



ISATS JAMAICA MAJOR RESEARCH REPORT

**The Implications of Migrants' Participation in
US J1 Cultural Exchange Programs for Jamaica's
Development**



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ISATS JAMAICA

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in the contribution of migrants' participation in US J1 cultural exchange programs to the social, cultural, economic and political development of societies. Migration has had a positive impact on cultural diversity whereby quality education and cultural exchange programs allow students and highly skilled professionals to experience working with persons from different cultures abroad while promoting Jamaican culture (Mejia, 2023). Promoting Jamaican culture while contributing to development through participation in overseas cultural exchange and international education programs is vital to the persistent commitment to achieving Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan, which is to make Jamaica the place to live, work, raise families and to business. This national vision is localized and integrated into the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicators and review process (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2024).

Jamaica's commitment to ensuring that international migration is a crucial strategy of development is evident in the formulation and implementation of its National Policy on International Migration and Development (2017). Despite the fact that Jamaica has been highly commended by its international development partners (IDPs) for its well-coordinated interministerial or national and regional mechanisms for facilitating migration as a strategy of development, a major problem that has been highlighted by the Government of Jamaica, especially the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) is the fact that Jamaica has no official policy to promote "ethical" recruitment for migrants for overseas cultural exchange, international education and temporary labour migration programs other than those within the framework of bilateral agreements (International Organization for Migration, 2019). As a result of this consistent problem, US J1 programs are misperceived as "temporary labour" programs and not necessarily cultural exchange, as defined by the US Department of State. This problem also affects perceptions and attitudes towards individual applicant's desire to participate in these programs. Therefore, this research conducted by International Student Affairs and Travel Services (ISATS) Jamaica is significant because majority of existing academic and practitioner-led research on migration and development heavily focuses on the social integration processes of migrants in host countries or regions such as North America and Europe or the push or pull factor framework influencing decisions to migration from low-income countries or regions. Jamaica is also among the top 5 sending countries for participants in US J1 cultural exchange programs (US Department of State, 2023). The study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to applicants' or candidates' decision to participate in US J1 cultural exchange and international education program or lack thereof and the role that the Government of Jamaica plays in facilitating migration as a strategy of national development.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data was collected from April 2024 to January 2025, through the deployment of semi-structured interviews with thirty (30) applicants who are interested in participating in the US J1 Intern and Trainee Hospitality program and two (2) elite interviews with a representative from Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO and the Government of Jamaica. The advantage of using the semi-structured interview for this study is the fact that it allows for flexibility and for allowing new questions and responses to emerge from an iterative conversational process with research participants while elite interviews with local and national stakeholders in cultural exchange and international education provides substantive and comprehensive about historical and contemporary analyses of institutions and or rule making structures that contributes to outcomes and implications of public policies for development, specifically policies or initiatives that support international migration (Mashuri et. al, 2022). Participants for this study were recruited through the use of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques based on observational and registration data provided on the ISATS Jamaica registration portal. Data from interviews was then analyzed using thematic analysis and NVivo 15 Qualitative Data Analysis software.

In terms of ethical considerations for this study, principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were applied to ensure protection of participants' shared data. One major limitation associated with this study is the disadvantage of utilizing elite

interviews with specific representatives from the Government of Jamaica and international development organization is the fact that it is difficult to conceal identities.

KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS #1

The stakeholders' interviews with a government representative and representative of Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO revealed that development is a multi-dimensional, continuous process with varied meanings, images and interpretations across numerous temporal and spatial contexts. Development means different things to different stakeholders- government, civil society or non-profit organizations, academia, practitioners, community-based organizations, youth/students, experienced professional and in general, the population that is affected by development policy, planning and initiatives.



KEY FINDINGS #2

Majority of program participants, across different age groups, socio-economic status and gender have highlighted that their primary motivations for wanting to participate in the US J1 Hospitality program is because the program provides a crucial avenue for cultural immersion and exchange, personal and career development and providing for themselves and their families financially.



KEY FINDINGS #3

Majority of program applicants mentioned that the major barrier for fully participating in US J1 cultural exchange programs were either due to a variety of socio-cultural and economic factors including exorbitant costs for program fees and additional fees, personal and family obligations and lack of alternative support to finance their participation in the program. Other factors include negative perceptions of some travel agencies and the conduct of their business activities.



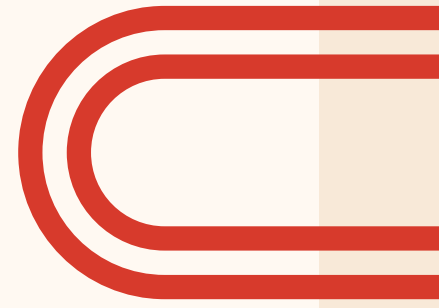
KEY FINDINGS # 4




Most program applicants expressed that they were recommended to ISATS Jamaica through friends, family or close associations that previously participated in US J1 cultural exchange programs. They have commended ISATS Jamaica for its efficient, reliable and trustworthy customer service and for its reputation of successfully placing candidates for its programs.



KEY FINDINGS #5 Migrants contribute significantly to Jamaica's development through social, cultural and economic remittances. Remittances through cultural exchange are a vital source of bottom-up development finance to reduce poverty, inequalities, increase household consumption and a contributor to child care health and education

VISUAL DATA



	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases	Nb Words	% Words
 Individual Level of Analysis						
◆ Personal Hobbies and Attributes	6	9.1%	6	66.7%	191	7.6%
◆ Long Term Career Aspirations	7	10.6%	7	77.8%	154	6.1%
◆ Personal Strengths and Areas of Expertise	17	25.8%	9	100.0%	485	19.4%
◆ Personal Weaknesses and Strategies for Improvement	3	4.5%	3	33.3%	65	2.6%
◆ Reflections on Career Trajectories in the Local Hospitality sector	11	16.7%	7	77.8%	517	20.6%
◆ Challenges in Daily Responsibility or the Local Hospitality sector	4	6.1%	4	44.4%	105	4.2%
 US J1 Hospitality program						
◆ Expectations of the US J1 Hospitality program	6	9.1%	4	44.4%	222	8.9%
◆ Potential Benefits or Contributions	5	7.6%	5	55.6%	160	6.4%
 ISATS Jamaica						
◆ Perceptions about ISATS Jamaica	7	10.6%	7	77.8%	273	10.9%

CONCLUSION

TAKEAWAY #1

The findings of the study are in strong congruence with the aspirations-capabilities theoretical framework and Borquois (2021:180) subjective well-being index for temporary migrants whereby cultural exchange programs through international migration has a positive impact on development through social cohesion, economic growth, progressive public policies that equip students, recent graduates and experienced professionals to become global citizens through cultural responsiveness and sensitivity and inter-cultural diplomacy.

TAKEAWAY #2

The findings also indicate that majority of program applicants have intrinsic motivations for wanting to participate in US J1 cultural exchange programs such as desire to be entertained or to experience adventure, desire to explore and learn about different cultures and the desire to grow and develop personally and professional through attractive career opportunities that are presented.

TAKEAWAY #3

Future directions for research will explore some of the regional and international best practices in cultural exchange that can inform mainstreaming cultural exchange in Jamaica's current policy on international migration for development

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