



What could the Future of Jobs look like for Jamaica?



The global landscape of jobs is shifting rapidly, spurred by technological advancements, demographic changes, and evolving societal needs. Many of today's jobs didn't exist two decades ago, and as we look ahead, some current roles will likely disappear, while others will be redefined or created. The degree to which workers, employers, and governments prepare for these transformations will profoundly shape the future of labor markets, job quality, and productivity across both developed and developing countries. Predicting these changes is complex.

While the third industrial revolution introduced automation and ICT advancements, the current "digitalization" revolution has brought breakthroughs in robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), altering how and where work occurs. AI, for instance, is transforming industries globally, offering opportunities for innovation and productivity. This JEP Discussion aims to provide insight and perspective from the Jamaican Economy Panel to better understand the unpredictable changes relating to the future of jobs for Jamaica.

Reflections on Past Developments

To grasp the current landscape of Jamaica's job market, it is essential to examine the transformative developments since 2000 that have shaped the types of jobs available and the evolving nature of work across sectors. Thus, the panellists were asked to indicate what they believe are the main developments that have affected the labour market since 2000 in Jamaica. Dr. Patrice Whitely, Head, Department of Economics at UWI Mona, highlighted "an increase in persons having multiple jobs," and noted that this

could be "negative in that it affects the quality of work done in any one job," or it could also be "positive in that it provides the worker with multiple income streams." She further noted "an increase in entrepreneurship/ persons being self employed" as a main development" which could be "positive in that it increases the number and sometimes types of jobs available." Additionally, Dr. Christine Clarke, Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, UWI Mona, believed that there has been "rapid technological growth and an increase in highly qualified candidates willing to work in entry level jobs."

Building on these trends and developments, it's important to consider the ways in which they have reshaped skill requirements for workers across Jamaica's labor market. Brianne Houston, Economist, felt that "as technology and automation begin to become more widespread, persons must develop strong digital skills such as basic programming, data analysis tools, machine learning and the use of software in order to adapt to the changing landscape." Similarly, Dr. Christine Clarke felt that "technological know how" is a necessary skill to have and also, "soft skills to work with difficult customers/team members and the ability to understand the business and customers simultaneously."

Along with these new skills and developments in the Jamaican labour market are new jobs. The panellists highlighted what they thought were some of the new jobs since 2000 and they specified jobs like Content Creator, Social Media Manager, Cyber Security Specialist, AI, Data Protection Specialist and Marketing Specialist. Evidently, there has been much change in the world of work for Jamaica since 2000.

Looking forward to 2040

It is crucial to explore the anticipated trends and developments that could shape Jamaica's future job market by examining the potential impacts on employment opportunities, skill demands, and the overall structure of work. The panellists pointed out what they felt will be the three main transformational drivers for jobs in Jamaica by 2040. Panellists agreed that ageing and declining working-age populations will be the leading driver of job transformation by 2040, while broadening digital access is the second and growing working age population is the third. Panellists also agreed that the rise in generative artificial intelligence is an important transformational driver.

Panellists were asked to state the economic sectors which they anticipate will have a significant increase or decrease in employment by 2040. Prof. Paul Golding, ICT researcher, University of Technology, Jamaica, noted that "BPO and many clerical jobs will be affected by GenAI," and Dr. Kevin Williams, Research Fellow, SALISES, UWI Mona, stated that he expects "the education sector to be adversely affected with the rise of AI. He added that he expects an "increased demand for labour in the Climate Change related occupation."

Just as the demand for certain skills adapted in the past to drive labour market evolution and economic growth, today's workforce must also evolve to support a thriving economy. With this in mind, the panellists were asked to identify which skills are likely to see increased, decreased, or steady demand by 2040 in Jamaica. The panellists indicated that "AI and big data, marketing and media analytical thinking, networks and cyber security, design and user experience, resilience, flexibility and agility, multilingualism, and creative thinking" are skills that will see an increase in demand by 2040. While "dependability and attention to detail, manual dexterity,

endurance and precision, customer service, leadership, social influence, and reading, writing and mathematics" are expected to see a decrease in demand by 2040. And the demand for skills like "empathy and active listening, curiosity and lifelong learning, resource management and operations" will remain unchanged by 2040."

Panellists highlighted the barriers or challenges they foresee affecting how jobs in Jamaica will evolve by 2040. "Skills gap in the labour market, unfit regulatory framework, rising inequalities, organizational culture and resistance to change, inability to attract and retain talent, shortage of investment capital, lack of adequate data and technical infrastructure" were highlighted by the panellists as the main challenges they foresee.

The panellists were then asked to state how well prepared they feel the current workforce in Jamaica is for the trends and developments anticipated to influence jobs by 2040. Just under 2/3 of the panellists agreed that Jamaica's current workforce is less than well prepared, while just over 1/3 noted that Jamaica's current workforce is not prepared.

Economist, Keenan Falconer noted that the reason he agreed that Jamaica's current workforce may not be prepared for the trends and development anticipated is that "Jamaica does not currently have the ability to equip the workforce to cope with the present demands of the market and fares even worse where training is concerned for futuristic endeavours with an obsolete education system. Moreover, the much-needed update of the overall regulatory framework in terms of a conducive and enabling Industrial Policy, Productivity Policy and meaningful labour market reform has yet to be undertaken to facilitate the entrance of new industries and sectors, as well as, preparation for the exigencies that come with these. Furthermore, Dr. Kevin Williams expressed that "Jamaica does not have the level of human capital to adequately adjust to the inevitable demand in digitization of things."



Potential Future

Given the trends and developments to affect jobs by 2040 that have been identified in Jamaica, it is imperative to explore the country's potential future of jobs. Subsequently, the panellists were asked to state what they envision to be the favourable outcome for the future of jobs in Jamaica by 2040. Dr. Patrice Whitely envisioned "jobs becoming less mechanical and repetitive because of the use of AI, but therefore requiring more critical thinking and soft skills like empathy and compassion," and Keenan Falconer envisioned "Jamaicans are adequately educated to take advantage of new and emerging industries and thus contribute significantly to the economy through increased value-added activities."

The panellists also forecast gaps in the skills needed to meet the demands for the jobs of the future, with Dr. Christine Clarke stating that the "continued piling on of nice-to-do things in the education sector rather than focusing on critical comprehension and problem solving skills in math and language."

Dr. Nadine McCloud states:

As AI infiltrates labour markets globally and renders irreversible changes to their structure, how the future of jobs in Jamaica will rebound to the benefit of its citizens depends on the structural adaptations we begin to pursue today actively. Thus, the country has to be deliberate and proactive in preparing its citizens for the opportunities and obstacles that will permeate its labour market in the next few decades and beyond. I echo the view of our panellists on the need for our education system to emphasise fostering students' higher-order critical thinking and quantitative and innovative skills. As an added national imperative, Jamaica must introduce and heavily invest and monetise code-based STEM programmes in all educational institutions, particularly those at the primary and secondary levels. Yet, these national investments will not be sufficient. Additionally, Jamaicans who internalise and embrace a continuous learning profile will fare better in the future job market than those who do not.



DR. NADINE McCLOUD
Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, UWI Mona

Dr. Stuart Davies further explains:

Technological advancements are having a profound impact worldwide. These changes affect both demand and supply in labour markets in many positive as well as negative ways, and the time for governments, employers, and workers to prepare themselves between each new phase is diminishing fast. Decision-making under such uncertainty is, of course, complex yet we are all called upon to make these from time to time. Futures thinking has grown as a discipline to assist governments, employers, and individuals promote dialogue on the future and help us all prepare for what the future holds by taking responsible actions today to seize the opportunities of tomorrow. For Jamaica, prone to vulnerabilities, investing in greater futures capability today will be a crucial step to ensuring sustained inclusive prosperity in future years.



DR. STUART DAVIES
Senior Economist, UN Jamaica

Conclusion

As Jamaica prepares for a future shaped by rapid technological advances, demographic shifts, and evolving societal needs, understanding potential trends and challenges becomes essential. Since 2000, the country's labor market has undergone significant changes, with an increase in entrepreneurial activity, rising demand for technology skills, and the emergence of new roles like content creators and cybersecurity specialists. Despite these positive transformations, many panellists agree that the current workforce is not fully prepared to meet the demands expected by 2040. Major barriers include a skills gap, outdated regulatory frameworks, and insufficient investment in education and training.

Looking ahead, key drivers such as an aging population, expanding digital access, and the rise of generative AI are anticipated to transform Jamaica's job market. The challenge will be to foster an adaptive workforce equipped with the critical skills necessary to thrive in a globalized economy.

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