts and mobilize institutional actors around shared priorities.

JAMPRO's role as a lead implementing agency is another key asset. The agency's operational scope, which combines export promotion, attracting FDI and business linkage development, is particularly well-suited for services, where intangibility, customization and human capital intensity require more holistic support. Over time, JAMPRO has built internal capacity to respond to the specific needs of service firms, including MSMEs and startups. Initiatives such as Export Max, investment facilitation services, and audiovisual sector incentives demonstrate the value of offering tailored support to firms at different stages of internationalization.

The SEZ regime has also contributed to Jamaica's position as a destination for services investors. While SEZs have traditionally been associated with manufacturing and logistics, Jamaica has adapted the model to accommodate digitally delivered services and creative industries and more recently, knowledge-intensive activities based on intellectual property.

Equally notable is Jamaica's gradual move towards more inclusive governance. The coordination of the NIP through the National Competitiveness Council, the participation of multiple ministries in JAMPRO's board, and the creation of sector-specific working groups and stakeholder dialogues illustrate a shift toward multi-sector engagement. While still limited in some areas, this approach helps reduce institutional fragmentation and creates opportunities for collaborative policy design.

Another positive development is the integration of talent development and export promotion. The involvement of training institutions (e.g., HEART/NSTA) and business associations (e.g., GSAJ, JAFTA) in sectoral initiatives – such as film and animation capacity building – suggests that Jamaica is moving beyond a narrow export promotion logic to support the broader ecosystem required for competitive service exports. This alignment between workforce skills, market access and sector incentives is essential for sustaining long-term growth in service industries.

Risks and challenges

Despite these advances, Jamaica continues to face structural and operational challenges that limit the scale and inclusiveness of its services export promotion agenda.

First, many services firms, particularly SMEs, still struggle with export readiness. While initiatives like Export Max were designed to bridge this gap, their coverage remains limited to a small number of companies and their continuity depends on public financing and institutional commitment. This illustrates the classic reach vs. depth trade-off.

Second, access to finance is still a constraint. Services firms often lack the tangible collateral or physical assets required by traditional lenders. Moreover, risk perceptions in financial institutions continue to be elevated, resulting in higher interest rates. While partnerships with institutions like the EXIM Bank have begun to address this issue, the development of specialized financial instruments for services exports remains incipient.

A third challenge relates to skills and human capital. Although Jamaica has made progress in building capacity for specific sectors – such as animation, audiovisual production and BPO – there is still a mismatch between the skills demanded by global markets and those supplied by the country's education and training systems. Additionally, the competition for digital talent is intensifying globally, which could limit Jamaica's

ability to scale services exports without sustained investments in workforce development.

Fourth, data limitations also hinder policy effectiveness. There is a lack of disaggregated, timely and sector-specific information that could help guide promotion strategies, monitor results and support investor decisions. Initiatives to strengthen statistical systems and invest in services trade intelligence should be considered a priority.

Finally, although the coordination among public institutions and the private sector has improved – particularly through the implementation structures of the NIP – the successful delivery of complex, cross-cutting strategies will require continued political support, adequate resources and consistent performance monitoring.

In conclusion, Jamaica's experience highlights the importance of tailoring traditional trade and investment promotion approaches to the unique characteristics of services. While challenges remain, the country has demonstrated that progress is possible through a combination of strategic vision, institutional alignment and policy experimentation. For other developing economies seeking to expand and diversify their service exports, Jamaica offers a valuable example of how to lay the foundations for a more resilient and inclusive services economy – one that is aligned with national development goals and capable of responding to global market shifts.

Endnotes

- 1 Source: WTO Stats, <https://stats.wto.org/>.
- 2 JAMPRO uses the term “global digital services” to refer to information technology outsourcing (ITO) and business process outsourcing (BPO) services.
- 3 Considering other small services-based economies with a comparable level of development (measured by the Human Development Index) and similar per capita income, Jamaica records higher KBS exports per inhabitant. Examples include El Salvador (US\$ 112), Fiji (US\$ 75) and Sri Lanka (US\$ 67). The exception is Moldova, whose KBS exports per capita reached US\$ 433 in 2024.
- 4 Public institutions represented in JAMPRO's board of directors are the Ministry of Tourism; the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport; the National Land Agency; and the Urban Development Corporation.
- 5 The BERA fosters economic growth and job creation by improving the efficiency of government processes to reduce transaction costs and increase transparency and predictability. The PPP Initiative promotes the use of these partnerships to improve infrastructure and the delivery of public services.
- 6 Under the Omnibus Act, firms can benefit from duty-free imports of raw materials for construction, employee tax credits, reduced corporate income tax, among other incentives.
- 7 The HEART/NSTA Trust (HEART) is Jamaica's leading human capital development agency and the largest provider of technical and vocational training in Jamaica and the Caribbean. It offers practical, competency-based programmes, including institutional and on-the-job training, mentorship, career guidance, and start-up support. See <https://www.heart-nsta.org/>.
- 8 Considering that women account for 63.5 per cent of the workforce in accommodation and food service activities (compared to 46.4 per cent across all sectors), initiatives to develop skills in the tourism industry could help reduce the gender gap.
- 9 Source: Authors' calculations with data from Jamaica Tourist Board, WTO and BLS.
- 10 The GDS sector generated four linkages contracts – mainly with providers within the same sector – and the tourism sector secured 18 contracts with providers from several industries (JAMPRO, 2025c).

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