



International
Labour
Organization



► **Free movement
of persons in the
CARICOM region:
A labour market
analysis**

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► List of abbreviations and acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BLMAs	Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National training Authorities
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CASS	CARICOM Agreement on Social Security
CCH	Caribbean Cooperation in Health
CCL	Caribbean Congress of Labour
CEC	Caribbean Employers' Confederation
CLMIS	CARICOM Labour Market Information Systems
CMPF	CARICOM Migration Policy Framework
COHSOD	Council for Human and Social Development
CPSO	Caribbean Private Sector Organization
CSME	CARICOM Single Market and Economy
COTED	Council for Trade and Economic Development
CQF	CARICOM Qualifications framework
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
ECEU	Eastern Caribbean Economic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ICLS	International Conference of Labour Statisticians
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMDP	Jamaica's National Policy on International Migration and Development

IOM	International Organization for Migration
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OE	Official Estimates
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organization for Eastern Caribbean States
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PC	Population Census
RAMP	Regional Approach to Migration Policy
SNTA	Surinamese National Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UWI	University of West Indies
WHO	World Health Organization

► Foreword

The free movement of persons lies at the heart of Caribbean integration. It is a principle rooted in the founding vision of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and one that reflects directly to the region's collective aspirations for shared prosperity, decent work, social cohesion, and resilience. In a context characterized by demographic change, skills shortages, outward migration, and accelerating climate risks, understanding how labour mobility interacts with labour market in small island developing states has never been more important.

This report, *Free movement of persons in the CARICOM Region: A labour market analysis*, provides a timely, evidence-based examination of labour migration and labour market dynamics across CARICOM Member States. It was prepared to support the development of a CARICOM Labour Migration Policy Framework and Action Plan that complements the ongoing formulation of the CARICOM Migration Policy Framework. Both migration and labour migration policy frameworks reflect the strong commitment of the CARICOM Secretariat, Member States, social partners, United Nations, and other partners in shaping migration governance that is orderly, rights-based, and development-oriented.

The analysis and recommendations put forward by this report are based on national statistics, regional and international datasets, and extensive consultations with governments, workers' and employers' organizations, the CARICOM secretariat, and other stakeholders. Therefore, the report provides a comprehensive picture of labour supply and demand, intra-regional migration patterns, and the institutional frameworks that govern labour migration. It highlights both the opportunities generated by free movement of persons such as skills matching and transfer, demographic adjustment, productivity gains and remittance, and deeper regional integration, and the persistent challenges including high levels of informality and precarious employment, skills mismatches, data gaps, limited coordination, and uneven implementation of relevant labour standards, among others.

A distinctive contribution of this analysis is its explicit attention to climate change and environmental risks. Climate-related shocks are already reshaping livelihoods and migration decisions in the Caribbean, while also generating new and urgent labour demands, particularly in the sectors such as agriculture, tourism, construction, and health. By integrating climate considerations into labour market and migration analysis, the report underlines the need for forward-looking integrated policies that enhance resilience while protecting workers and communities.

The findings buttress a central message: well-governed labour migration can be a powerful driver and enabler for realizing decent work, economic development, and regional integration, but it requires stronger coordination, better labour market information, effective skills recognition systems, and robust protection of migrant workers' rights. Progress towards full free movement must therefore be accompanied by investments in institutions, social dialogue, and evidence-based policymaking at both national and regional levels.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership and close collaboration provided by the CARICOM Secretariat as well as the valuable guidance by the Project Steering Committee, national liaison officers, social partners, and other contributors. Their collective efforts have ensured that this report is grounded in Caribbean realities and responsive to the needs of Member States.

It is our collective ambition that this analysis will serve as both a technical reference and source of evidence for strategic policymaking, informing high-level decision-making, guiding national and regional reforms, and catalysing coordinated action among Member States and the social partners, to advance the free movement of persons in a manner that is economically transformative, socially just, and fully supportive of deepening the effective functions of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

Finally, I should recognize that this work was made possible through financial support from the Government of Canada, through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and the United States Government through the Western Hemisphere Regional Migration Programme (WHP) led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). I also acknowledge the technical expertise provided by the International Labour Organization's Employment, Labour Markets, and Youth (EMPLAB) and Labour Migration (MIGRANT) Branches.



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► Executive summary

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the trends and characteristics of the cross-border movement of persons in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region. The report supports the development of a CARICOM Labour Migration Policy Framework that is aligned with, and expands upon, the labour components of the forthcoming CARICOM Migration Policy Framework (CMPF). The CMPF is being developed under a whole-of-CARICOM Regional Approach to Migration Policy (RAMP) with United Nations (UN) support. The study was carried out in collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat - specifically with CARICOM's Single Market and Economy (CSME) Unit's Directorate of Single Market and Trade - and in collaboration with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean.

The report is based on research undertaken between January and July 2025 on three key themes, namely: supply and demand for labour; labour migration governance; and climate change and environmental risk. It looks at the implications of labour migration and labour migration governance on the labour market, and provides a comprehensive analysis of different economic, employment, labour and migration factors in CARICOM Member States, with a particular focus on climate change and institutional labour market governance. The report includes recommendations to improve productive and decent employment within the framework of a putative CARICOM Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework.

The study was overseen by a Project Steering Committee chaired by the CARICOM Secretariat and consisting of the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC), the Caribbean Private Sector Organization (CPSO), the University of West Indies (UWI), the Government of Dominica (Lead head Labour, including Intra-Community movement of Skills) and the ILO. National liaison officers were identified within each CARICOM Member State to help guide and validate the report. It was prepared by Mr Richard Horne and Ms Emmerentia Erasmus on behalf of the consultancy firm Empstat Ltd. A summary of the main findings is as follows:

Context of free movement in CARICOM

The movement of skilled workers is one of the main drivers of labour migration under the CARICOM Free Movement regime. The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas was adopted in 2001 as a precursor to the CSME, established in 2006. (Aragón and Mawby 2019). The CSME aims to deepen regional integration and remove barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people; and to facilitate the establishment of businesses within CARICOM (Acosta and Baaren 2024; Aragón and Mawby 2019; CARICOM, n.d.-b). Under Article 45 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, Member States committed to the goal of free movement within CARICOM. However, the Bahamas does not participate in the CSME (CARICOM 2017, page 6); and Haiti, while being a full Member State of the CSME (Acosta and Baaren 2024), does not have the institutional and administrative arrangements in place to facilitate free movement. However Haitian citizens are entitled to six months stay upon arrival in CARICOM Member States; may acquire a skills certificate if they meet the qualification criteria for any of the twelve approved skills categories; and are entitled to provide a service or establish a business under the CSME.

There are two overarching regimes which allow for movement of persons within the CARICOM region: i) facilitation of travel; and ii) movement for economic purposes, under which the following regimes are in place: (a) movement of skilled nationals; (b) movement of service providers; and (c) right of establishment.

Most migration in the region consists of CARICOM nationals leaving the region altogether, particularly for Canada, the United States and Europe. Despite this, there is still considerable intra-CARICOM movement.

In respect of migration within the CARICOM region, there are net senders (Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica), and net-receiving Member States (The Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago) – with nationals from lower-income Member States moving to higher-income Member States. In fact, the economic differences in the region are stark, ranging from Haiti, with the lowest income per capita in the CARICOM region, to The Bahamas, with the highest. Haiti accounts for more than half the total population of the CARICOM region, and has not completed the internal processes to fully implement the CSME, albeit it does allow for free movement of CARICOM nationals into Haiti without restrictions. Meanwhile The Bahamas does not participate in the CSME at all. The recent discovery of oil in Guyana and Suriname is also expected to have implications for regional migration to and from these countries.

Labour market characteristics of the CARICOM region

There is considerable heterogeneity across different labour market variables in the CARICOM region. Around 9 million people of working age (defined here as those aged 15+) were in the labour force in 2024, corresponding to a labour force participation rate of around 64 per cent. While this has increased from around 6 million in 2000, much of this growth has been driven by Haiti, which accounts for more than half the working age population in the region. In the context of the CSME, regional averages are best considered both with and without Haiti, to reflect labour market characteristics of countries that fully partake in the CSME, and to reduce the bias driven by the size of Haiti's population.

There has been little change to the overall rate labour force participation rate in the region. However, gender gaps have been narrowing over the past two decades, and youth participation has been decreasing. The gender gap between has been narrowing due to increasing access to employment for women over time, and reduced differentials in accessing jobs between men and women. Despite this, gender gaps do persist, including in unemployment figures, reflecting barriers to employment that disproportionately impact upon women. In addition, women remain more likely to be in sectors characterised by poorer working conditions. Meanwhile, the decrease in youth labour force participation rates is likely to be reflective of more youth staying in longer in education.

There are significant decent work deficits, with around three-quarters of the region's employment estimated to be informal. However, the regional average decreases to around 50 per cent once Haiti is removed from the totals, where almost nine out of ten workers are in informal employment. Informal employment means that workers fall outside the scope of legal and regulatory provisions, and while this can apply to all sectors, certain sectors are more likely to be affected than others, in particular agriculture and small-scale services. Informally employed workers are often not eligible for social protection or other benefits such as paid annual or sick leave and often experience poorer working conditions, including longer hours, unstable earnings and occupational safety and health shortcomings.

Around 70 per cent of the region is engaged in the services sector (excluding Haiti), with labour shortages in health and education linked to an exodus of skilled workers. Services account for 86 per cent of all employment of women in the CARICOM region (excluding Haiti); while for men, this figure is around 70 per cent. There is higher propensity for men to be engaged in industry sectors such as construction and transport, although women are often engaged in manufacturing, as well as agriculture. Stakeholder consultations highlighted labour shortages in the agricultural sector, and even greater shortages in health and education, primarily driven by migration to Europe and America.

The characteristics of Labour migration in the CARICOM region

There is a lack of precise data on labour migration flows, with the numbers skills certificates and work permits only painting a partial picture. While skills certificates are one of the main channels of labour migration, they are typically outweighed by the use of work permits. While the number of skills certificates provide a helpful insight into migration within the region, they are insufficient to capture

labour migration flows per se. Having a skills does not necessarily mean that a person uses it to obtain work in another Member State, and one person can be the holder of multiple skills certificates in different categories.

CARICOM migrants have a higher labour force participation rate than the non-migrant population. The differences likely reflect the fact that CARICOM nationals are more likely to be explicitly in the country for employment reasons. The same holds for differences in the unemployment rate, for which CARICOM nationals have a lower rate than the national population. This is likely due to the higher likelihood of ineligibility for social security provisions for migrants, as well as the fact that many CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals will have moved for purposes of employment and even have employer-specific visas and permits.

As more than half the population in CARICOM are in informal employment, local labour markets are likely to receive migrants into informal jobs. Migrants are often more vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions than non-migrants, even in wage and salaried jobs. In general higher paying jobs are more likely to have regular incomes, higher levels of job security, and are more likely to be eligible for social security and other benefits such as paid leave. However, this is not always the case. Many migrants in wage and salaried employment can be in poor quality jobs, particularly in the informal sector, and in some cases can find themselves in vulnerable situations owing to the employer-specific nature of the work permit, which requires them to stay in that particular job in order to stay in the country per se.

Breakdowns by occupational skill levels and stakeholder consultations highlighted a reliance on non-CARICOM migrants for high skilled roles. A higher share of non-CARICOM nationals were in high-skilled occupations (38 per cent) than both the national workforce (27 per cent) and the CARICOM migrants (28 per cent). This suggests a reliance on high-skilled workers from outside the CARICOM region for certain high-skilled roles. At the same time, stakeholder consultations highlighted frequent shortages of healthcare workers, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists, as well as hospitality workers and care workers, often associated with national workers in these areas going abroad.

The degree and characteristics of migrants leaving the CARICOM region has implications for national labour markets, particularly the outflow of skilled labour. Higher educated and higher skilled workers are leaving behind skill gaps and a dearth of skilled labour for certain sectors. This is particularly problematic for certain occupations, including nursing and teaching, for which OECD economies can be an attractive prospect. Conversely, remittances constitute a major financial inflow to the region, and returning migrants can bring skills, investment and other benefits.

Labour migration governance in the CARICOM region

Regional and national labour migration governance are hampered by a shortfall in coordination and information sharing on labour migration among Member States. The free movement of persons is discussed at some CARICOM meetings, such as the Council for Human and Social Development's Labour Meeting. However, there is no formal dialogue process or coordination mechanism on migration per se, nor on labour migration, in which all the CARICOM Member States participate. However, some CARICOM Member States do have national coordination mechanisms on migration, or other coordinating committees where labour migration is discussed.

CARICOM plans to develop a regional labour migration policy framework as part of the CMPF, as mandated by the Conference of Heads of Government in 2019. This is expected to strengthen labour migration governance, skills-matching, and standard-setting for the protection of migrant workers' rights, including CARICOM nationals exercising their right to free movement. CARICOM Member States are yet to adopt national labour migration policies, and inter-ministerial coordination on labour migration needs to be strengthened in most Member States. Overall, labour migration and its developmental impact could be bolstered by developing labour migration objectives through a whole-of-society approach.

CARICOM Member States are taking steps toward enhancing fair recruitment and the protection of migrant workers' rights. It is unclear to what extent national labour laws apply to migrant workers with irregular status. Awareness should be raised with Member States on fair recruitment practices and the ratification and implementation of Conventions on the protection of migrant workers, including the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143).

Migrant workers' access to social protection and opportunities for family reunification and integration varies across the region. This points to the need to standardise the implementation of regional policy at the national level, including through the CARICOM Agreement on Social Security and the Protocol on Contingent Rights.

Climate change and its implications for labour migration in the region

The CARICOM region is particularly exposed to climate-related shocks. Exposure to climate-related disasters has worsened as rising temperatures increase the frequency and intensity of storms and flooding. Moreover in the longer term the region faces rising sea levels and coastal erosion. Across the Member States the vulnerability to climate change is similar in biophysical terms, but varies significantly in terms of the likely impact, owing to different degrees of readiness among Member States. Countries with higher degrees of readiness are more likely to have the resources and systems in place to cope with and mitigate the impact on jobs and livelihoods. In short, higher-income CARICOM Member States are better equipped to deal with climate change risks.

There is clearly potential disruption to food security and the agriculture sector per se. Approximately 30 per cent of total employment in the region is in the agricultural sector (decreasing to 10 per cent when excluding Haiti from the regional average). There are considerable food security risks in the region, stemming in particular from the impact of climate change on both agricultural production itself and its associated value chains. In stakeholder consultations conducted as part of this study, the agricultural sector was regularly cited as being heavily prone to climate-change related disasters. The impacts range from disruption caused by natural disasters such as hurricanes, to longer-term changes such as prolonged drought, irregular weather patterns, and excessive heat. However, there are also signs of new environmental management systems, climate-resistant agricultural practices, and the emergence of new occupations and specialities in the agricultural sector that respond to climate change. Many of these specialist activities will increase the demand for specialist skills that exceed domestic supply, unless there are targeted education and technical and vocational educational and training (TVET) curriculums that explicitly respond to this demand.

The tourism sector is a major source of employment in CARICOM Member States, for both nationals and foreign workers, and is heavily exposed to the impact of climate change. It is estimated to contribute 33 per cent of GDP in parts of the region and to account for around 18 per cent of all employment. Moreover this figure rises to 43.1 per cent when employment indirectly linked to the sector is included (ILO 2020b). Furthermore, between 50 and 60 per cent of the tourism sector's workforce are women, and tourism is also an important source of employment for youth (ILO 2025c).

Due to the onset of climate-change related disasters, including hurricane damage, stakeholder interviews highlighted the surge in demand for construction workers for reconstruction and infrastructure development. Oftentimes, the urgent demand for labour necessitates the use of migrant workers from other CARICOM Member States, or from outside the region. Migrant construction workers are often seen as a means of filling labour demand but also keeping costs down, and as a result these migrant workers are often more subjected to exploitation and poorer working conditions (Lyu et al. 2025). Safeguards are needed for safe and well managed labour migration of construction workers, both for long and short-term employment.

Strategic recommendations

The report presents a number of strategic recommendations, aligned with the draft CARICOM Migration Policy Framework (CMPF):

Bolster labour migration policy development and implementation

International Labour Organisation:

- ▶ Raise awareness and build capacity on the key Conventions and non-normative tools related to the protection of migrant workers in CARICOM Member States.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Ratify key Conventions related to the protection of migrant workers and align national laws, policies and practice to these Conventions.
- ▶ Develop and implement comprehensive national labour migration policies, or develop labour migration objectives that are anchored in other policies, such as migration or development policies, through a whole-of-society approach.
- ▶ Reinforce policy coherence between labour migration objectives and related policy areas (particularly employment, social protection, education and training, and climate change) by including labour migration objectives in related policies and putting mechanisms in place to ensure policy coherence in the implementation of these policies.

CARICOM Secretariat:

- ▶ Ensure the CARICOM regional labour migration policy framework strengthens regional cooperation on labour migration through strengthening data sharing on national skills gaps, by facilitating skills matching, and by setting regional standards for the protection and integration of migrant workers and their families.
- ▶ Develop the CARICOM labour migration policy framework through a whole-of-society approach, based on good practices and a rights-based approach to migration.

Strengthen coordination on labour migration at regional and national levels

CARICOM Secretariat:

- ▶ Bolster regional cooperation via the CSME on labour migration as a means of facilitating mobility, filling skills gaps, and enhancing CARICOM nationals' knowledge of their rights and opportunities for labour migration in the region.
- ▶ Strengthen regional coordination on the harmonisation of CSME legislation and the standardisation of the implementation of regional policy at national level.
- ▶ Create opportunities for non-governmental stakeholders to participate in decision-making related to labour migration at regional level.
- ▶ Facilitate the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning on labour migration between CARICOM Member States by establishing a regional labour migration dialogue, or by incorporating such exchanges into established CARICOM meetings.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Introduce a national coordination mechanism on labour migration or include labour migration in other relevant national coordination mechanisms, such as on migration or trade, and involve the social partners and all other relevant stakeholders through a whole-of-society approach.
- ▶ Create opportunities for the social partners and other non-governmental stakeholders to participate in decision-making related to labour migration at national level.

Enhance fair recruitment and the protection of migrant workers**International Labour Organization:**

- ▶ Raise awareness on fair recruitment with CARICOM Member States and assist them in aligning laws, policies and practice with the ILO general principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment.¹
- ▶ Raise awareness with CARICOM Member States on the need to ensure that all migrant workers, regardless of their status, are protected by national labour laws.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Ensure that all labour migration laws, policies, practice and programmes comply with the ILO general principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment.
- ▶ Align the provision of social protection for migrant workers with CARICOM regional policy and instruments, including the CARICOM Agreement on Social Security (CASS).
- ▶ Clearly specify that all migrant workers, regardless of their status, are protected under national labour laws.

CARICOM Secretariat:

- ▶ Expand the CASS and fully align it to the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).
- ▶ Support CARICOM Member States to extend and harmonise the provision of social protection to migrant workers.

Support family reunification and the integration of migrant workers and their families into host countries**CARICOM Secretariat:**

- ▶ Facilitate the harmonised implementation of the Protocol on Contingent Rights across CARICOM Member States.
- ▶ Support CARICOM Member States in standardising the implementation of the CASS to enhance the portability of social security benefits.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Enhance the financial inclusion of migrants to bolster their integration and contribution to economic development.
- ▶ Initiate and improve upon mechanisms for the portability of social security to aid labour migration outside of the region.

¹ [General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs. ILO, 2019.](#)

Strengthen the functions for regional labour migration and its impact on economic development

CARICOM Secretariat:

- ▶ Support and strengthen the harmonisation of educational standards and skills recognition across the region.
- ▶ Strengthen the Caribbean Vocation Qualification (CVQ) system to increase the number of CVQs that are issued.
- ▶ Facilitate the further standardisation and simplification of application and verification of Skills Certificates across the region and raise awareness on how this process works for CARICOM nationals.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Develop and align National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) with the CARICOM Qualification Framework (CQF).
- ▶ Increase formal channels for sending remittances and reducing the cost of sending remittances, including by developing new mechanisms, such as mobile money (Cerovic and Beaton, 2017).
- ▶ Create opportunities for the channelling of remittances into productive investments, such as small businesses, education, and vocational training.²

Improve labour market information for evidence-based labour migration governance

CARICOM Secretariat:

- ▶ Conduct a detailed stocktaking review of the availability of international labour migration statistics across the region. This should look at how statistics on stocks and flow of migrants are gathered and recorded; and develop a framework of minimum indicators, data sources and guidance for the systematic improvement in coverage of international labour migration statistics across Member States. In addition, the review ought to expand the minimum list of international labour migration statistics indicators in the CLMIS list of indicators; and facilitate regional workshops for knowledge sharing and capacity building on the systematic expansion of international labour migration statistics in CARICOM Member States.
- ▶ Conduct a stocktaking review of data sources of information on demand for labour, skills gaps and skills shortages across the region, and facilitate regional workshops for knowledge sharing and capacity building on alternative and effective approaches for measuring the demand for labour in CARICOM Member States, including web scraping of online job boards.
- ▶ Facilitate regional dialogue, including with social partners and education and TVET institutions, to provide qualitative insights into skills gaps per sector and to facilitate curriculum development to address these gaps at the regional level.
- ▶ Produce regular reports in collaboration with Member States that consolidate labour market developments and highlight trends and characteristics in the supply and demand for labour at the regional level, with a focus on key sectors, in particular health and education.
- ▶ Conduct research into the issuing of work permits to determine the degree to which it is driven by skill gaps, particularly to understand why there is a propensity to hire non-CARICOM nationals. It should examine the educational background of those being issued skills certificates against skills gaps across the CARICOM Member States. The research should seek to determine if the process of issuing work permits is preferred to using other free movement entry points.

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Ensure the delivery of timely and reliable data on the issuing of work permits, skills certificates, and other relevant information to the CARICOM Secretariat.
- ▶ Develop roadmaps for the improvement of international labour migration statistics, using a CARICOM framework of minimum indicators.
- ▶ Strengthen collaboration between national statistics offices and other ministries and agencies - including those dealing with immigration and labour issues - through a whole-of-government approach to assist with the processing of administrative data on international labour migration statistics.
- ▶ Establish sector skills councils to help with the identification of specific labour market issues per sector including labour shortages and skills gaps, and to strengthen collaboration between the private sector and education and training institutions.
- ▶ Explore opportunities for harvesting job posting information from private sector job boards to expand insights into demand for labour at national level.

Better understand the implications of climate-change for labour migration**CARICOM Secretariat:**

- ▶ Mainstream labour migration into regional climate and development strategies. This should include integrating labour migration issues into Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCC) Planning, the Regional Adaptation Strategy, and other regional initiatives.
- ▶ Establish an inter-agency task force on climate change and labour mobility³, including key regional institutions such as the CCCCC, the OECS Commission, along with the social partners and other national stakeholders and technical experts to help coordinate regional efforts on labour migration and climate change.
- ▶ Improve data and foresight tools on climate-related labour migration by establishing partnerships with institutions to strengthen data and foresights on climate-change related labour migration. This will help constituents and other stakeholders better understand anticipated displacement and labour migration outcomes, including potential labour reallocation across sectors. The production of climate-related scenarios would help both national and regional level planning.
- ▶ Climate-change related displacement and migration propels the need for CARICOM nationals to access labour markets in other CARICOM Member States and should therefore be incorporated into the regional labour migration policy framework. It doing this draw from relevant resources including the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition (ILO 2015).

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Convene tripartite regional consultations at the sectoral level to assess and address labour migration being driven by climate-change, particularly agriculture, tourism, construction and healthcare.
- ▶ Conduct sectoral assessments to gauge the potential impact of climate-change related risks on the labour market and its potential implications for labour migration, with a particular focus on agriculture, tourism, construction and healthcare.
- ▶ Facilitate sector skills councils for specific areas related to climate change mitigation to share information between the private sector and education and TVET institutions to ensure that curriculum and skills development respond to future skill needs being driven by adaptation to climate change.

³ For the purposes of this report, labour mobility is a looser term than labour migration and includes shorter-term movements for work, including business trips and work-related travel.

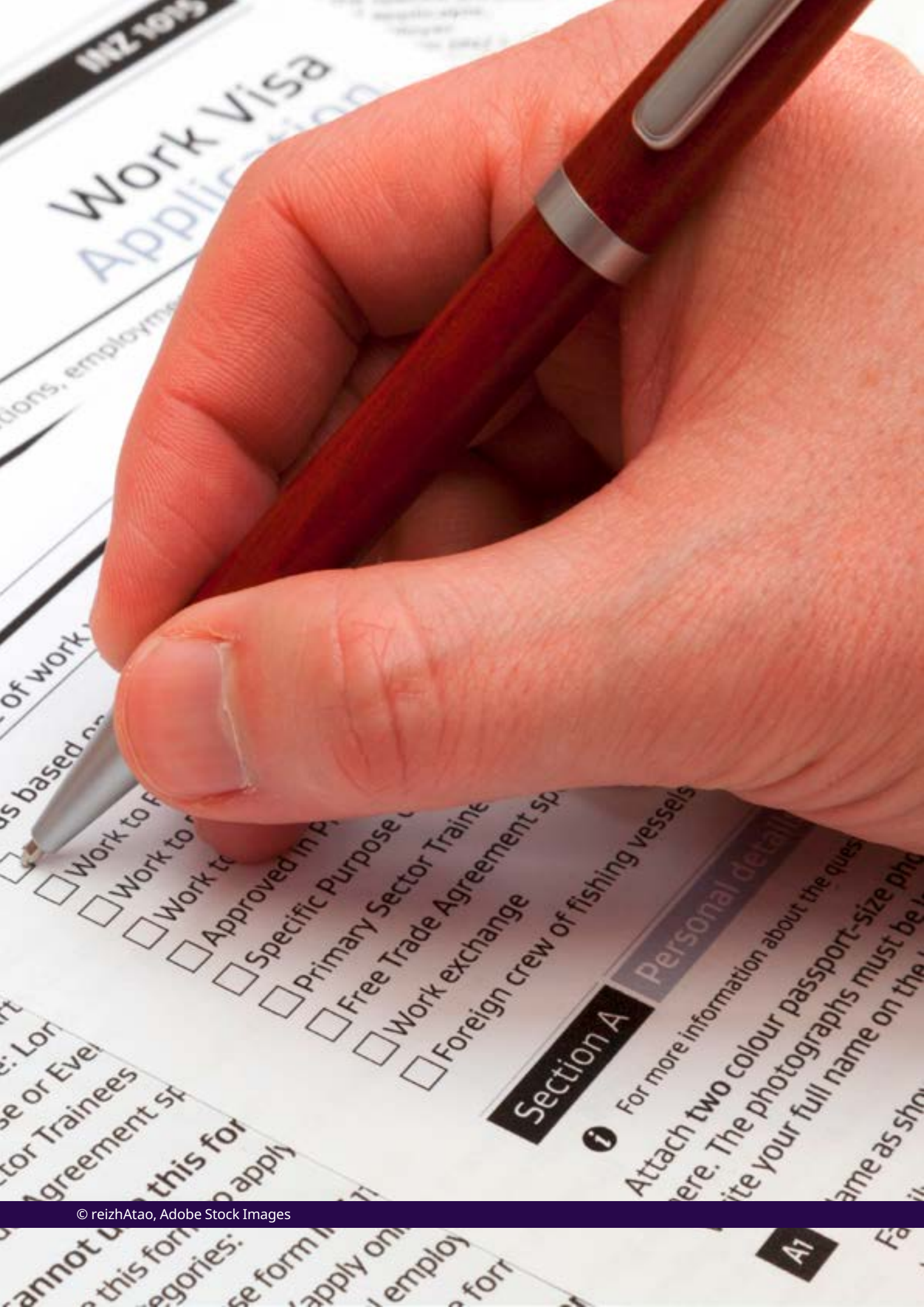
▶ 1. Introduction

The Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have called for the development of a regional migration policy. In 2023, with the backing of the United Nations (UN), discussions began on a whole-of-CARICOM Regional Approach to Migration Policy (RAMP). RAMP is designed to cover all aspects of migration, and in this vein, a CARICOM migration policy framework (CMPF) is being developed. Within this context, the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean was requested to develop a complementary Labour Migration Policy Framework, in collaboration with the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) that is aligned with – and expands upon – the labour components of the draft CMPF. Consequently, in collaboration with CSME, the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean commissioned this report “Free movement of persons in the CARICOM Region: a labour market analysis”, to support the development of the Regional Labour Migration Policy Framework.

This report is intended to provide a comprehensive and sweeping analysis of different economic, employment, and labour aspects of migration in the CARICOM Member States to help inform the policy. It has a particular focus on the impacts of climate change, labour mobility, and labour market governance in the region. The report is structured as follows:

- ▶ Section 2 provides an overview of the methodology, including the analytical framework, the data sources used, limitations and considerations, and concepts and definitions.
- ▶ Section 3 provides the context to free movement in the CARICOM region, including the regulatory structure of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), the characteristics of migration in the region, and socio-economic considerations.
- ▶ Section 4 provides an overview of the labour market in the region, using both regional estimates and national estimates of headline labour market variables. This includes data on labour force participation disaggregated by economic activity, occupational skill level and informality, and data on unemployment.
- ▶ Section 5 looks at the characteristics of labour migration in the region, drawing on data related to work permits and CSME skills certificates, as well as labour market characteristics of nationals versus CARICOM and non-CARICOM migrants.
- ▶ Section 6 provides a comprehensive review of labour migration governance in the region, including labour migration policies, skills recognition, and access to social security.
- ▶ Section 7 takes a more detailed examination of the impacts of climate change on the region, its impacts on migration, and different Member States’ readiness to respond to climate change.

Overall this report is intended to help identify potential opportunities, challenges and threats to enhancing productive employment at the national level, whilst contributing to regular labour mobility and economic integration across the CARICOM region. With this in mind, it provides strategic recommendations, within the framework of the CMPF, to help inform a CARICOM labour migration policy framework. The overall objective is to improve productive and decent employment opportunities for nationals and migrants in CARICOM Member States.



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▶ 2. Methodology

The labour market analysis was undertaken between January and July 2025. It consisted of three phases: i) an inception phase, ii) an implementation phase and iii) a validation and finalisation phase. The study was shaped around key research themes, namely: the supply and demand for labour in the CARICOM region; labour market governance; and climate change and environmental risk. These research themes and the inception report were presented at an online launch with representatives of CARICOM Member States on Tuesday 14 January 2025. The implementation phase that followed entailed desk research, analysis of data, and consultations with ILO constituents and other key stakeholders; while the validation and finalisation phase consisted of a validation workshop, revisions to the report, and further consultations.

The labour market analysis was overseen by a Project Steering Committee made up of CARICOM' CSME Unit, the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC), CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO), the University of West Indies (UWI) and the ILO. It was chaired by a CARICOM Secretariat representative. National liaison officers were identified from 12 of the 15 participating CARICOM Member States to help guide and validate the labour market analysis (No liaison Officers were nominated by The Bahamas, Haiti and Montserrat). It was prepared by Mr Richard Horne and Ms Emmerentia Erasmus on behalf of the consultancy firm Empstat Ltd.

2.1. Objectives of the study

The Terms of Reference for the study stipulated that it:

- ▶ Assess the economic, employment, labour, and migration dynamics in CARICOM Member States.
- ▶ Analyse the impacts of climate change on jobs, labour mobility, and productivity.
- ▶ Evaluate the supply of labour in the region by examining demographics, education, health, poverty, and employment conditions (including informal work, underemployment, and working poor), all disaggregated by sex, age, occupation, and education.
- ▶ Evaluate the demand for labour by assessing economic growth, skills demand (current and future) and identifying sectors with potential for green and inclusive job creation.
- ▶ Assess equity and inclusion in labour market outcomes and access to education, health, finance, and decent work, particularly for women and migrants.
- ▶ Review institutional and policy frameworks, including national development plans, labour mobility policies, and governance structures.
- ▶ Map regional mobility arrangements, especially the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) free movement mechanisms and barriers.
- ▶ Identify key challenges and opportunities to enhance productive employment and regular labour mobility.
- ▶ Propose strategic recommendations to improve decent employment and integration into the labour market for both nationals and migrants in line with CARICOM's regional migration and labour mobility frameworks.

2.2. Research themes

Based on the objectives and the terms of reference, three main themes were identified and formed the basis of the methodological framework. These are summarised below:

- **Supply and demand for labour in the CARICOM region:** The supply side refers to the characteristics of the labour force and employment in the region, with special attention to CARICOM nationals versus nationals of individual Member States. On the demand side, it refers to the demand for labour and job creation, hence, a focus on sources of economic growth, key growth sectors and where possible, future skills' demand.
- **Labour market governance:** This refers to the regulatory environment, including labour market policies, migration policies and labour migration policies. Where feasible, other policies and regulation were examined in assessing the labour market access of CARICOM migrants versus nationals. The status and scope of labour market information to contribute to informed policymaking was also considered.
- **Climate change and environmental risk:** There is a special focus on the implications of the region's unique exposure and vulnerability to climate-change and environmental risk on labour markets and labour mobility.

2.3. Methodological framework

The assignment was conducted through stakeholder consultation; and through desk research and secondary analysis of available statistics, published materials, and legal and policy legislation. Table 1 summarises the primary and supporting data sources for each of the research themes.

► **Table 2.1: Summary of main sources of information for each research theme**

Research theme	Main information source	Supporting information source
Labour market supply and demand in the CARICOM region		
Labour force and employment characteristics	National statistics	Secondary statistics
Labour migration characteristics	National statistics	Stakeholder interviews
Labour market governance		
Regulatory environment, including labour market policies and migration initiatives	Review of materials	Stakeholder consultations
Climate change and environmental risk		
Exposure and vulnerability to climate-change	Secondary statistics	Stakeholder consultations
Implications for labour markets and labour mobility	Stakeholder consultations	Secondary statistics

2.3.1. Labour migration governance analytical framework

The analytical framework for the labour migration governance component of the report (Section 6) is structured around International Labour Standards on labour migration. These are outlined in the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration: Non-binding principles and guidelines for a rights-based

approach to labour migration (ILO 2006), as well as the ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment (ILO 2019) (see Appendix II for reference points in these documents). Moreover, the Resolutions and conclusion concerning fair and effective labour migration governance, adopted at the 2017 International Labour Conference, also provide guidance on effective labour migration governance (ILO 2017b).

The analytical framework has three pillars. Each is central to effective labour migration governance and to reinforcing the developmental impact of labour migration in the CARICOM region. Each pillar contains sub-components that contribute to the respective pillar.

The three pillars and their thematic areas are:

Pillar I. Strengthening labour migration governance mechanisms

- 1.1 Coordination of labour migration at national and regional levels
- 1.2 Standards that inform policy development
- 1.3 Policy development and implementation
- 1.4 Policy Coherence

Pillar II. Enhancing the protection and integration of migrant workers and their families

- 2.1 Fair Recruitment and the protection of migrant workers' rights
- 2.2 National labour laws and social protection laws apply to migrant workers
- 2.3. Family reunification, and access to employment for family members and education for children

Pillar III. Supporting functions for participation in the labour market

- 3.1 Skills recognition
- 3.3 Access to Finance
- 3.3 Facilitating remittances
- 3.4 Portability of Social Security benefits

The labour migration governance assessment provides an overview of how the region is faring in terms of each thematic area. Each thematic area contains examples from CARICOM Member States and presents key findings and recommendations. Data was gathered through desk research, and through interviews and questionnaires with constituents and other stakeholders in CARICOM Member States. As more data was available in some Member States than others, these are more extensively covered in this assessment.

2.4. Data sources

2.4.1. National statistics

A preliminary mapping of national data sources with available microdata is provided in Table 2.2, and a longer list is provided in Appendix I. While many of the national data sources were accompanied by published reports, the necessary breakdowns of data was not always available. Access to the microdata

via the ILO Microdata Repository (ILO 2024d) allowed for some additional analysis where this was not available in published reports.

The preliminary mapping showed that estimates were available for all CARICOM Member States, thereby allowing some degree of labour market analysis of key variables for all Member States, including labour force participation rates and employment characteristics. However, for some Member States the data is outdated, including Dominica (2001), Saint Kitts and Nevis (2001), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2008), Haiti (2012) and Suriname (2016). For these countries in particular, assistance from the national liaison officers from ministries with responsibility for labour, the social partners and other relevant stakeholders to access newer and alternative data was appreciated, particularly for information on labour migration statistics (see Section 2.4.2).

The second point to note is that not all these datasets include data on citizenship or place of birth, making it difficult to conduct an analysis of CARICOM nationals versus nationals of other Member States. Furthermore, due to the small population sizes of many of the CARICOM Member States, in many cases the numbers of observations when conducting microdata analysis were too small to be reliable. As such, the information in the fourth column about migration status in Table 2.2 is only indicative.

► **Table 2.2: Overview of available national data sources and latest year of data available**

Country or territory	Data source	Latest year	Migration status
Antigua and Barbuda	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023	Included
Bahamas	LFS - Labour Force & Household Survey	2023	Included
Barbados	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023	Included
Belize	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2020	Included
Dominica	PC - Population Census	2001	Not included
Grenada	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023	Included
Guyana	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2021	Included
Haiti	HIES - Households Living Conditions Survey	2012	Included
Jamaica	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023	Not included
Montserrat	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2020	Included
Saint Kitts and Nevis	PC - Population Census	2001	Not included
Saint Lucia	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023	Included
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	OE - Official Estimates	2008	Not included
Suriname	HIES - Survey on Living Conditions	2016	Included
Trinidad and Tobago	LFS - Continuous Sample Survey of the Population	2023	Included

Note: Mapping is based on data consolidated in the ILOSTAT database.

2.4.2. ILO Microdata Repository

The ILO processes microdata from labour force surveys, household income and expenditure surveys and other employment-related datasets from different countries. This data is housed in the ILO Microdata Repository. The Microdata repository contains metadata, survey questionnaires and datasets, which includes variables coded in alignment with international statistical standards. Access to the ILO Microdata Repository allowed the consultant to analyse specific breakdowns that were not available in publicly disseminated reports, particularly in respect of identifying migrant workers according to their countries of origin. This facilitated the identification of nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals in different CARICOM Member States. This data was imperative for building an insight into the labour market characteristics of CARICOM migrant workers in the region. Data sources used for the comparison of nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals are outlined in Table 2.3.

► **Table 2.3: Data sources for comparison of labour market characteristics of nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals**

Country or territory	Data source	Year
Antigua and Barbuda	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023
Barbados	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2021
Grenada	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023
Guyana	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2021
Montserrat	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2020
Saint Lucia	LFS - Labour Force Survey	2023
Suriname	HIES - Survey on Living Conditions	2016
Trinidad and Tobago	LFS - Continuous Sample Survey of the Population	2023

2.4.3. Regional modelled estimates

The labour market analysis presents both national data and regional averages where available. The ILO produces estimates of selected labour market indicators globally for all countries in the world above a certain population threshold (ILO modelled estimates). This allows for a custom regional average (CARICOM) for selected labour market variables. Not all CARICOM Member States had data available; hence the regional averages are based on the following CARICOM Member States:

- **The Bahamas**
- Barbados
- Belize
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Jamaica
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Suriname
- Trinidad and Tobago

Regional averages are population weighted. However, as Haiti accounts for such a large share of the total population, the regional average is presented both with and without Haiti.

2.4.4. Mapping of stakeholders and key informants

Regional and national-level constituents and stakeholders were identified for consultation as part of the study. National-level stakeholders were identified predominantly through the national liaison officers from respective CARICOM Member States' ministries with responsibility for labour. The national liaison officers also managed the engagement with these stakeholders. Regional-level constituents and stakeholders were identified in the inception phase of the assignment. Owing to the large number of stakeholders and the limited timeframe, a questionnaire was developed and shared (Annexes I and II). A summary of the constituents and stakeholders is provided below, and a full list of those that provided inputs through the consultation process is available in Appendix I:

Key regional institutions:

- ▶ CARICOM Secretariat: CARICOM Single Market and Trade Directorate's CSME Unit, and the Human and Social Development Directorate and Regional Statistics Programme (RSP)
- ▶ University of West Indies (UWI)

CARICOM Member States:

- ▶ Key informants from each CARICOM Member State were consulted as part of this assignment. They fulfilled different capacities and were identified based on criteria shared with national liaison officers. These include:
 - ▶ Ministries with responsibility for labour and human resources
 - ▶ Public employment agencies and placement organisations
 - ▶ National Statistics Offices
 - ▶ Ministries of Home Affairs

Employers and workers' organisations:

- ▶ While national employers' and workers' organisations were consulted at the national level, regional organisations were also consulted, namely:
 - ▶ Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL)
 - ▶ Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC)
 - ▶ CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO)

Technical and regional experts:

- ▶ Technical experts for the region include international organisations, academia, and others who have worked extensively with CARICOM and CSME on free movement and the design of labour migration policies and frameworks, namely:
 - ▶ International Labour Organization (ILO)
 - ▶ International Office for Migration (IOM)

2.4.5. Mapping of relevant resources

As part of the inception phase, a preliminary mapping of relevant resources was conducted. This was limited to reports published since 2010 and is not considered an exhaustive list. Cited reports are listed in the References and referenced throughout the report. (Caribbean Community, n.d.; 2019a; 2019b; CSME 2015; 2016) (CSME 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; European Commission, n.d.) (ILO 2017a; IMPACS, n.d.; IOM 2017; 2018; 2019) (CSME 2021; 2023; Lacarte et al. 2023; Longhurst and Gouretskaia 2021; Mortley and Lunt 2022; OECS 2016a; 2016b)

2.5. Limitations and considerations

This report draws upon information from different sources, including preexisting quantitative and qualitative data combined new qualitative data from stakeholder consultations. The report has added value in the form of new data on regional averages, new analysis on labour market characteristics of nationals versus CARICOM and non-CARICOM migrants, and new information from constituent and stakeholder consultations.

Despite this, there are some limitations and considerations. In terms of quantitative data, one limitation is the fact that the main source of national data stems from ILOSTAT. While this complies with international standard definitions and concepts, at times it may differ from what is in official national statistics, and occasionally does not reflect the most recent data available at the national level. Secondly, the report gives regional estimates, but this is only based on the Member States for which a data is available (see Section 2.4). Finally, the report uses national data sources, which at times are out of date (see Section 2.4).

Finally, the labour migration governance section draws heavily on consultations with constituents and other stakeholders. While this is supplemented by existing literature on the topic, the consultation process was based on questionnaires and interviews. There were varied response rates to the consultation process (see Appendix I), which means that for some CARICOM Member States, there might be missing references to relevant information. All efforts have been undertaken to minimise this and provide constituents and other stakeholders from Member States with the opportunity to help fill gaps and address inaccuracies, including through the review and validation process. Accordingly, the report does not claim to be an exhaustive review of labour migration governance at the national level, but rather a review at the national level to help glean regional insights.

2.6. Concepts and definitions

2.6.1. Statistical concepts and definitions

The following concepts and definitions are used in international labour migration statistics, in line with the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) Guidelines Concerning Statistics of International Labour Migration (ILO 2018b). Those provided below are a selection related to the main categories of labour migration statistics analysed in this report.⁴

Place of birth: This refers to the country of birth and distinguishes a country's native-born population from the foreign-born.

Country of destination: An emigrant's country of destination is the country, other than his country of citizenship, to which that person transfers his or her usual residence.

Foreign-born population: For a given country, comprises all individuals born outside the country.

Stock of international migrants (foreign-born or foreign citizens): For a given country, refers to the number of foreign-born individuals or foreign citizens in a country at a given period of time.

Inflow of international migrants (foreign-born or foreign-citizens): Depending on the criterion used to define international migration, the inflow of international migrants includes either foreign-born individuals or foreign-citizens who moved to the country during the reference period to establish usual residence there.

⁴ For a detailed and comprehensive list of all international labour migration statistics concepts and definitions, including labour market concepts, please consult the ILOSTAT [Guide to reporting International Labour Migration Statistics to the ILO using the Excel questionnaire](#) (ILO, 2021).

Inflow of nationals returned from abroad (returnees): Refers to the number of citizens who return from a period of residence abroad to live again in their country of citizenship during the reference period.

Outflow of nationals: For a given country, refers to the number of its citizens who left their country of citizenship to establish usual residence in another country during a given period of time.

Outflow of nationals for employment: The outflow of nationals for employment includes only the citizens who left their country for employment purposes, or the “for work” emigrants. This group therefore excludes accompanying family members whose purpose of migration was not employment at the time of entry.

Stock of nationals abroad: For a given country, refers to the number of its citizens who have their usual residence in another country at a given period of time.

2.6.2. Glossary of terms

The following glossary of terms are drawn from the Regional glossary for the harmonization of free movement of persons and migration data in CARICOM (CSME 2024).

CARICOM: "CARICOM" means the Caribbean Community, including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy established under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, signed in The Bahamas on 5 July 2001.

CARICOM citizen / national: a person shall be regarded as a national of a Member State if such person – (i) is a citizen of that State; (ii) has a connection with that State of a kind which entitles him to be regarded as belonging to or, if it be so expressed, as being a native or resident of the State for the purposes of the laws thereof relating to immigration; or (iii) is a company or other legal entity constituted in the Member State in conformity with the laws thereof and which that State regards as belonging to it, provided that such company or other legal entity has been formed for gainful purposes and has its registered office and central administration, and carries on substantial activity, within the Community and which is substantially owned and effectively controlled by persons mentioned in subparagraphs (i) and (ii) of this paragraph.

CARICOM Member State: “Member State” means a Member State of the Community excluding an Associate Member within the meaning of Article 231; “Member” means a Member of CARICOM within the meaning of Article 3 of the Revised Treaty but does not include an Associate Member within the meaning of Article 231 of the Revised Treaty; Associate Membership – Conference may admit any Caribbean State or Territory to associate membership of the Community on such terms and conditions as Conference thinks fit.

CSME: The regime established by the provisions of this Treaty replacing Chapters Three through Seven of the Annex to the Treaty Establishing the Caribbean Community and Common Market signed at Chaguaramas on 4 July 1973.

Climate migrant: A person who moves predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border

Contingent rights: Rights to which a CARICOM national and his or her spouse and immediate dependants are entitled, contingent on the exercise by the principal beneficiary of the right of establishment, provision of services, movement of capital or free movement of skills.

Emigrant: From the perspective of the country of departure, a person who moves from his or her country of nationality or usual residence to another country, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.

Foreign national: A person in a State of which he or she is not a citizen or national of a CARICOM Member State.

Immigrant: From the perspective of the country of arrival, a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.

Irregular entry / Irregular migrant (migrant in irregular situation as defined here): The act of crossing borders without complying with all the legal and administrative requirements for entry into the State. Source: Adapted from Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Labour migrant / migrant worker: A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

Migrant: An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

Work permit: A legal document issued by a competent authority of a State authorizing a migrant worker to be employed in the country of destination during the period of validity of the permit.



► 3. The context of free movement in CARICOM

This section provides an overview of the regulatory context of free movement and migration in CARICOM, as well as an overview of the socio-economic characteristics of the region. It provides context for the main body of the report, which is focused on labour market and labour migration. It should be noted that the focus of this report is on the 15 CARICOM Member States and not associate members.

3.1. Regulatory context of free movement in CARICOM

The Treaty of Chaguaramas established CARICOM in 1973. With the 1989 Grand Anse Declaration and Work Programme for the Advancement of the Integration Movement, the first steps were taken towards free movement in the CARICOM region (Aragón and Mawby 2019). From this point onwards the Conference of Heads of CARICOM began adopting Declarations that allowed for the free movement of certain groups of skilled CARICOM nationals (Acosta and Baaren 2024).

The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas was adopted in 2001 and sought to create the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), which was finally established in 2006 (Aragón and Mawby 2019). The CSME aims to deepen regional integration and remove barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and persons in the Community (Acosta and Baaren 2024; Aragón and Mawby 2019; CARICOM, n.d.-b). In Article 45 of the Revised Treaty, Member States committed to the goal of free movement of their nationals within the Community. The Bahamas did not sign onto these commitments and is not participating in the CSME or freedom of movement within CARICOM (CARICOM 2017, page 6). Haiti, a full Member State of the CSME since it has ratified the Revised Treaty (Acosta and Baaren 2024), does not have the institutional and administrative arrangements in place to facilitate the free movement of CARICOM nationals, but, as it has ratified the Treaty, Haitian citizens are entitled to six months stay upon arrival in CARICOM Member States (Acosta and Baaren 2024).

At the 49th Heads of Government Meeting held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in July 2025, the conference authorised Barbados, Belize, Dominica, and St Vincent and the Grenadines, to, among themselves, grant their nationals the right to enter, leave and re-enter, move freely, reside, work and remain indefinitely without the need for a work or residency permit. Their nationals will also be able to access emergency and primary health care, and public primary and secondary education, in the receiving Member State. The participating Member States agreed to undertake the required legislative, security and administrative measures to support the free movement of their nationals and that free movement among them would commence on 1 October 2025 (CARICOM 2025a).

Within the CARICOM region lies the Eastern Caribbean Economic Union (ECEU), which was established by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 2010 through the Revised Treaty of Basseterre (OECS 2023a). The ECEU allows for free movement of OECS nationals within the seven Protocol Member States: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. All of Member States are part of CARICOM, and this has implications for analysis and interpretation of trends within the region, the formulation of a CARICOM regional labour migration policy framework, and labour migration governance assessments of the region.

3.1.1. Facilitation of travel

Under CARICOM's facilitation of travel rules, entry visas are abolished for CARICOM nationals. All CARICOM nationals have the right to enter other CARICOM Member States and are granted a six

month stay upon arrival. Member States, however, retain the right to refuse entry to undesirable persons, such as a person deemed to be a threat to national security, public morals, or public safety and health. And they can also deny entry to a person that may become a burden on the host Member State and will need to be sustained by public funds (CARICOM 2017, page 12). CARICOM nationals who are refused entry may request a review of the decision by administrative and judicial means, or by using the CARICOM Complaint Procedure.

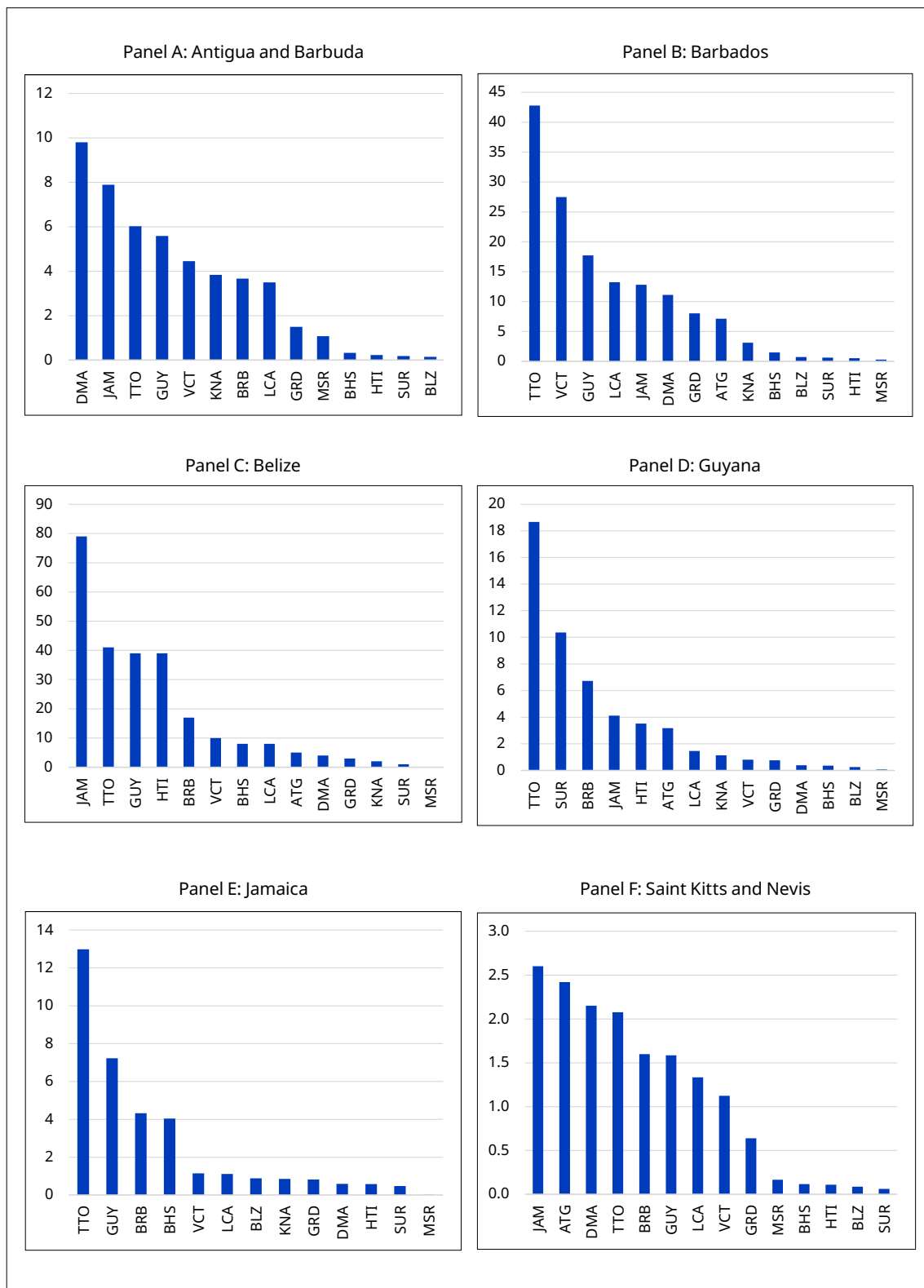
The six-months stay in a CARICOM Member States does not entitle a CARICOM national to the right to work or provide services. To enjoy such rights the required procedures need to be followed with the respective authorities (Aragón and Mawby 2019), as specified below.

[all] CARICOM Nationals should receive a definite entry of six months upon arrival in a Member State in order to enhance their sense that they belong to, and can move in the Caribbean Community, subject to the rights of Member States to refuse undesirable persons entry and to prevent persons from becoming a charge on public funds." Entry to CARICOM Member States is facilitated through designated immigration lines for 'Citizens, Residents and CARICOM Nationals'.⁵ Travel is further eased through the use of CARICOM passports. A CARICOM passport is a national passport which follows the prescribed CARICOM format and displays the CARICOM logo and the words 'Caribbean Community' on its cover and can be used for travel within and outside of the CARICOM region. Twelve Member States issue the CARICOM passport, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. The CARICOM passport is also designed to instil a sense of regional identity (CARICOM 2017, page 13).

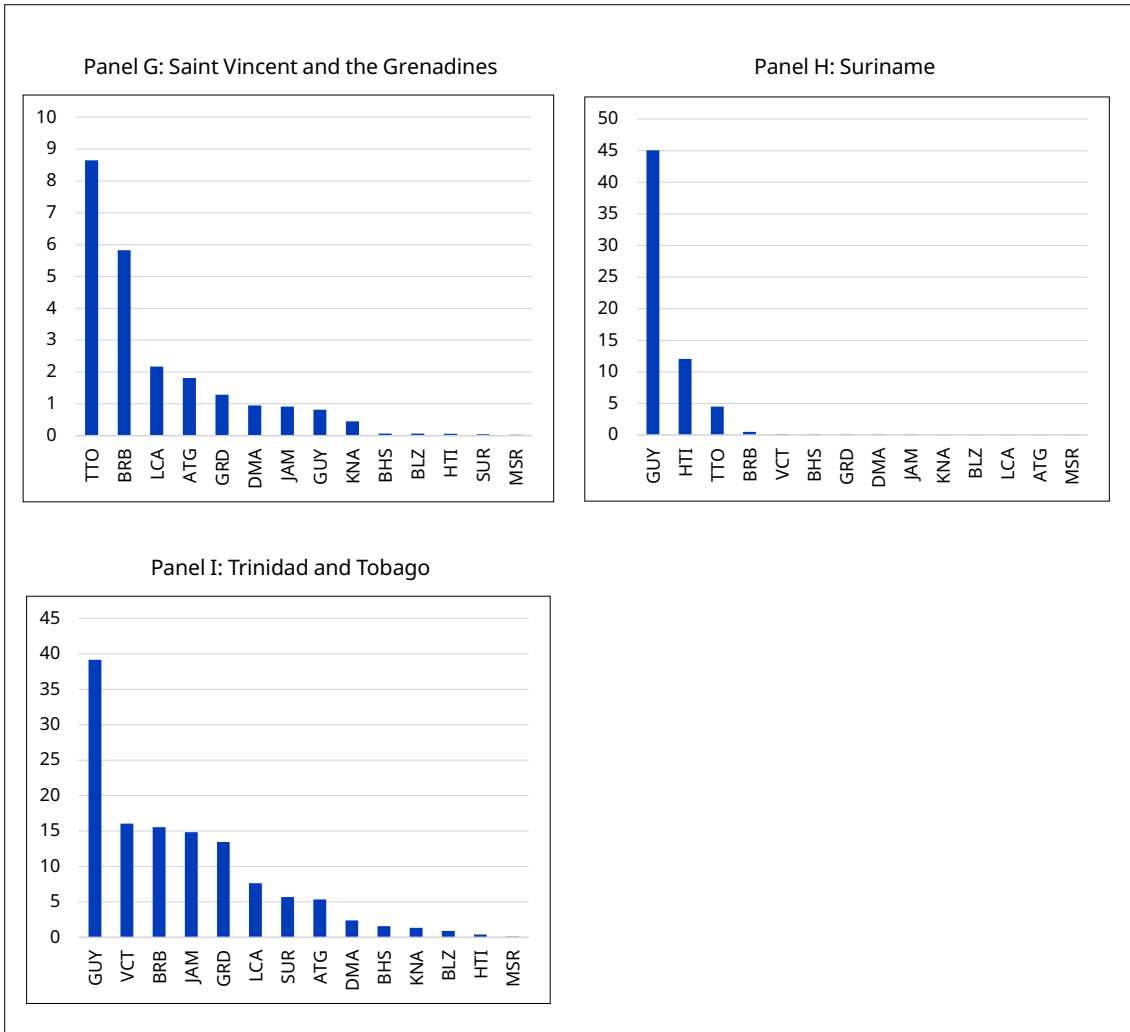
Figure 3.1 provides an illustration of movements between CARICOM Member States based on CSME Unit data. This does not necessarily represent movements for work or residence, but provides an insight into the main travel routes used by nationals of CARICOM Member States within the region. It shows the different CARICOM Member States denoted by different colour and uses the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 3166-1 alpha-3 country code, to show the size of travel movements between Member States. It reveals that the major origin Member States were Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana (based on absolute numbers), whereas Barbados was a major recipient of nationals from all other CARICOM Member States.

⁵ Wording from the agreement made at the 28th Meeting of the Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community.

► Figure 3.1: Composition of CARICOM arrivals per Member State, 2017 (1,000s)



► **Figure 3.1: Composition of CARICOM arrivals per Member State, 2017 (1,000s)** (Continued)



Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. CARICOM arrivals.

3.1.2. Movement of skilled nationals

Certain categories of skilled CARICOM nationals are allowed to seek employment in CSME participating Member States without a work permit (CARICOM 2017, page 20). There are 12 established categories of skilled nationals, namely: university graduates; artists; musicians; sports persons; media workers; nurses; teachers; artisans with a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ); holders of Associate Degrees or comparable qualifications; domestic workers; agricultural workers and private security officers. At the 49th Heads of Government Meeting held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in July 2025, Aviation Personnel was added as the 13th category of Skilled Nationals. However, at the time of writing (December 2025) the COHSOD has yet to meet to decide on the qualification criteria for Aviation Personnel. Once this is done, their recommendations will be finalised by the Conference (CARICOM 2025a).

Skilled nationals who wish to seek wage earning employment in CSME participating Member States can apply for a CARICOM Skills Certificate from the competent authority in a CSME participating Member State. This skills certificate proves to the receiving Member States that the applicant meets the criteria

for the movement of skilled nationals (CARICOM 2017, page 20).⁶ Receiving Member States have the right to verify skills certificates and the documents upon which it is based. A CARICOM national may work in the receiving Member State while the skills certificate is being verified, and apply for indefinite stay once the skills certificate has been verified (CARICOM 2017, pages 34-35). The validity of the skills certificate is indefinite, and the recipient is expected to work in the field for which they applied (CARICOM 2017, pages 34-35).

3.1.3. Right of establishment

The Right of Establishment refers to the right of CARICOM nationals to set up a business in the CSME. This includes the right to engage in non-wage-earning activities of a commercial, industrial, agricultural, professional or artisanal nature. It also includes the right to build and manage businesses, which produce or trade in goods, or provide services that are owned or controlled by a CARICOM national (CARICOM 2017, pages 36-37).

Companies may submit a request to the competent authorities to bring in managerial, supervisory, and technical staff for their business. The free movement of such staff is tied to their employer and the duration of their employment contract (CARICOM 2017, page 37).

3.1.4. Provision of services

The right of CARICOM nationals to provide services includes the right to:

- Provide services from their country to consumers in other CARICOM Member States
- Provide services in their country to consumers of other CARICOM Member States
- Establish a commercial presence in another Member State
- Move themselves or their staff temporarily to another Member State to provide services.⁷

Services can be provided by a self-employed individual who receives compensation other than wages in any approved sector, or by a business. To temporarily provide services in another Member State, a self-employed person needs to register as a service provider in the Member State where they reside and work. Once they are registered, they will be issued with a certificate that is valid indefinitely and which facilitates entry to other Member States (CARICOM 2017, page 40).

3.1.5. Moving towards the full free movement of persons

CARICOM has progressively allowed for the free movement of nationals in 12 categories of skills, and in July 2023 it decided to work towards the free movement of all CARICOM nationals by the end of March 2024 (Acosta and Baaren 2024). While this deadline was not met, it was decided to work towards the full free movement of persons through the implementation of the *Protocol to amend the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy to allow enhanced cooperation among Member States and to address related Issues*. With the signatures of all parties to the Revised Treaty, the Protocol is being provisionally applied. The Protocol allows for

⁶ This is not to say that the skill levels and other characteristics of the worker are of equal measure if they hold the same category of skills certificate, and stakeholder consultations undertaken as part of this labour market analysis did highlight that there remained preferences and prejudices around holders of the same skills certificate.

⁷ Information provided during a presentation by CARICOM Secretariat (CARICOM Secretariat 2025).

variable application whereby Member States who are ready to implement full free movement may commence with the implementation of full free movement between themselves. A minimum of three Member States need to indicate their readiness to implement full free movement under the Protocol to be initiated. Moreover, they need to agree the procedures for the implementation among themselves.⁸

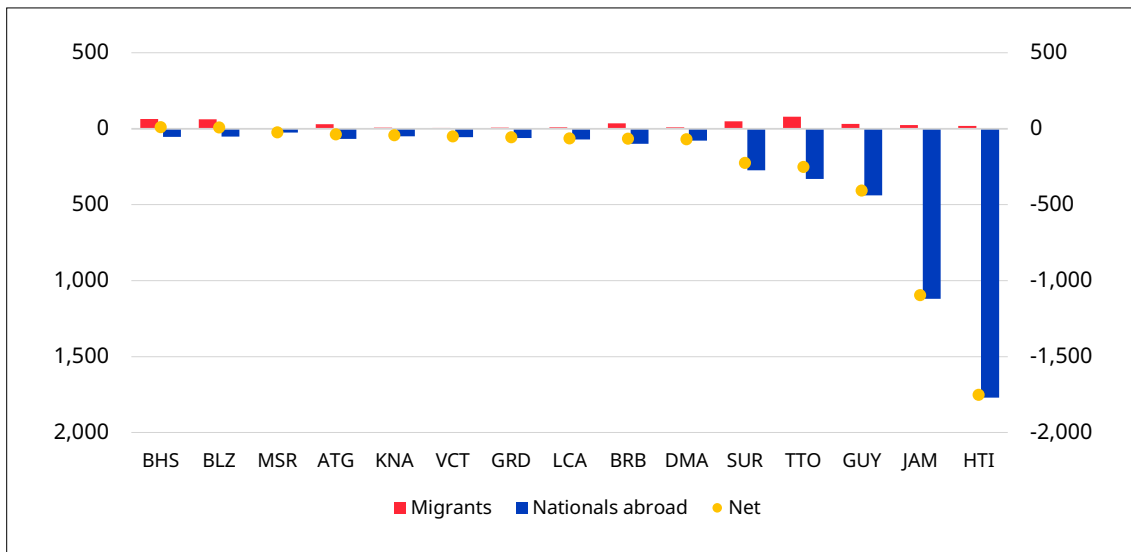
3.2. The Characteristics of Migration in CARICOM

The stock of international migrants represents the number of migrants in a country or territory at a given time. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) produces estimates of the stock of international migrants by country of origin and destination for the whole population (aged 0+). This section provides an overview of characteristics of migration in the region.

3.2.1. International migrant stock

Figure 3.2 shows the stock of migrants from all countries of origin within the country or territory and the stock of nationals abroad. This allows for the net migration rate to be calculated (as depicted by the red dot). It shows that CARICOM Member States are largely net-outward migrating nations - only the Bahamas and Belize are net-inward migrating countries. And Haiti and Jamaica in particular have significant stocks of migrants abroad.

► **Figure 3.2: International migrant stock, CARICOM Member States, 2023 (thousands)**

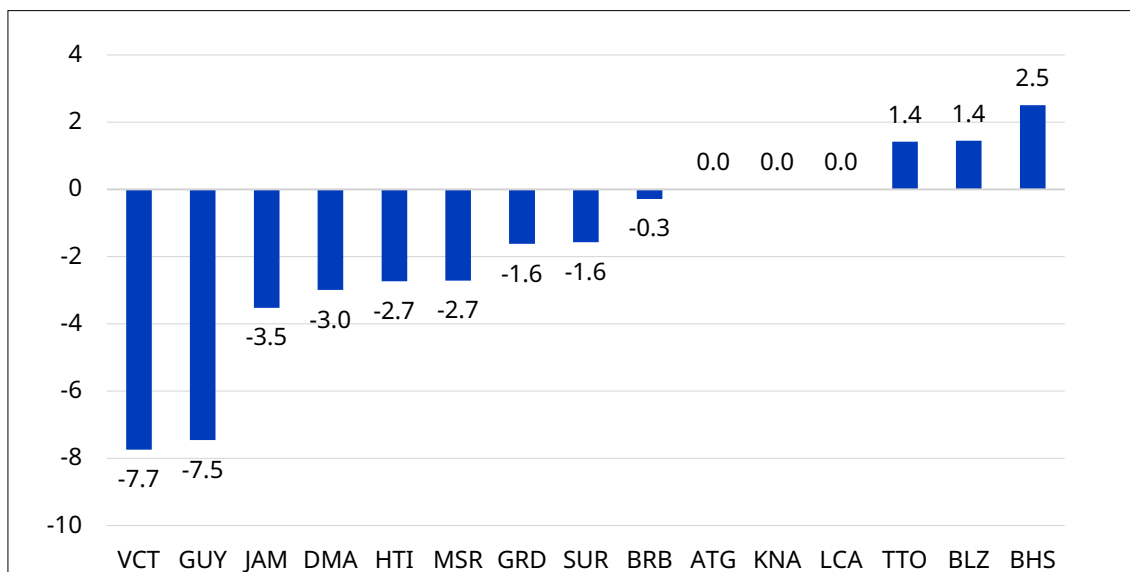


Source: UN World Migration, 2024

⁸ Consultation with CARICOM Secretariat representative.

Figure 3.3 shows net migration rates (per 1,000 population) for CARICOM Member States. The metric takes the size of the population into account and therefore reflects migration relative to the population. It shows that the greatest emigration rates are observed for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, at 7.7, followed by Guyana at 7.5, and Jamaica at 3.5 per cent. Haiti, despite having the greatest absolute numbers of net emigrants, only registers 2.7 emigrants per 1,000 of the population.

► **Figure 3.3: Net migration rates, CARICOM Member States, 2023 (per 1,000 population)**

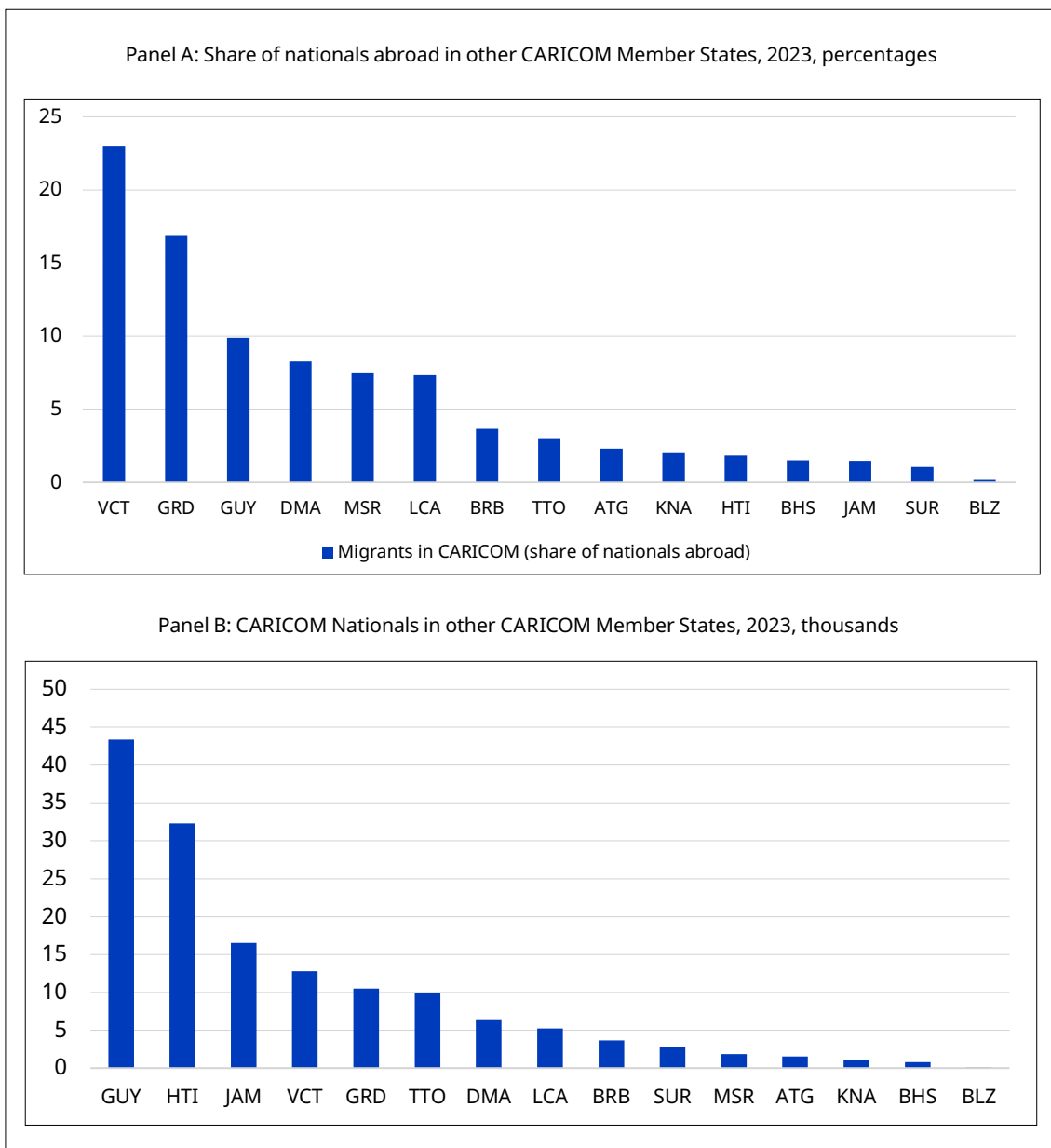


Source: UN World Migration, 2024

3.2.2. Intra-CARICOM migration

Figure 3.4, Panel A shows migration within the CARICOM region by illustrating the share of nationals abroad for each CARICOM Member State, who remain within the CARICOM region. It is important to remember that for all CARICOM Member States, the majority of outward migrants leave the CARICOM region. Only in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, are more than 10 per cent of all nationals abroad located in other CARICOM Member States. It should be noted that these numbers reflect the percentage share of all nationals abroad and does not reflect the absolute numbers or the size of the population. For absolute numbers, see Figure 3.4, Panel B. For instance, 1.5 per cent of Jamaican nationals abroad is equivalent to 16,500 people, whereas 23 per cent of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' nationals is equivalent to 12,800 people (Figure 3.4, Panel B).

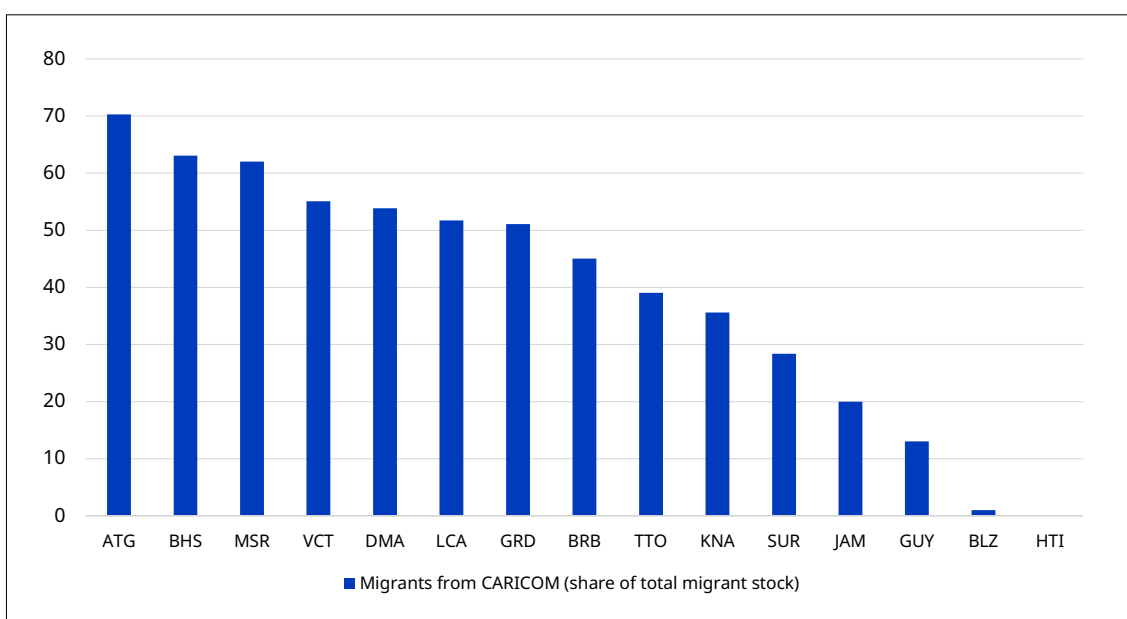
► **Figure 3.4: Nationals abroad in other CARICOM Member States, 2023**



Source: UN World Migration, 2024

Figure 3.5 shows the share of migrants in each CARICOM Member State from other CARICOM Member States. In Antigua and Barbuda for instance, 70 per cent of migrants are from other CARICOM Member States. In the case of Antigua and Barbuda many of these will be from OECS Member States, taking advantage of free movement. For many CARICOM Member States, the majority of migrants are not from the CARICOM region, for instance, in Haiti and Belize almost all are non-CARICOM. In Guyana, the figure stands at 13 per cent. However, with the recent economic boom in Guyana, there is potential for the composition of migrants to shift if CARICOM facilitates the movement of skilled workers to address skill needs and gaps in the country. At present, around three quarters of migrants in Guyana are from Venezuela. Many migrants from Venezuela and Haiti are considered to be vulnerable populations, and in Haiti’s case, many are forcibly repatriated (IOM 2025). For instance, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)’s Forced Returns Dashboard identified around 16,000 Haitians who were forced to return to Haiti from the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean between January 2021 and December 2024, of which half were repatriated from The Bahamas (IOM 2025). A survey of the Haitian migrants forcibly returned from The Bahamas, found that 75 per cent had left Haiti in search of better job opportunities abroad, while 25 per cent cited other reasons, including better basic services (21 per cent), family reunification, education, and violence/insecurity (<5 per cent, respectively) (IOM 2025).

► **Figure 3.5: Share of migrants from other CARICOM Member States, 2023 (%)**

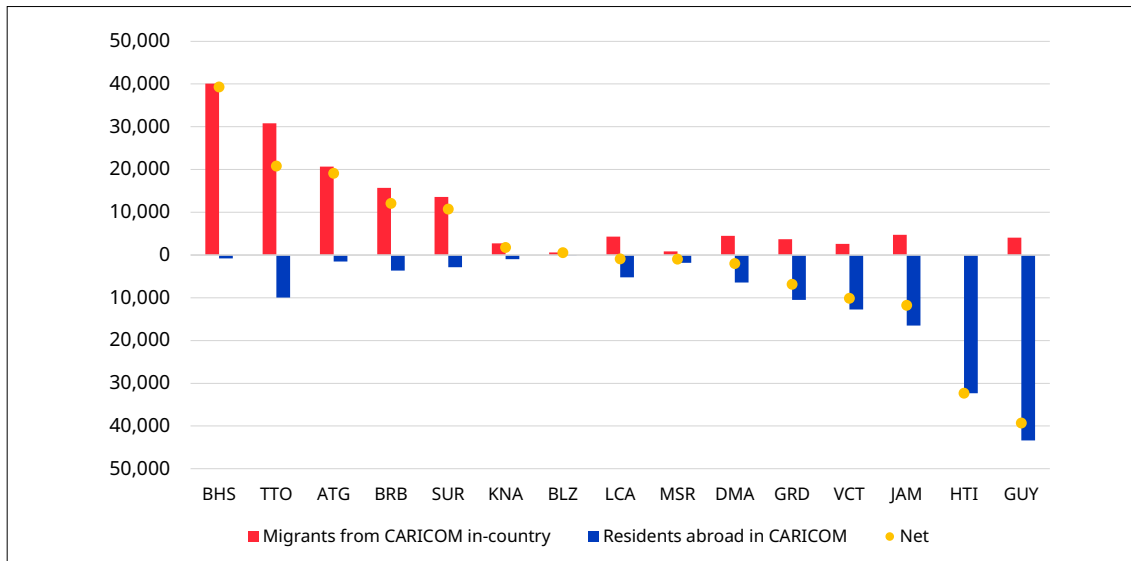


Source: UN World Migration, 2024

Looking only at the net migration to and from the CARICOM region, there are clearly Member States that are countries of destination for migrants (Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica), and those that are net-receiving Member States (The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago) (Figure 3.6). In general, these movements are characterised by economic differences, with higher income Member States such as The Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados being net-receiving countries, while Haiti, Jamaica and Guyana are net senders. As mentioned above, the situation for Guyana is likely to change over the coming years, albeit this depends on how Guyana is able to fill labour gaps with CARICOM nationals as opposed to other countries in Latin America.

The “CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and Eastern Caribbean Economic Union (ECEU) fundamentally shape how individuals move throughout the region.” (IOM 2019). On top of this, free movement within OECS Member States is also pertinent. For instance, Antigua and Barbuda well as Saint Kitts and Nevis are net receivers from other OECS Member States, whereas Dominica, Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are net senders.

► **Figure 3.6: Net migration to and from CARICOM Member States, 2023**

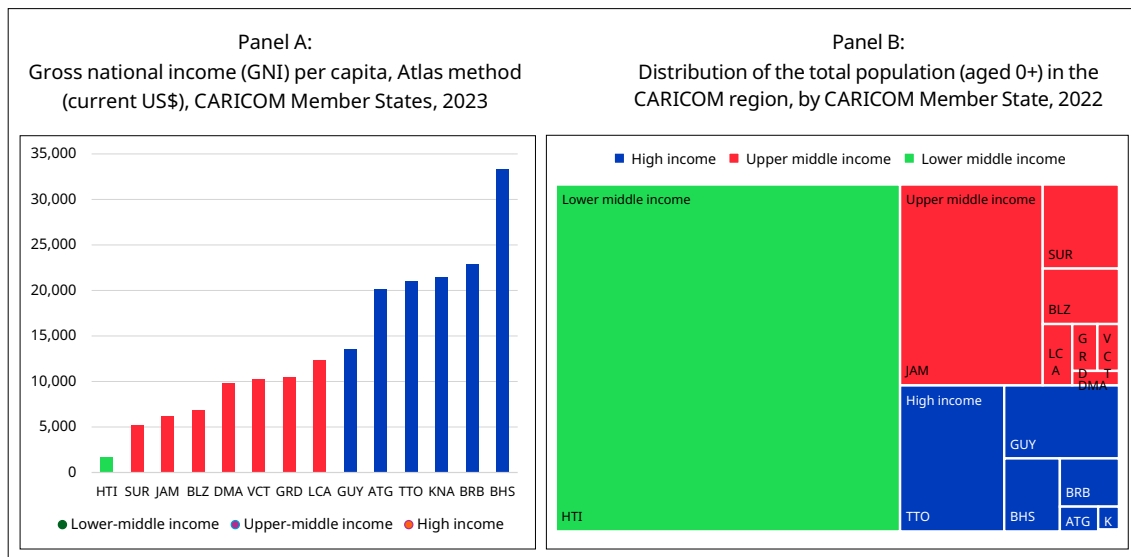


Source: UN World Migration, 2024

3.3. Socio-economic context in CARICOM

There are considerable socio-economic differences between CARICOM Member States, as measured by income-group classification. These socio-economic differences create significant push and pull factors for migration in the region. Haiti is the only lower-middle income country, with the remaining CARICOM Member States being either upper-middle income or high income (Figure 3.7, Panel A). The difference is even more marked when the population size and distribution is taken into account (Panel B). While being the only CARICOM Member State that is lower middle income, Haiti also accounts for more than half the region's total population. This has important implications for the dynamics of labour migration within the region, as higher income economies are more likely to have more established social security provisions, more developed public services, and more investment and capital that can contribute to job creation.

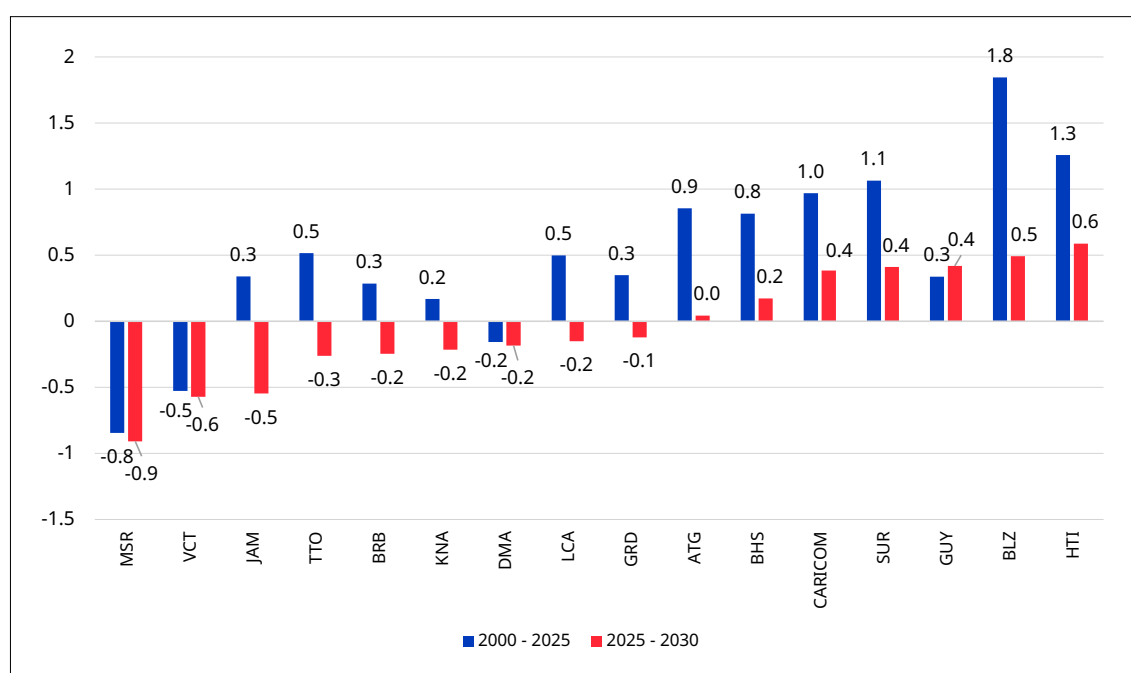
► **Figure 3.7: World Bank income group classifications**



Source: World Bank, UN WPP

There are also different demographic dynamics in different CARICOM Member States. Population aging and net outward migration is expected to contribute to shrinking populations in nine of the CARICOM Member States, most notably Monserrat, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica. However, the population is expected to increase in the region, largely owing to population growth in Haiti (Figure 3.8). Overall, the population distribution in the region also has significant implications for labour migration and mobility, particularly with regards to skill needs and skill gaps.

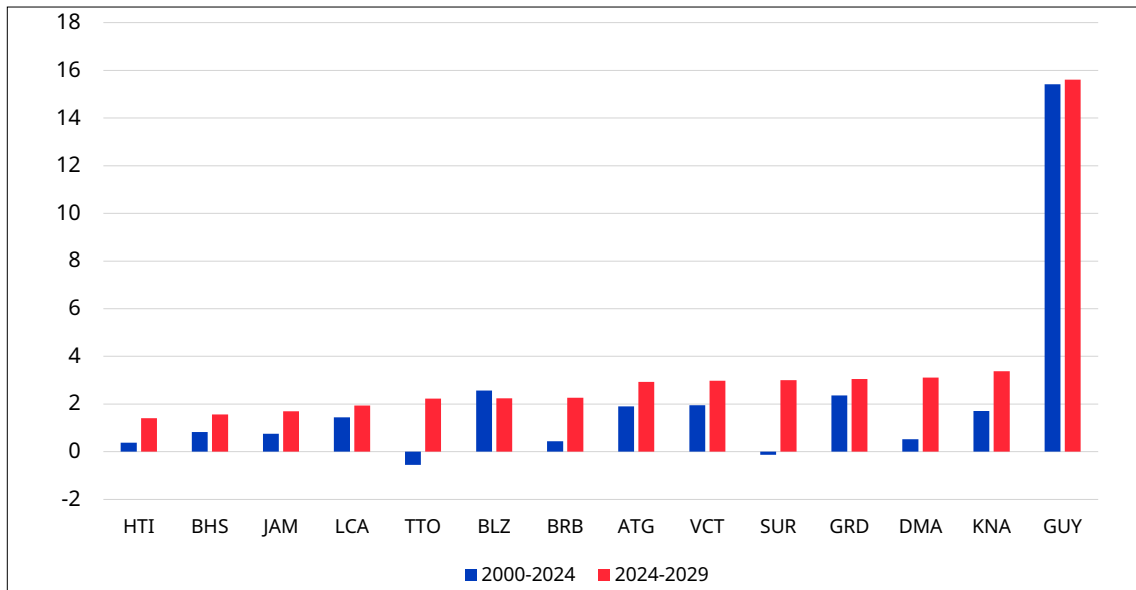
► **Figure 3.8: Population growth rates, by CARICOM Member State, 2000-2025 and forecast 2025-2030 (%)**



Source: UN WPP

In terms of GDP growth, annual-average growth rates varied from -0.6 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago, and -0.1 per cent in Suriname between 2010 and 2024, to 15.4 per cent per annum in Guyana (Figure 3.9). Guyana is an exceptional case, caused by the discovery of offshore oil. With oil production beginning in 2019, Guyana has now become a major oil exporter globally, with major implications for the economy. Similar outcomes can be expected for Suriname following oil discoveries. Growth in Guyana is forecast to maintain 15.6 per cent per annum between 2024 and 2029. Besides Guyana, the highest growth rates for 2024-2029 are anticipated in Saint Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Grenada and Suriname. In Guyana's case, there is likely to be an increase in demand for labour, which can be sourced from mainland Latin America, or from the CARICOM Member States. The degree to which it can be sourced from the CARICOM Member States depends on the ease with which other CARICOM nationals can navigate the processes of obtaining the rights to work compared with nationals from mainland Latin America. This will ultimately be determined by eligibility and ease of obtaining work permits through the standard process, but also by working conditions, including the competitiveness of wages and other factors, including housing and quality of life.

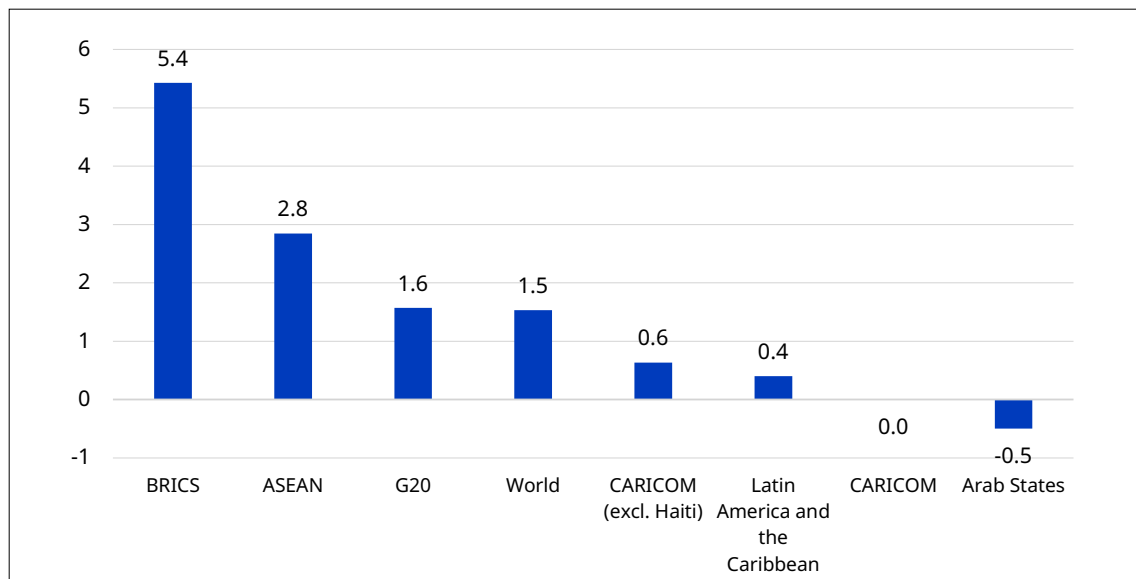
► **Figure 3.9: GDP growth rates, by CARICOM Member State, 2010-2024 and forecast 2024-2029 (%)**



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, April 2025

One big challenge for the CARICOM region are the chronically low levels of labour productivity. In fact, this is a common feature for the whole of the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Figure 3.10 shows the annual-average growth rates in labour productivity in selected regions between 2005 and 2023. It shows that CARICOM had negligible growth in labour productivity growth during this period, although averaging 0.6 per cent per annum, when Haiti is excluded from the regional average. This is lower than the global average of 1.5 per cent per annum, and of other regional blocs including ASEAN (2.8 per cent) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS) (5.4 per cent). Notably, the average rate is not too dissimilar to the average for the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean (0.4 per cent). For the Latin America and the Caribbean region as a whole, chronically low levels of labour productivity reflect high levels of informality, educational deficiencies, and lack of technology adoption (ILO 2022a; Ianchovichina 2024).

► **Figure 3.10: Labour productivity, selected regions & groups, annual-average growth 2005-2023 (%)**



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3.

► 4. Labour market characteristics in the CARICOM region

There is considerable heterogeneity in labour markets in the CARICOM region. This is observed across a number of different labour market variables, namely: labour force participation, unemployment rates, and employment characteristics including employment status, rates of economic activity and occupational skill levels. However, understanding the trends and characteristics across the region is complicated by a lack of recent data for some CARICOM Member States. This section provides an overview of labour market characteristics across the region, using regional estimates – both with and within Haiti – and national data sources.

4.1. The labour force

The working-age population (aged 15+) in the CARICOM region was estimated at approximately 14 million in 2024. Haiti accounts for more than 8 million, which means, the remainder of the region has a working-age population of approximately 6 million.

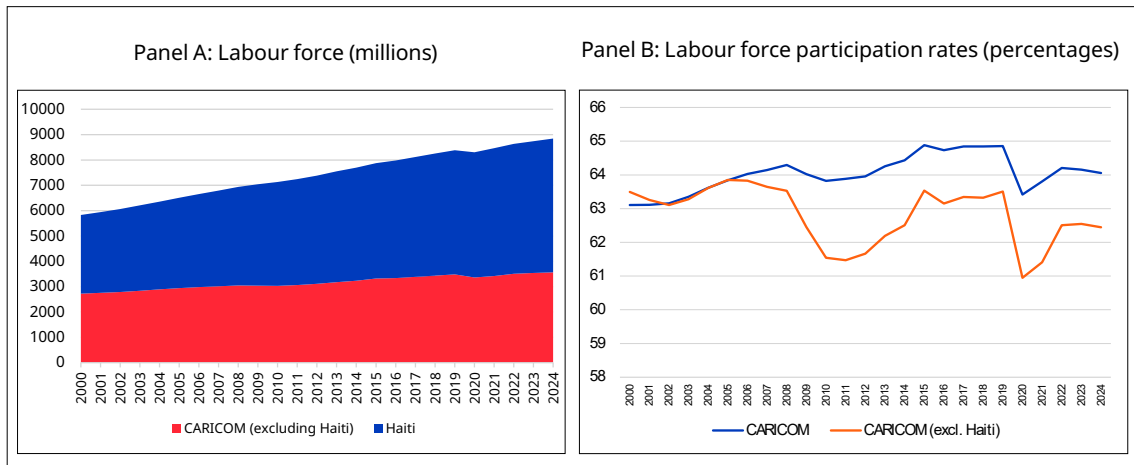
4.1.1. Labour force participation

In 2024 the CARICOM region's labour force was estimated at 8.8 million people. As with the working-age population, much of the region's labour force (60 per cent) was also accounted for by Haiti (Figure 4.1, Panel A). This has increased over time owing to Haiti's higher population growth relative to other CARICOM Member States (see Section 3.3). Haiti's labour force grew by an average of 4.1 per cent per annum between 2000-2024, compared to 0.6 per cent per annum for the rest of the CARICOM region.

CARICOM had a labour force participation rate of 64 per cent in 2024, albeit this lowers to 62.4 per cent for the region if one excludes Haiti (Figure 4.1, Panel B). Haiti's higher labour force participation rate is typical for an economy with lower levels of economic development and is driven by less developed social protection systems as well as lower household savings. Combined with a lack of productive employment opportunities and lower earnings, which contributing to higher rates of working poverty and other decent work deficits, it limits the options of remaining outside the labour force (Scot and Rodella 2016).

The labour force participation rate for the region dipped significantly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Excluding Haiti, the rate dropped from 63.5 per cent in 2019 to 60.9 per cent in 2020. Like elsewhere in the world, this was driven by people dropping out of the labour force owing to work closures, economic disruption, lockdowns and other containment measures (ILO 2021b; 2020a). The labour force participation rate has yet to recover to pre-crisis levels, a trend also observed elsewhere across Latin America and the Caribbean (ILO 2025c). Part of this is attributed to certain cohorts of workers that remain unable to re-enter the labour market, despite the return to relatively normal economic conditions (ECLAC and ILO 2023). A lagged recovery in labour force participation was also observed following the 2008 global financial crisis. Only by 2015 were participation rates for the CARICOM region (excluding Haiti) back to pre-crisis levels (Figure 3.1, Panel B). This suggests that there are wider, more systemic issues in the region that impact upon the resilience of the CARICOM labour force to recover from shocks.

► **Figure 4.1: Labour force characteristics, CARICOM region, 2000-2024**

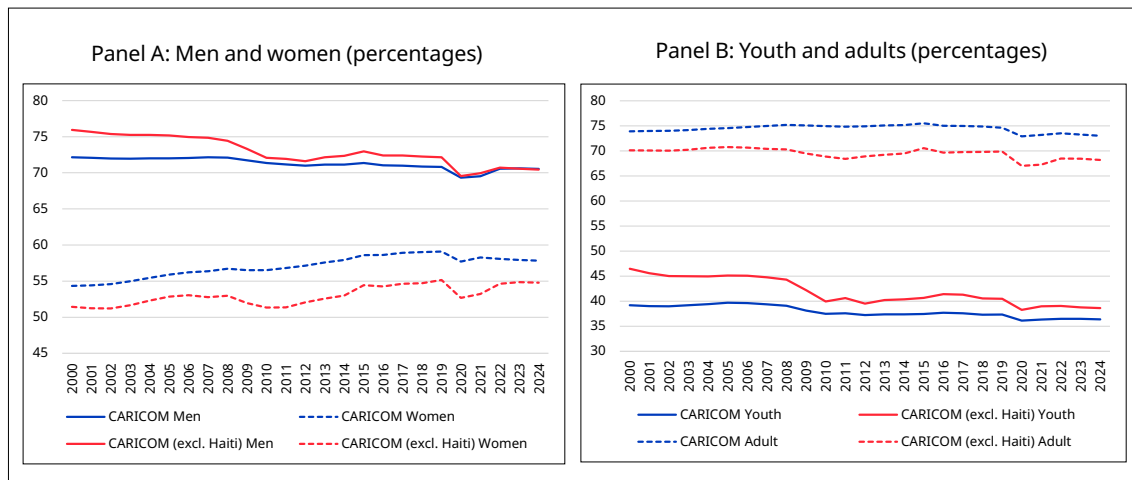


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3.

Women’s labour force participation rate is significantly lower than men’s, albeit the gap has been narrowing. In 2024, women’s labour force participation rate in the CARICOM region was estimated at 57.8 per cent, compared to 70.5 per cent for men. This gap of 12.7 percentage is significantly lower than at the beginning of the century, when women’s labour force participation stood at 54.3, compared to 72.2 per cent for men. This long-term increase in the labour force participation rate for women and narrowing of the gender gap likely reflects improved access to employment and jobs for women. However endemic and long-standing gender inequalities in the labour market remain, including relating to the quality of work in the sectors where women are more concentrated (Thailinger et al. 2023).

For youth, there has been a long-term decrease in labour force participation rates, potentially reflecting longer participation in education. The youth participation rate decreased from 39.2 per cent in 2000 to 36.4 per cent in 2024. A decline in labour force participation rates for youth can be considered a positive development if it is driven by more young people staying longer in education rather than entering the labour force. On the other hand, lower labour force participation rates for youth can also reflect a lack of productive opportunities, and young people giving up looking for work altogether, and therefore dropping out of the labour force (not even being counted as unemployed) (ILO 2024b). Accordingly, an alternative measure is to look at young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) rates in the region. Overall, approximately 24 per cent of all youth aged 15-24 in the region (excluding Haiti) are considered NEET. Albeit uncomfortably high, it compares well with a recent peak of 29 per cent in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. NEET rates are reflective of a lack of opportunities for young people, and can be associated with disengagement, alienation and social unrest (ILO 2024b).

► **Figure 4.2: Labour force participation rates, by sex and age, CARICOM region, 2000-2024**



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3.

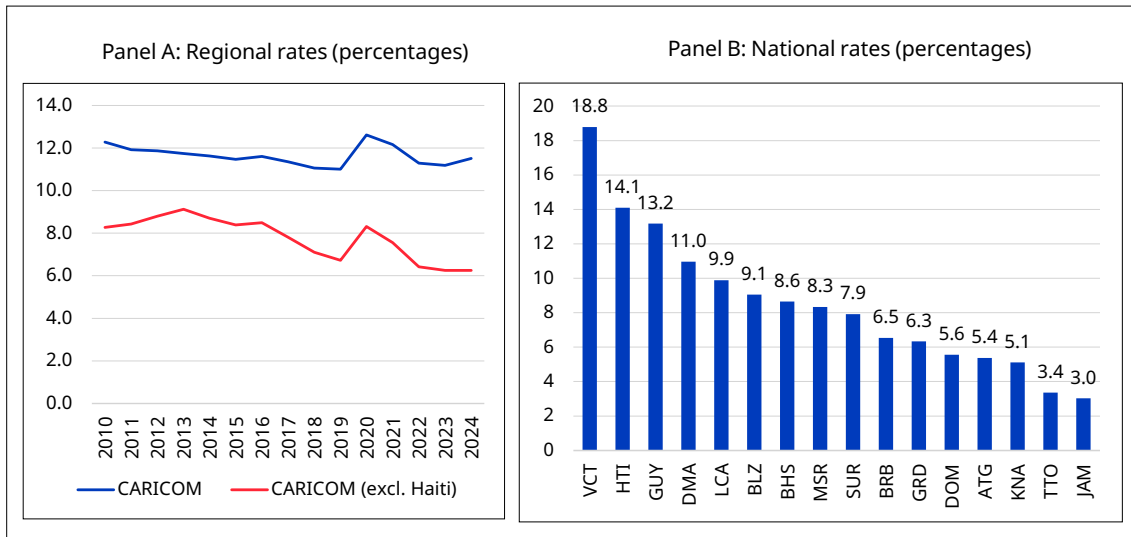
4.1.2. Unemployment

Unemployment has been increasing in the CARICOM region, driven primarily by unemployment growth in Haiti. As of 2024, there are an estimated 1.1 million unemployed in the CARICOM region. This represents an increase from around 876,000 in 2010. However, much of this increase is accounted for by increasing unemployment in Haiti. Indeed, excluding Haiti from the regional average, there has actually been a decline in total unemployment from 250,000 to around 222,000 between 2010 to 2024. The unemployment rate, estimated at 12 per cent, is relatively unchanged since 2010 as the nominal increases in total unemployment have run in parallel with increases in the size of the working-age population (Figure 4.3, Panel A). However excluding Haiti, the unemployment rate is estimated at around 6 per cent, down from around 8 per cent in 2010, similar to the rate for Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole in 2024, estimated at 6.2 per cent (ILO 2025c).

The unemployment rate varies considerably by CARICOM Member State. Based on the latest available data, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines lies at the upper end has an unemployment rate with nearly 20 per cent, decreasing to less than 5 per cent for Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica (Figure 4.3, Panel B). High unemployment rates are generally reflective of a lack of productive opportunities driven by insufficient job growth. At the same time, low unemployment rates can also be reflective of poor working conditions, and higher rates of working poverty and informal employment (ILO 2025c).

While women remain more likely to be unemployed than men, the gender gap in unemployment rates has, excluding Haiti, been narrowing. Excluding Haiti, in 2024 the unemployment rate for women was estimated at 7.4 per cent, compared with 5.3 per cent for men (Figure 4.4, Panel A). This represents a narrowing gender gap over time, from 3.1 percentage points in 2010 to 2.1 percentage points in 2024.

► **Figure 4.3: Unemployment rates, regional and national, 2010-2024**

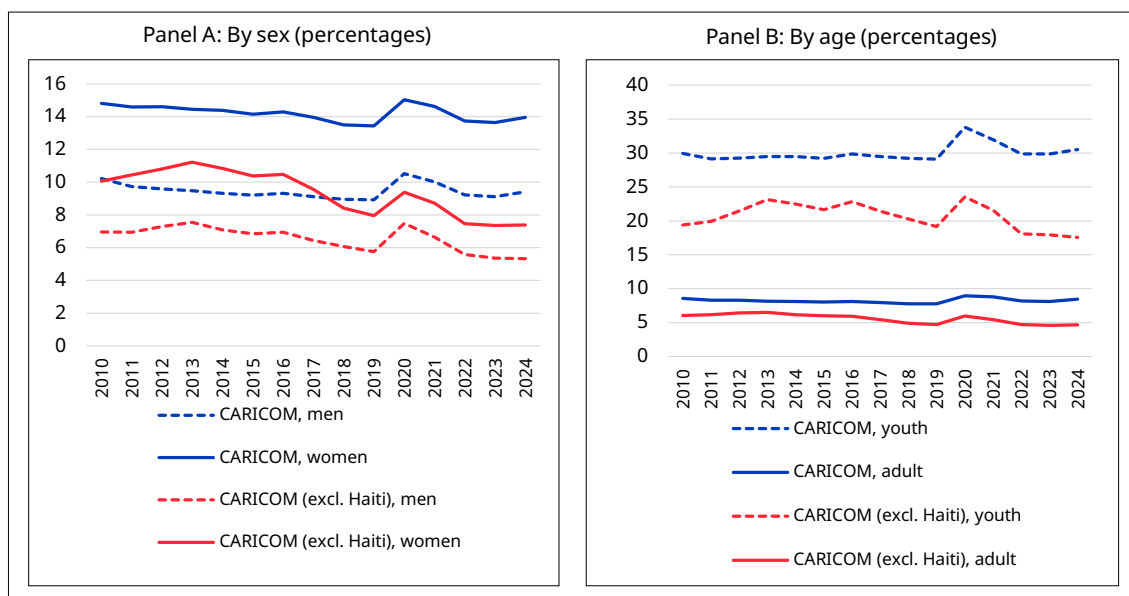


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3; national data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

Nonetheless, women remain more likely to be unemployed than men, reflecting barriers to employment that disproportionately impact upon women. As in other parts of the world, women are disproportionately more responsible for unpaid care work (UN WOMEN 2019; ILO 2018a). While active labour market policies in Latin America and the Caribbean have been found to be effective at increasing skills and labour market outcomes for young women - including those looking to re-enter the labour force following maternity leave and childcare - such policies are typically more prevalent in high and middle income countries (ILO 2016b; 2018a)

Youth are far more likely to be unemployed than people aged 25 and above. In 2024 youth unemployment rates for the region (excluding Haiti) stood at 17.6 per cent, compared to 4.7 per cent for people aged 25 and above (Figure 4.4, Panel B). The youth unemployment rate for the region excluding Haiti, peaked at around 23.5 per cent in 2020, driven by COVID-19. However, overall, the gap between youth and 25+ rates has widened marginally since 010. It should be noted that the definition of unemployment only includes those who are without work but actively seeking and also available to work. There are, therefore, people who are not working but not registered as unemployed. For instance, those who are seeking work but not available, or those who are available for work but no longer seeking.

► **Figure 4.4: Unemployment rates, by sex and age, 2010-2024 (%)**

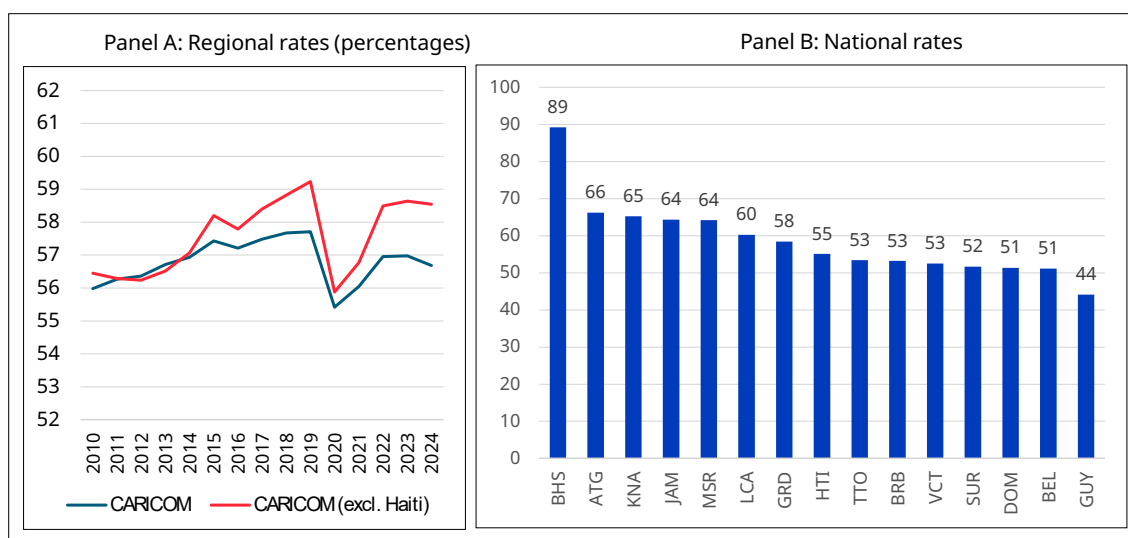


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3.

4.2. Employment characteristics

In 2024 approximately 7.8 million people were estimated to be employed in the CARICOM region, up from 6.8 million a decade earlier. Excluding Haiti, the figure drops to 3.3 million, up from just under 3 million in 2014. This corresponds to an overall employment-to-population ratio of 56.7 per cent for the region as a whole, and 58.5 per cent for the region excluding Haiti (figure 4.5, Panel A). As with the labour force participation rate, there was a noticeable drop in the employment-to-population ratios during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching lows of 55.4 per cent in 2020. At national level, employment-to-population ratios range from lows of 44 per cent in Guyana, and around 51-52 per cent in Belize, Dominica and Suriname, to highs of 64 and 65 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, and Monserrat (Figure 4.5, Panel B). The Bahamas is an outlier with an employment-to-population ratio of 89 per cent.

► **Figure 4.5: Employment-to-population ratios, regional and national, 2010-2024 (%)**

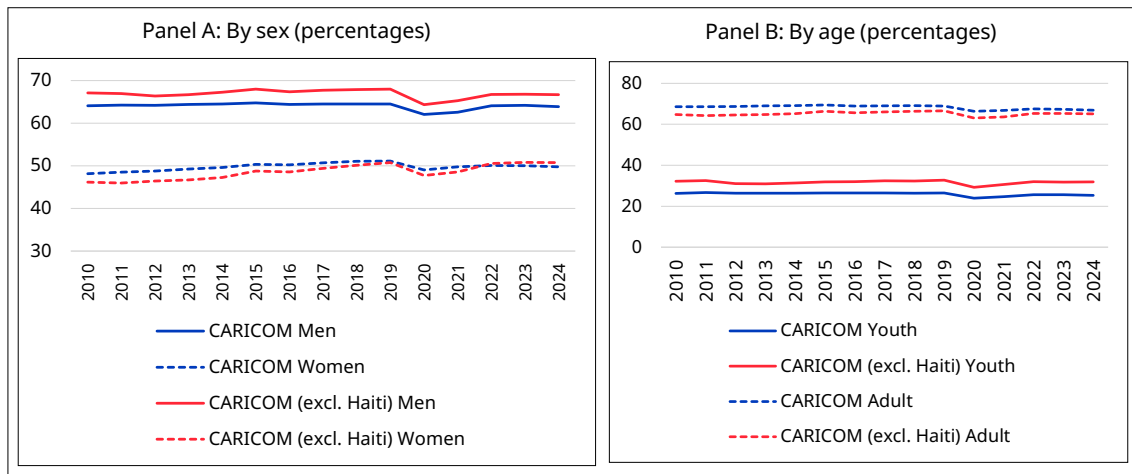


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3; national data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

The differences in women and men's employment to population rate are narrowing, as more women enter paid employment. Nonetheless it remains the fact that, in the CARICOM region, men have a significantly higher rate (63.9 per cent) than women (49.8 per cent). This represents a gender gap of 14.1 percentage points. However as seen in Figure 4.6, Panel A, women's employment-to-population ratio has been increasing over time, which has corresponded to a narrowing of the gender gap from 15.9 percentage points in 2010. For the CARICOM region excluding Haiti, the situation is similar, except the gender gap has narrowed more significantly from 20.9 percentage points in 2010 to 15.9 percentage points in 2024. Thus, excluding Haiti, as of 2024, men's employment-to-population ratio was estimated at 66.7 per cent and women's at 50.7 per cent.

There has been little change in the youth employment-to-population ratio, estimated at 25.3 per cent in 2024, compared to 26.3 per cent in 2010, while for the region excluding Haiti, it was estimated at 31.9 per cent in 2024, marginally down from 32.2 per cent in 2010. Given the changes over time in the youth labour force participation, it suggests that most changes took place between 2000-2010, as in 2000 youth rates were considerably higher at 31 per cent, and 36.6 per cent for the region excluding Haiti. It suggests that this earlier period was when most progress was made, with educational attainment and improved opportunities expanding. There has been a stalling of progress since 2010, possibly driven by the different global economic crises and their disproportionate impacts on youth.

► **Figure 4.6: Employment-to-population ratios, by sex and age, 2010-2024 (%)**

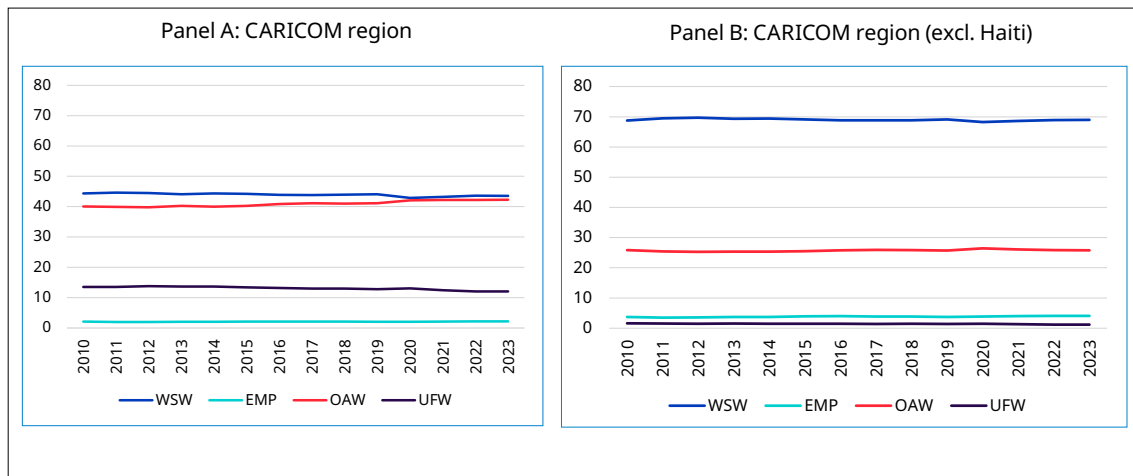


Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3.

4.2.1. Status in employment

Not everyone in employment has access to decent work, and looking at status in employment sheds some light on the differences across CARICOM Member States. There are many ways to assess these decent work dimensions, but one such proxy is to look at status in employment as a proxy for decent work. Those in wage and salaried employment (or employees), are more likely to be in more stable jobs, with more regular incomes and greater job security, than their counterparts in own-account work or contributing family work. Figure 4.7 shows the status in employment for the CARICOM region (Panel A) and the CARICOM region excluding Haiti (Panel B). There are marked differences between the two regional estimates, with the regional average excluding Haiti displaying a much higher rate of wage and salaried employment and low levels of both own-account work and unpaid family work. This is because Haiti, being a lower income country, is characterised by higher rates of own-account work and unpaid family work, and these forms of work are more associated with poor conditions of work and more precarious situations. As CARICOM Member States develop, the share of wage and salaried employment typically increases, as reflected in the comparison of the two regional estimates in Panels A and B in Figure 4.7.

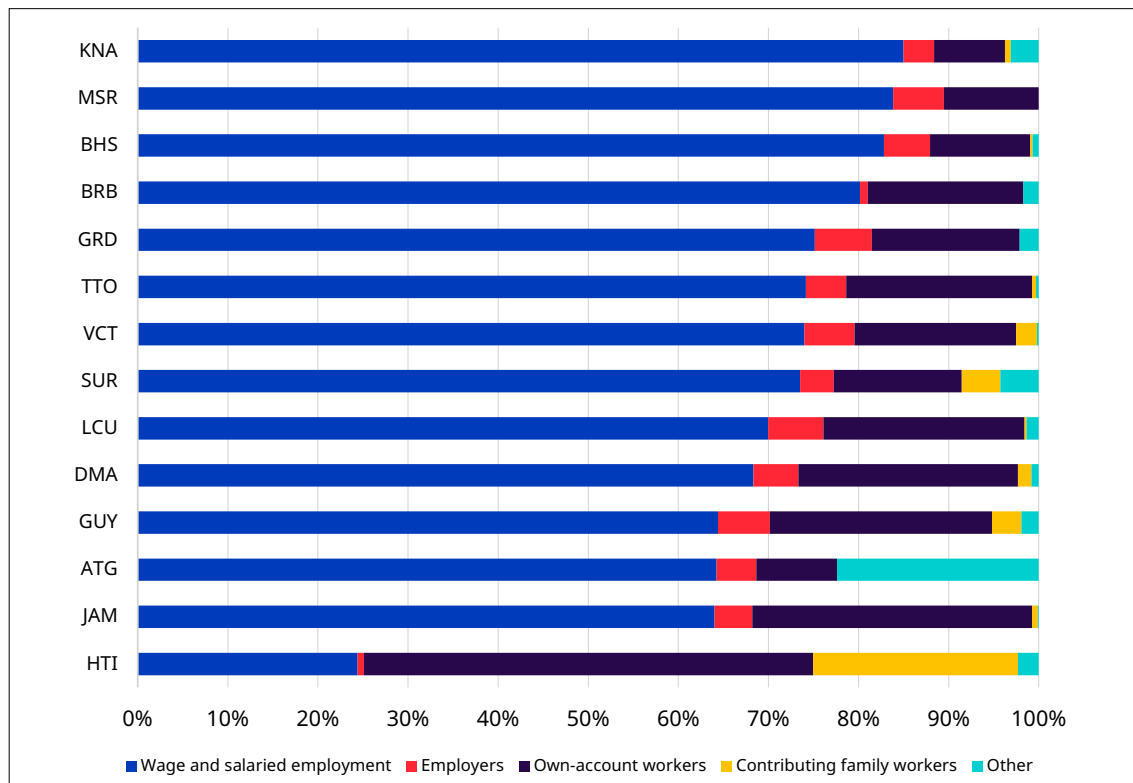
► **Figure 4.7: Status in employment, 2010-2023 (%)**



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024. For further details please see Section 2.4.3.. Note: WSW = wage and salaried employment, EMP = employers, OAW = own-account workers, UFW = unpaid family workers.

For many of the higher income Member States, the share of employment in wage and salaried employment is very high. Indeed, observing the national level data, Figure 4.8 shows that in Saint Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, The Bahamas and Barbados, the share of employment in wage and salaried employment is over 80 per cent of total employment. For these Member States only around 10 per cent of workers are in own-account work. This is stark contrast to Haiti, in which less than a quarter are in wage and salaried work, nearly half were in own-account work, and a further 23 per cent in contributing family work.

► **Figure 4.8: Status in employment, by CARICOM Member States, latest available data (%)**



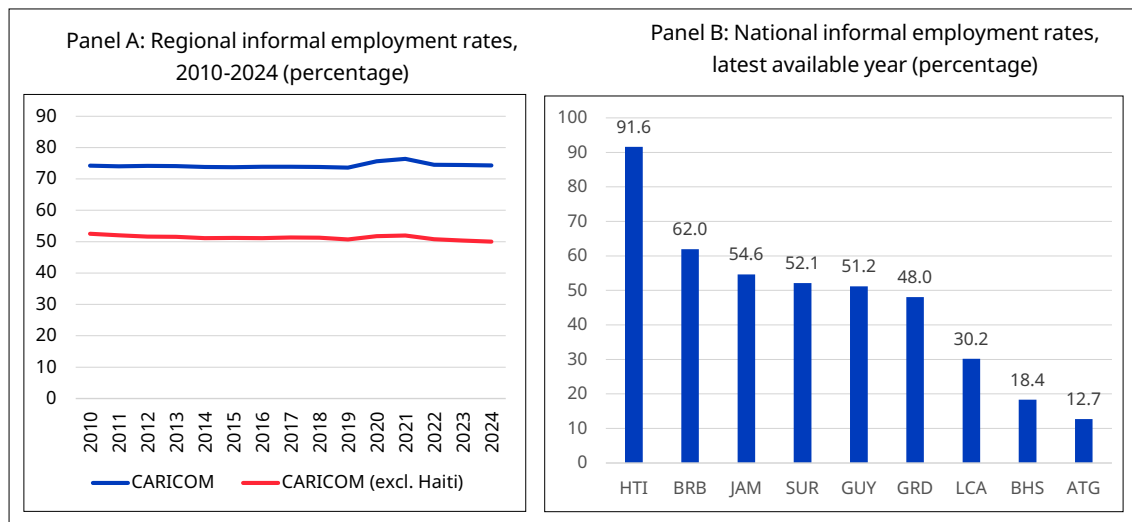
Source: National data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

4.2.2. Informal employment

Around three-quarters of the region's employment is estimated to be informal, dropping to 50 per cent once Haiti is removed from the regional totals. Informal employment means that workers fall outside the scope of legal and regulatory provisions and are often not eligible for social protection nor other benefits such as paid annual or sick leave. Informal employment is also associated with poorer working conditions, including longer hours, unstable earnings and occupational safety and health shortcomings (ILO 2023; 2018c).

Nearly 9 out of 10 people in employment are in informal employment in Haiti, and the informal employment rate stands at approximately 50 per cent in Guyana, Suriname and Grenada. At the lower end, only 12.7 per cent are in informal employment in Antigua and Barbuda, 18.4 per cent in The Bahamas, and 30.2 per cent in Saint Lucia.

► **Figure 4.9: Informal employment rates, CARICOM region and national**



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024 – for further details please see Section 2.4.3; national data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

4.2.3. Occupational skill levels

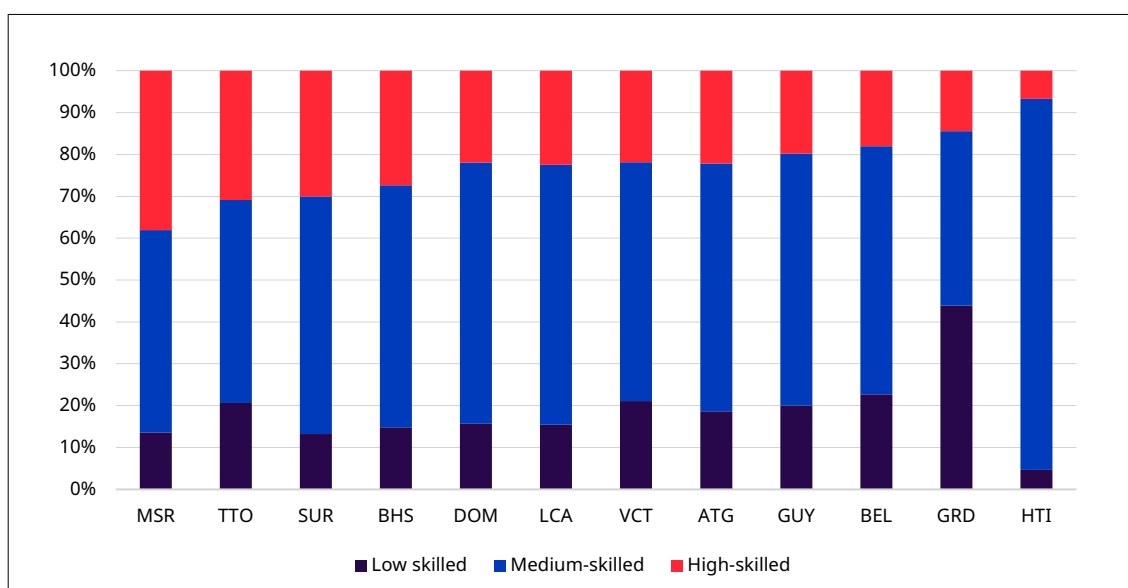
The share of employment in high skilled jobs correlates with the income levels of Member States. There are many ways to define skills levels, however, for the purposes of cross-country comparisons, a proxy classification based on occupations can be used. This allows for the classification of low, medium and high skilled occupations whereby low-skill occupations refer to elementary occupations such as cleaners, manual labourers and street vendors; medium-skill occupations include clerical support workers, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural and trade workers, and plant and machine operators; and high-skill occupations refer to managers, professionals and technicians or associate professionals. Figure 4.10 below shows that Monserrat, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname have the highest shares of workers in high skilled occupations, at 38 per cent, 30.7 per cent and 29.4 per cent, respectively. At the lower end of the spectrum is Haiti with 6.7 per cent in high-skilled occupations.

The occupational skill levels of a job do not necessarily correspond to educational attainment of the worker, reflecting mismatches in the region. Incidences of underqualification or overqualification in employment can reflect mismatches between labour supply and labour demand, and create challenges for both employers, workers, and jobseekers. For workers and jobseekers, this can be a driving factor in outward migration, particularly if they perceive there to be better opportunities elsewhere, either in the CARICOM region or beyond. For employers, challenges in obtaining the necessary talent and skills can have

implications for productivity, enterprise growth and job creation. Accordingly, comprehensive skills needs assessments are a crucial part of informed labour market policymaking. Such assessments should take into account perspectives and insights from both workers and employers’ organisations through tripartite consultations. Examples of assessments in the region include Trinidad and Tobago’s Labour Skills Assessment for the Energy Services Sub-Sector, and the Labour Skills Assessment for the ICT Platforms and Services Sub Sector. Both identified shortages of workers in several key sectors (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2022a; 2022b).

“The ICT sector is another critical area experiencing workforce shortages, as [we] move toward digital transformation. Roles such cybersecurity specialists, software developers, data scientists, cloud computing experts, and machine learning engineers have emerged as some of the most sought-after professionals. Additionally, there is a strong demand for digital transformation specialists to support the modernization of both the public and private sectors. The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI), financial technology (FinTech), and automation into business operations is driving the need for a highly skilled digital workforce” – **Stakeholder consultation**

► **Figure 4.10: Occupational skill levels, by CARICOM Member State (%)**



Source: National data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2. Please note, the low value for low-skilled workers in Haiti is most likely down to the fact that it was not possible to distinguish between skilled and unskilled agricultural workers, resulting in all agricultural workers being treated as medium-skilled.

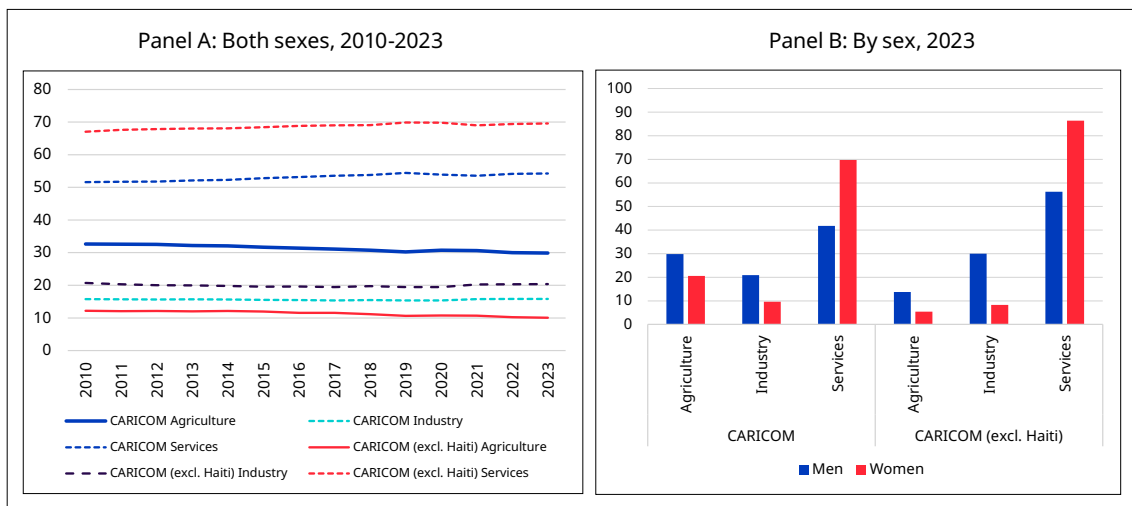
4.2.4. Economic activity

Around 55 per cent of workers in the region are in the services sector (70 per cent when excluding Haiti). Economic activity can be grouped into broad sectoral groups, namely: agriculture, industry, and services. While this is not sufficiently detailed to contribute to meaningful insights per CARICOM Member State, it does allow for top-level comparisons and regional estimates. In the CARICOM region most workers are engaged in the services sector, accounting for 54.6 per cent of employment in 2023, and 69.6 per cent of employment in 2023 when Haiti is excluded. If one excludes Haiti, the share of people working in agriculture has been decreasing, from 12.2 per cent in 2010 to 10.1 per cent in 2023. This reflects a well-established structural transformation; as an economy develops, employment tends to shift from less productive employment, such as agriculture, to more productive sectors in industry and services.

Stakeholder consultations with multiple CARICOM Member States, highlighted shortages of agricultural workers in the region.⁹ In Southern Belize this shortage is filled more by migrant workers from Central America than by CARICOM migrant workers. In Jamaica the agricultural sector also faces persistent labour shortages which it struggles to fill with domestic labour, partly due to lack of youth interest and high labour costs. And many agricultural employers look to countries such as Mexico and the Philippines to source agricultural labour. This raises the question of whether the free movement of skilled nationals regime offers enough avenues for low-skilled workers, particularly agricultural workers, to obtain work in the region. For instance, Haiti does not issue skills certificates, which makes it challenging for Haitians to access this regime.

Women are more likely to be engaged in the services sector than men. Services account for 56.2 per cent of all employment of women in the CARICOM region, increasing to 86.4 per cent without Haiti. For men, around 41.7 per cent are in services, increasing to 69.8 per cent when Haiti is excluded. Excluding Haiti, around 14 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women were engaged in agriculture, and around 30 per cent of men and 8.2 per cent of women in the industrial sector. This reflects the higher propensity of men to be engaged in construction and transport, albeit women are often engaged in manufacturing.

► **Figure 4.11: Distribution of employment by broad sector group, by sex 2010-2023**



Source: ILO Trends Econometric Models, November 2024. For further details please see Section 2.4.3.

Agriculture remains an important source of employment in many CARICOM Member States, especially

Haiti. At the national level, the differences per CARICOM Member State are displayed in Figure 4.12. It shows how employment in Haiti is still much more reliant on agriculture, a sector characterised by low-productivity own-account work and contributing family work. Agriculture remains a significant source of employment in Belize, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Guyana, and Jamaica. These workers are therefore more vulnerable to climate-change and natural disasters, which can devastate crops and agricultural production (see Section 7).

Industry accounts for around 20 per cent of all employment in most CARICOM Member States. However, there are some notable exceptions. For instance, in Barbados around 54 per cent of employment is in the industrial sector, mostly geared toward tourism. This includes construction of hotels and resorts, but also infrastructure development; and there is a significant level of manufacturing in the country. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, nearly half of all employment is in the industrial sector, also in construction linked to tourism, but also in real estate. Construction (which is categorised under 'industry') is a

⁹ Further analysis on the agricultural sector is provided in Section 7.3.1

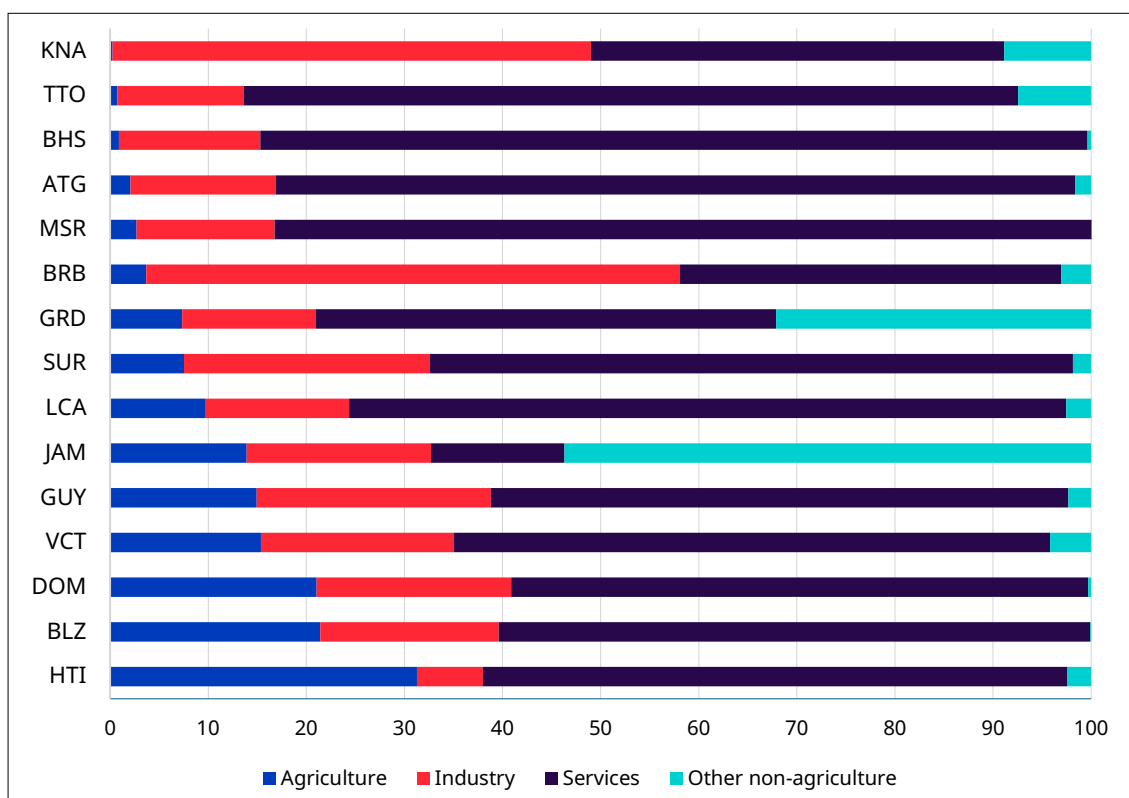
major source of employment, accounting for approximately 10 per cent of jobs in most CARICOM Member States (see Section 7.3.3). However, stakeholder interviews highlighted this as a sector that experiences significant labour shortages, particularly in skilled occupations including

“ The loss of engineers and other technical experts is hampering national development, as these professionals are vital for infrastructure, innovation, and economic competitiveness” – Stakeholder consultation

engineers, welders and crane operators, with many of these professionals being drawn to overseas opportunities.

Most employment in CARICOM Member States is in the services sector, and much of this is linked to tourism. Employment linked to the tourism sector includes those working in hotels and restaurants, event planning, cruise-ship services, tour operators and travel agents. There is also a significant finance and insurance sector in the region, with significant employment in investment, financial advisory services,

► **Figure 4.12: Distribution of employment by broad sector group, CARICOM Member States, latest available data (%)**



Source: National data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

insurance and reinsurance, and banking more broadly. In some CARICOM Member States business process outsourcing is growing, for instance Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and Saint Lucia. And there is also significant employment in non-market services, including education, public administration and health.

The services sector can be split into market services (wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, and financial services) and non-market services (health and education). Stakeholder consultations highlighted that non-market services are facing significant labour shortages as workers in these sectors increasingly migrate out of the CARICOM region to North America and Europe. The health and education sectors face chronic shortages of workers, driven in part by emigration out of the CARICOM

region. In almost all stakeholder consultations the loss of professionals in the health and education were cited. In particular shortages in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects such as mathematics, biology and information technology were cited. Labour shortages in these areas ultimately undermine the competitiveness of CARICOM Member States and future growth prospects. There is therefore a need to source workers in these sectors from abroad or offer better conditions to

“The health sector is [an] area facing acute worker shortages. There is a high demand for specialist nurses, consultants and public health medical officers, particularly in rural areas where access to quality healthcare services is already limited. The migration of health professionals in search of better remuneration and working conditions has created staffing gaps in many local healthcare facilities” – **Stakeholder consultation**

encourage return or deter migration. However competition for these workers outside of the CARICOM region attracted by higher compensation and better prospects in North America and Europe, presents a major challenge.

4.3. Labour market information

Progress is being made in the region with regards to Labour Force Survey implementation, including greater frequency of surveys and new standards being applied. Labour Force Surveys are the main instrument through which official statistics on key labour market variables are produced, including data related to the labour force, employment, unemployment, as well as characteristics of the employed, including informality rates and other statistics. The 13th Meeting of Caribbean Ministers of Labour, in 2025, highlighted that, while most Caribbean countries and territories conducted labour force surveys, these were mostly done on an ad hoc basis. In addition to problems related to the frequency of surveys, compliance with international standards for labour statistics established by ICLS was raised as an issue (ILO 2025a). The same meeting did, however, note that the OECS has developed a common standardized questionnaire, and is transitioning to more frequent surveys, with a goal of quarterly survey implementation (ILO 2025a). Ministers and social partners at the meeting also highlighted Jamaica's adoption of the latest ICLS, and the country's exemplary progress in advancing labour force survey implementation. In addition the launch of labour force surveys in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Dominica and Saint Lucia were noted as a significant step forward, as well as, including those related to informality (ILO 2025a).

Progress has been made in relation to the development of a regional labour market information system. Notably, the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ILO and CARICOM, whereby the ILO will provide technical support to the implementation of a labour market information system (LMIS) project for the CSME (CARICOM 2016). A feature of this LMIS development is to develop national systems to be compatible with the “stat” statistical information system, and to provide technical assistance and capacity building to this end. The process entails the use of a minimum set of indicators, classifications and definitions, and encompasses skidata from official data sources such as labour force surveys, as well as administrative records. Despite progress, further support is needed (as of June 2025) to transition into the launch and operationalisation of the CLMIS.

There is a distinct lack of regular and systematic information on demand for labour in the region. Such information, which is useful to identify skill gaps, skill needs, and to gauge changing demand for occupations and other categories of work can be drawn from different sources. The main source of information comes from job vacancies, which illustrates the levels of demand for different occupations, which can then be analysed in relation to salaries, location and other characteristics. One source of job vacancy information are online job postings or employer and establishment surveys. Both have their

limitations, including the former being more skewed towards higher skilled jobs, and the latter being limited to the formal sector. In both cases, there is a shortage of this information being harvested and processed in the region. Some assessments do exist. For instance, the Statistical Institute of Jamaica conducted a survey of establishments in 2018 (STATIN 2019) and other ad hoc studies have looked at skill needs and skill gaps, including those in Trinidad and Tobago (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2022a; 2022b). Moreover, Labour Market Needs Assessment Surveys have been undertaken in Grenada (Government of Grenada 2014) and St Lucia (Government of St. Lucia 2020). However, these are ad hoc and do not allow for the ongoing tracking and monitoring of demand for labour.

Sector skills councils are being used in the region, but could be broadened to help identify skill needs, gaps and priorities in a wider range of sectors. In Jamaica, the Global Services Skills Council (GSSC), is focused on business process outsourcing and information technology outsourcing, and brings together private businesses, education and TVET institutions, and government agencies to help identify skills gaps and influence the design of training programmes and curricula to help address future needs (IDB 2019). Sector Skills Councils are also being used in Guyana, and there are suggestions for the establishment of a renewable energy skills council in Barbados (UN PAGE 2024). These Sector Skills Councils are typically tied to a specific sector or industry, and ought to be expanded to more sectors across the region to better understand skill needs and demand for labour. They can then better contribute to more informed labour market policies and labour migration management.



► 5. The characteristics of labour migration

The previous section detailed considerable heterogeneity in the labour market characteristics of CARICOM Member States. However, there is considerable variation in the statuses of nationals, CARICOM nationals and foreign (non-CARICOM) nationals within Member States. Accordingly, this section provides an overview of labour market characteristics, distinguishing between nationals, CARICOM nationals and foreign (non-CARICOM) nationals. It relies on national data, including labour force surveys, administrative data, and data on skills certificates and work permits collected from the CSME Units within the region.

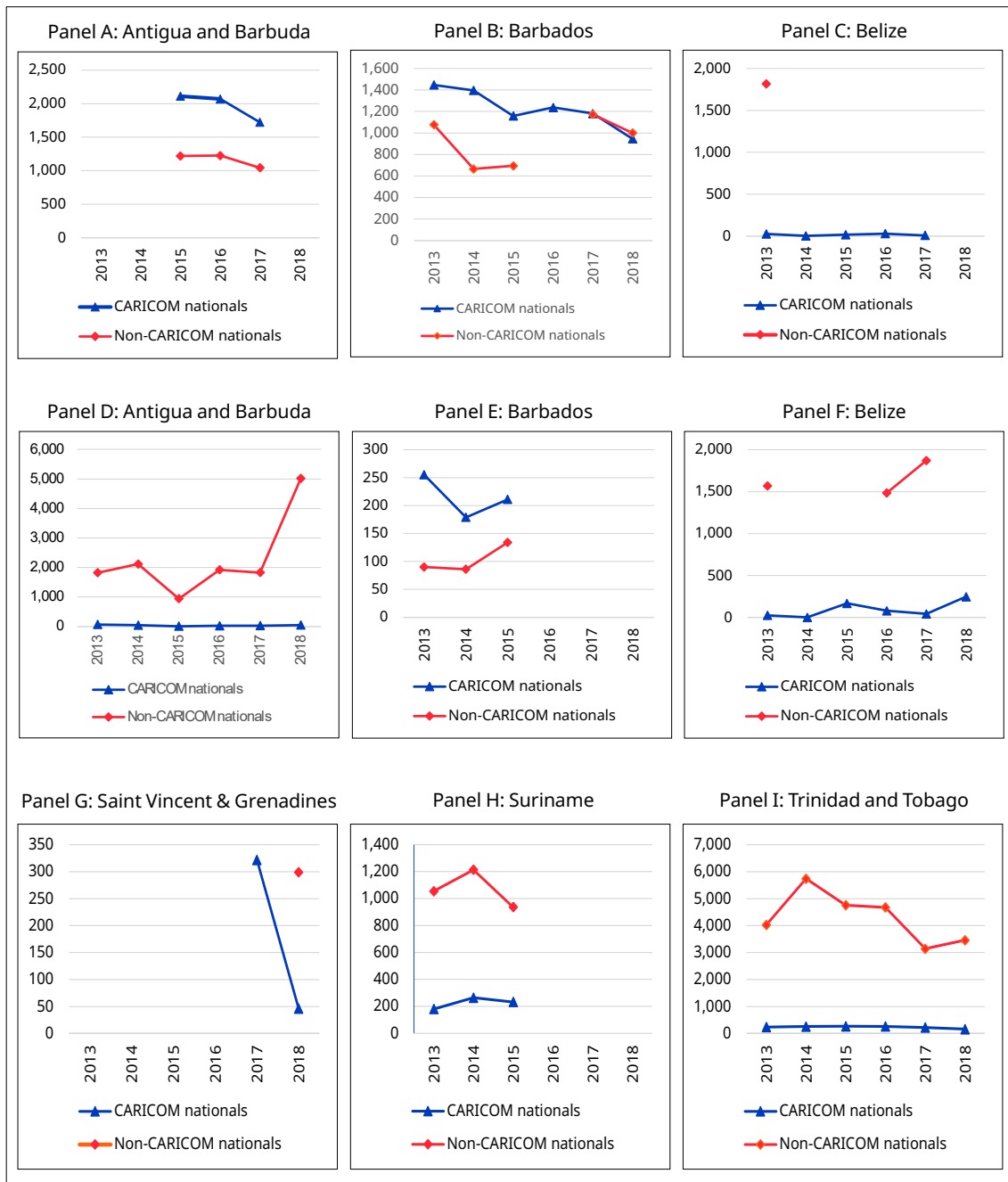
5.1. Labour migration characteristics in the CARICOM region

Most CARICOM nationals who leave their country of origin leave the region altogether. However, a significant minority of CARICOM nationals stay within the region. CARICOM nationals can make use of the CSME provisions to migrate, including skills certificates, and regulations pertaining to the provision of services and right of establishment (see Section 3.1). Data on movements under the CSME regime can be garnered through information compiled by the CARICOM Secretariat's CSME Unit. At the same time, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) nationals are able to freely move and work in each other's countries. Consequently, the information from the CSME Unit is only partially reflective of labour migration movements within the region per se. Moreover, it only captures regular migration. An alternative approach, used in this report, is to consider national data sources, and identify migrants based on place of birth or citizenship (feasible for measuring international migrant worker stock but not international migrant worker flows). While this provides for more accurate data, it fails to capture irregular migrant movements. Nonetheless it does allow for some triangulation between data sources and helps fill information gaps in the CSME data.

5.1.1. Work permits

Work permit data across the region shows little commonality among CARICOM Member State in terms of trends over time, type of permit (short and long term) and nationality of recipients. Figure 5.1 shows work permit records reported to the CSME Unit by selected CARICOM Member States. Specifically, it shows the numbers of long-term and short-term work permits issued to CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals between 2013 and 2018. There are few commonalities between CARICOM Member States over time. For instance, there are spikes and drops in different Member States and at different times, and different trends for CARICOM nationals versus non-CARICOM nationals. More recent data was not available, particularly covering the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This would likely have illustrated more common trends between Member States and also likely highlighted how the pandemic impacted upon labour migration between the different CARICOM Member States.

► **Figure 5.1: Work permits issued by issuing Member State, CARICOM and non-CARICOM nationals, 2013-2018**



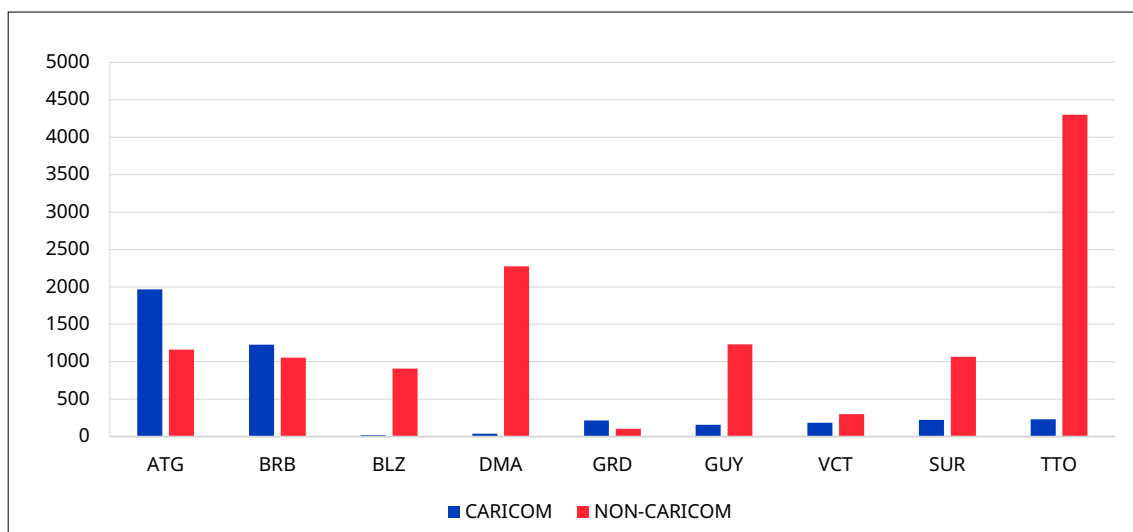
Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat.

There is significant divergence in the issuing of work permits for CARICOM nationals versus non-CARICOM nationals. Figure 5.2 summarises the averages between 2013-2018 per CARICOM Member State. For Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados there were more work permits issued to CARICOM nationals than non-CARICOM nationals. Moreover, collectively these two Member States account for, on average, nearly 75 per cent of the reported work permits issued to nationals of other CARICOM Member States. Grenada also issued more work permits to CARICOM nationals than non-CARICOM nationals, but

owing to the country's population, these are comparatively smaller numbers. In contrast, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, Guyana, Belize, Suriname and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines all issued a lot more work permits to non-CARICOM nationals than CARICOM nationals. Trinidad and Tobago issued 18 work permits to non-CARICOM nationals for every work permit issued to CARICOM nationals, accounting for, on average, around 4,300 work permits to non-CARICOM nationals per year between 2013 and 2018.

The divergence among Member States in the issuing of work permits to CARICOM and non-CARICOM can be put down to a number of factors. For The Bahamas, as it does not partake in the CSME, CARICOM nationals do not have the option of using skills certificates, nor of regulations pertaining to the provision of services, or rights of establishment under the free movement protocol. Instead, CARICOM nationals are more likely to use other channels to work in The Bahamas, mainly through obtaining work permits, like non-CARICOM nationals. Meanwhile, Trinidad and Tobago is a major recipient of migrants from Venezuela, a non-CARICOM Member State. Ultimately, the different CARICOM Member States have context specific dynamics that determine how many work permits are issued to CARICOM versus non-CARICOM nationals. Further research could help identify the reasons for this divergence - whether it is being driven by skill needs and skill gaps, and whether these gaps are being filled by non-CARICOM nationals, and whether applying for work permits is preferred to using other free movement entry points.

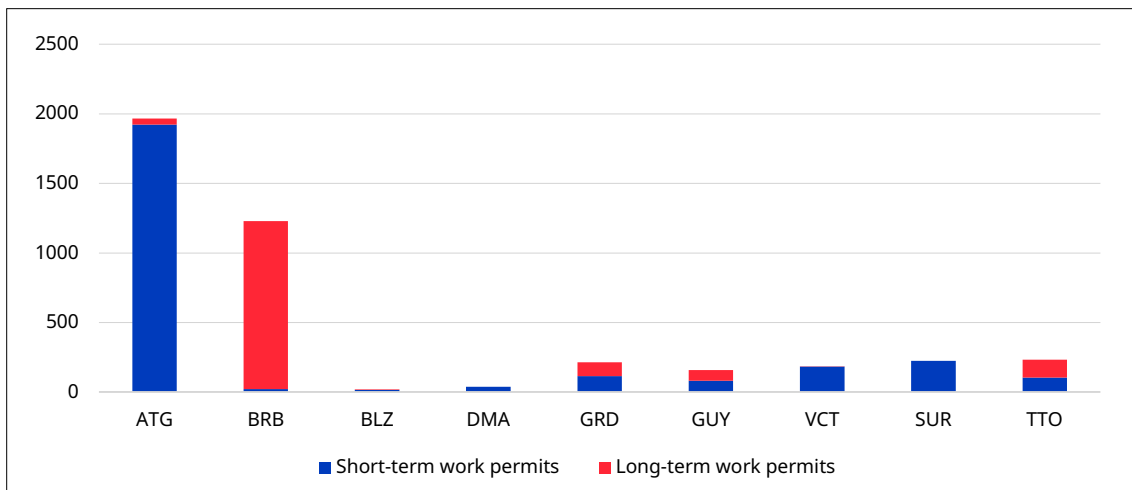
► **Figure 5.2: Work permits issued to CARICOM and non-CARICOM nationals, by issuing Member State, annual-average 2013-2018**



Source: CSME Unit. Note: annual average reflects only years with available data.

Additionally, not all work permits are long-term, and the duration of work-permits varies by CARICOM Member State. What is most apparent in Figure 5.3 is that Antigua and Barbuda almost solely issues short-term work permits, in contrast to Barbados, who almost solely issues long-term work permits to CARICOM nationals. In Grenada, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, the split is relatively even, while in Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname, it is almost all short-term work permits.

► **Figure 5.3: Work permits issued to CARICOM nationals, by issuing Member State, by short and long-term, annual-average 2013-2018**

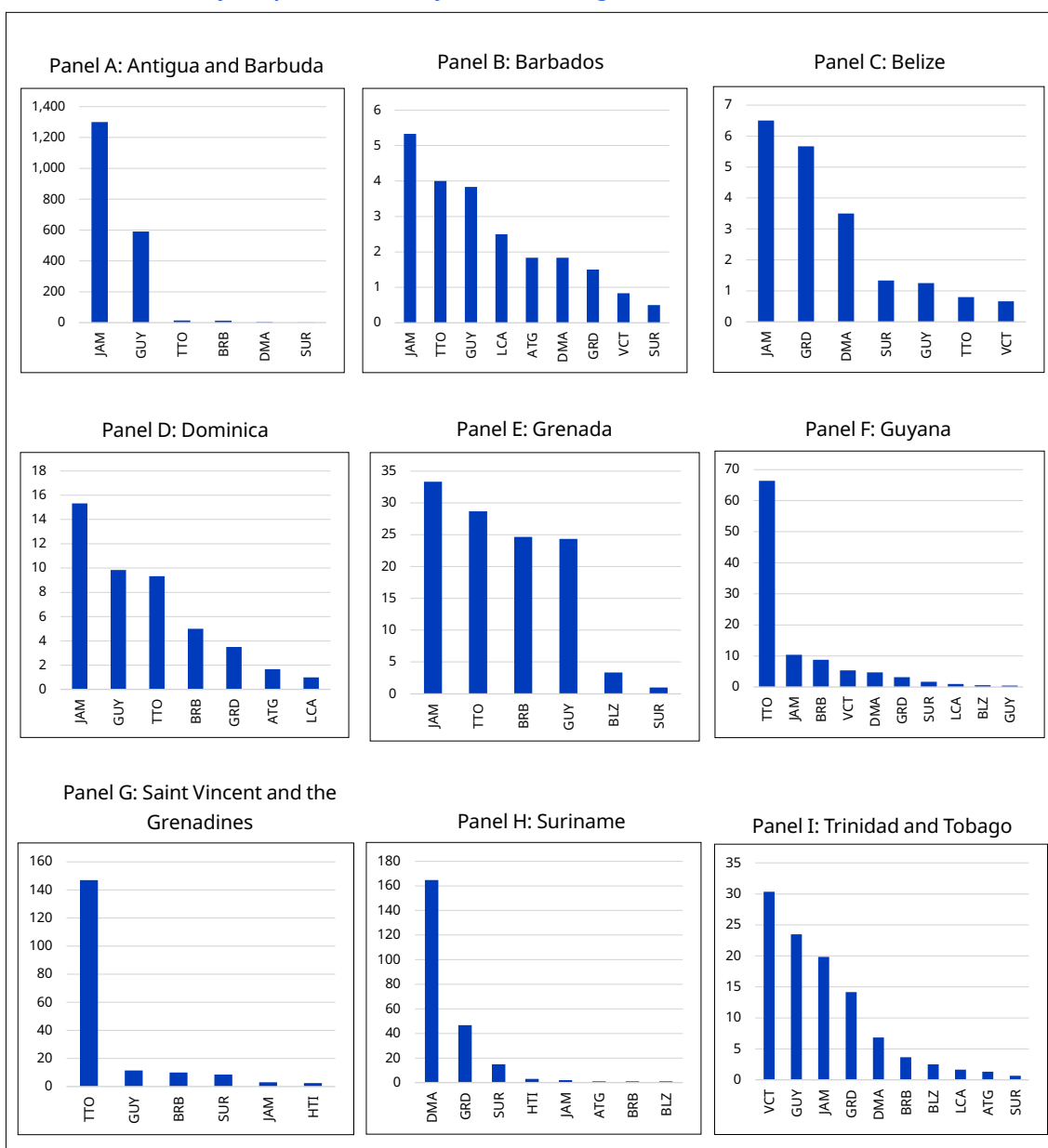


Source: CSME Unit. Note: annual average reflects only years with available data.

For CARICOM nationals, the distribution of long-term and short-term work permits varies significantly across countries and nationalities. Figure 5.4a shows the relationship between nationality and the issuance of long-term work permits, while Figure 5.4b presents the distribution of short-term permits.

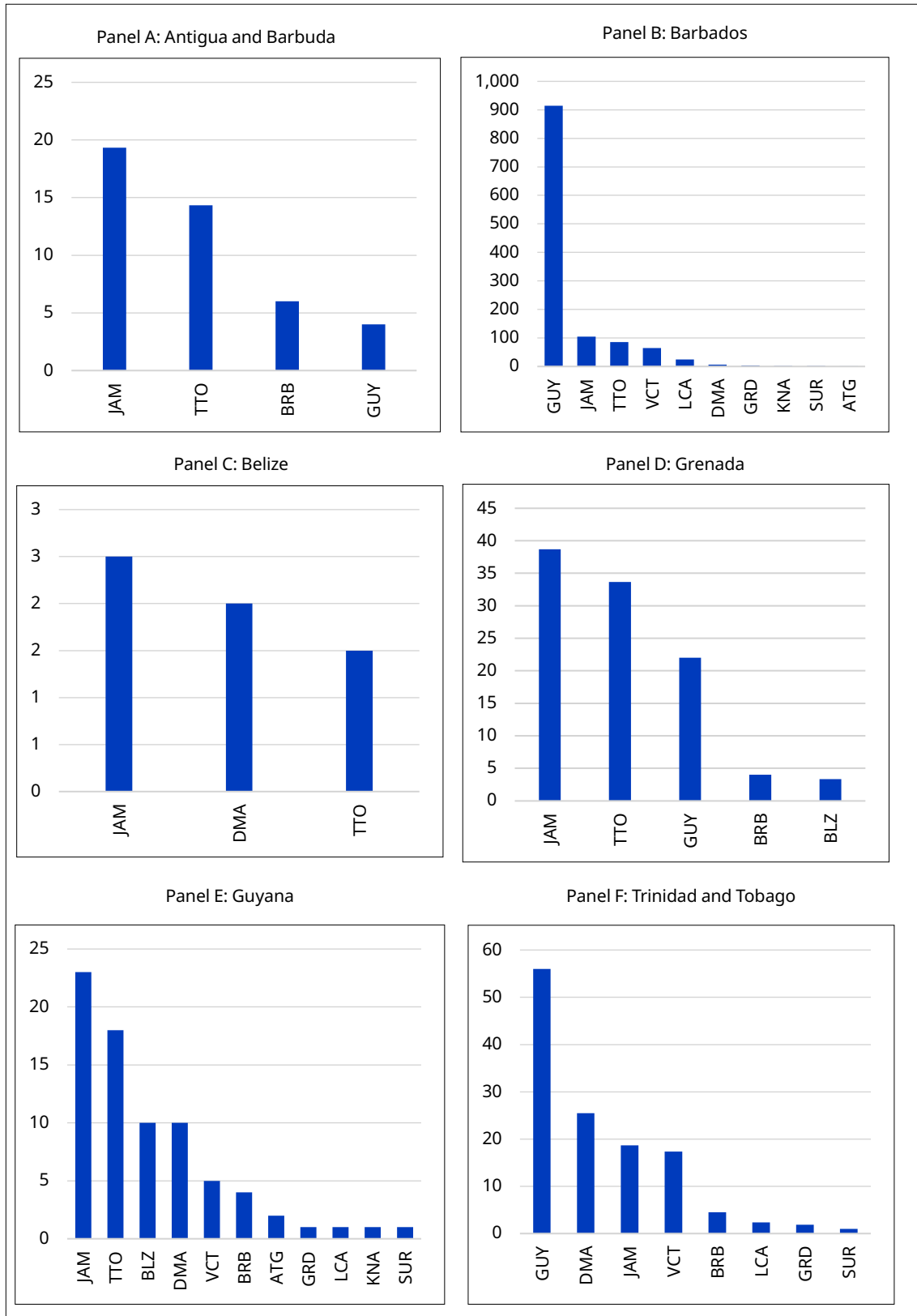
Most long-term work permits are accounted for by nationals of Jamaica going to Antigua and Barbuda, who accounted for nearly 50 per cent of work permits issued by the CARICOM Member States between 2013 and 2018. Nationals of Guyana going to Antigua and Barbuda also accounted for a sizeable share of long-term work permits issued, accounting for around 20 per cent over the same period. The story is quite different when observing the recipients of short-term work permits. In this case, nationals of Guyana going to Barbados accounted for 60 per cent of short-term work permits issued between 2013-2018.

► **Figure 5.4a: Long-term work permits issued to CARICOM nationals, by issuing Member State and by recipient nationality, annual-average, 2013-2018**



Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. Based on annual average data from 2013-2018.

► **Figure 5.4b: Short-term work permits issued to CARICOM nationals, by issuing Member State and by recipient nationality, annual-average, 2013-2018**



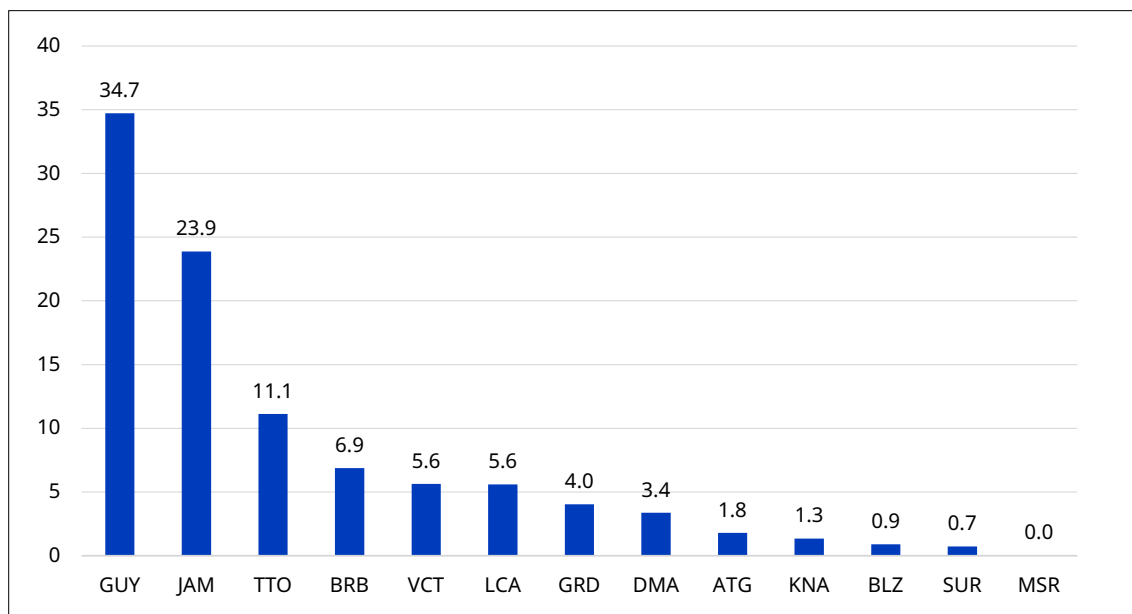
Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. Based on annual average data from 2013-2018.

The Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime

The dynamics in applying for work permits are often driven by the alternatives available (or not available) for CARICOM nationals to work in the region. One of the main issues is whether skills certificates are available via the Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime (see Section 3.1). The Bahamas does not partake in the CARICOM free movement protocol, and therefore CARICOM nationals seeking to work in the country have to apply for a work permit, whereas in other CARICOM Member States, CARICOM nationals can secure access with skills certificates. It should be noted that Haiti – a net sending country – is a party to the Revised Treaty. Haitian nationals therefore have rights under the CSME and a number of Member States have issued skills certificates to Haitian Nationals.

There are different skills categories under the skills certificate regime (see Section 3.1). Two of these categories are solely based on education, available to University Graduates, and holders of associate degrees. The remaining categories are for specific occupations, including nurses and teachers. On average, the vast majority of skills certificates issued are for University Graduates, accounting for 65.2 per cent of skills certificates issued between 2013 and 2018 (Figure 5.5). A further 14 per cent were issued to holders of associate degrees. Only 20 per cent of skills certificates were issued under the occupation categories.

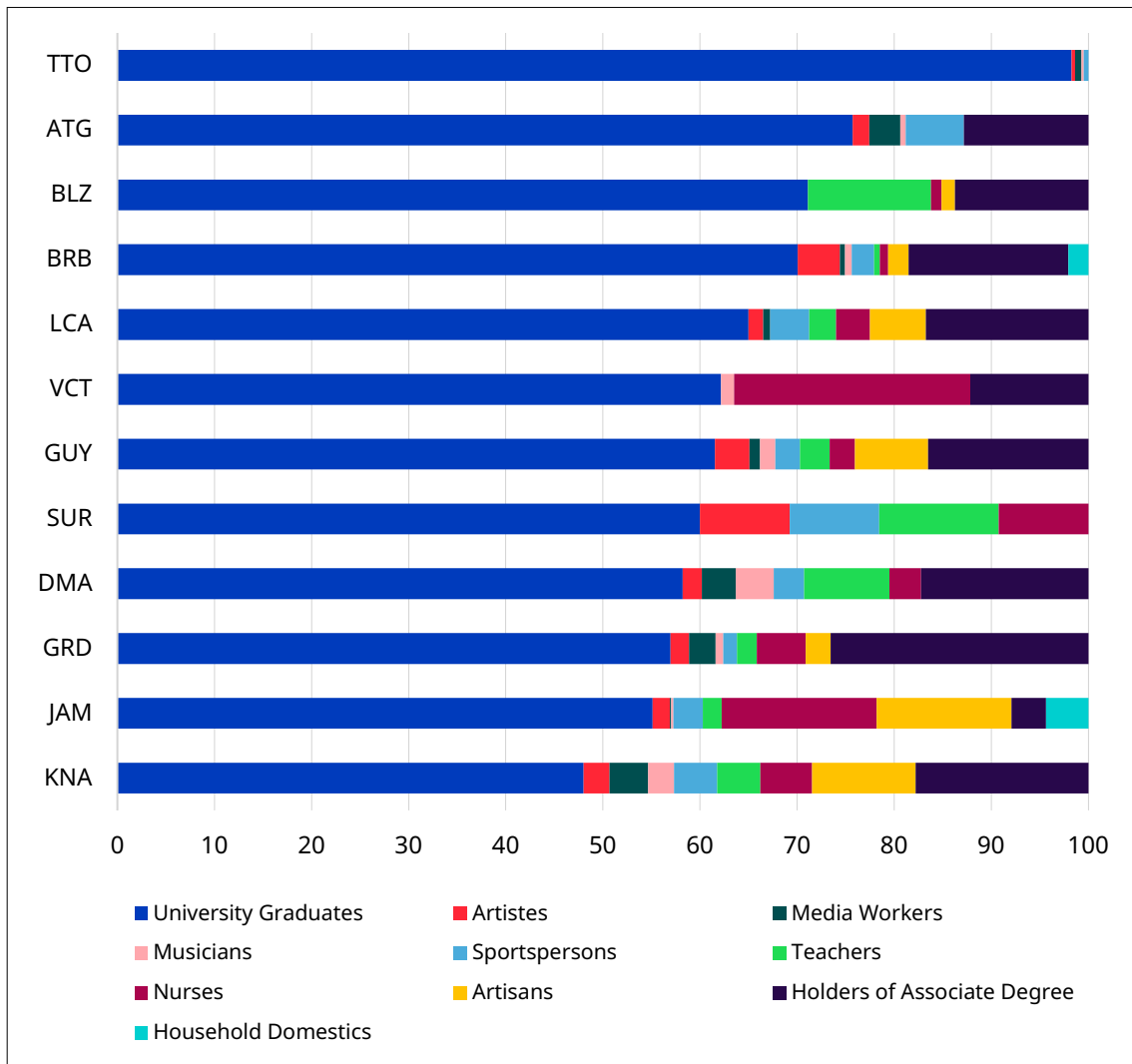
► **Figure 5.5: Distribution of skills certificates issued by CARICOM Member States - annual average 2013-2018**



Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. Based on annual average data from 2013-2018.

In terms of the migrants, there was some variation in terms of the skills categories, but most skills certificates were issued to University Graduates. This was particularly the case for Trinidadian nationals, and this trend was seen to a lesser degree in Antigua and Barbuda, Belize and Barbados (Figure 5.6). For specific occupations skills certificates, nurses were most common for nationals of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, accounting for 24 per cent of the skills certificates issued to the country; as well as to Jamaicans (16 per cent) and Surinamese (9 per cent). Teachers were more common for nationals of Belize (13 per cent), Suriname (12 per cent) and Dominica (9 per cent). It is possible that the education skills certificates offer more flexibility than other occupation-specific categories. Further research on the educational composition of the skills certificate recipients would be helpful in terms of understanding the motivations and preferences under this avenue of labour migration in the region.

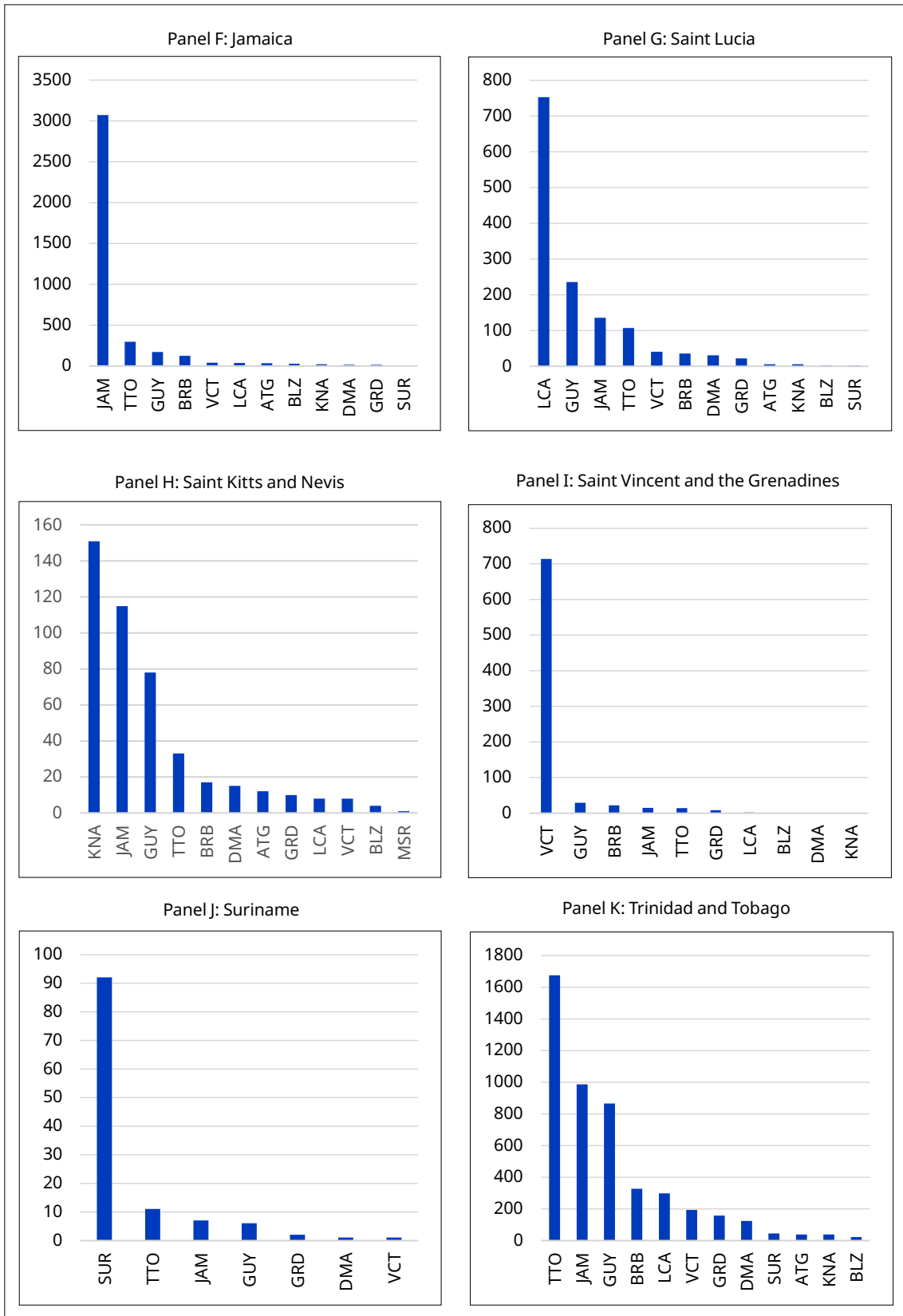
► **Figure 5.6: Distribution of skills certificates issued, by recipient CARICOM Member State and skills category, annual average over 2013-2018**



Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. Based on annual average data from 2013-2018.

The main recipients of skills certificates were Guyanese nationals, accounting for 35 per cent of skills certificates issued between 2013 and 2018 (Figure 5.7). Guyana itself was the main issuer of these skills certificates. It is worth noting that recipients of skills certificates do not necessarily use the skills certificates to move and work. It simply gives them the right to use these certificates if they wish to do so. Second was Jamaica, accounting for 23.9 per cent of skills certificates, followed by Trinidad and Tobago (11.1 per cent).

► **Figure 5.7: Skills certificates issued, by CARICOM Member State** (Continued)



Source: CSME Unit, CARICOM Secretariat. Based on annual average data from 2013-2018.

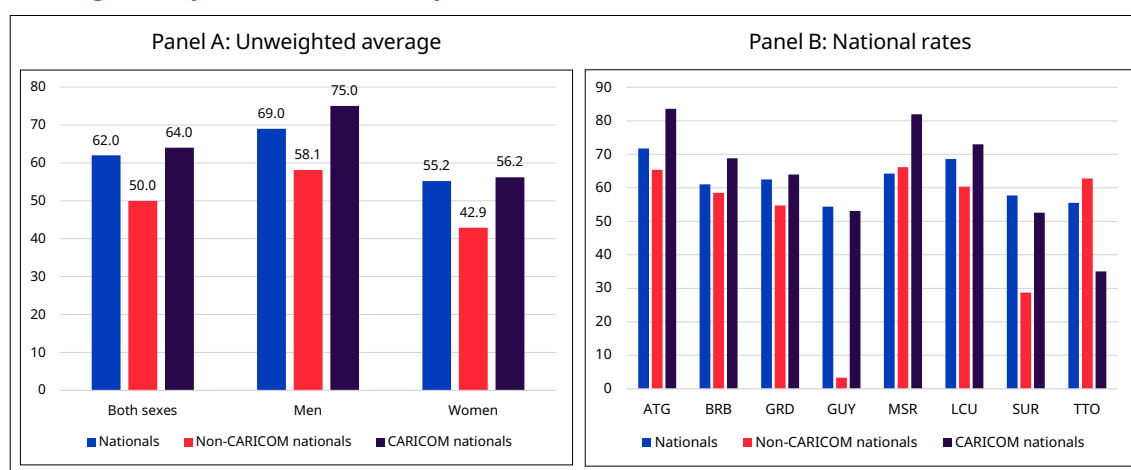
5.1.2. Labour market characteristics of nationals versus migrants

The main data source for labour market characteristics of nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals are labour force surveys and, in some cases, household surveys if they allow for both labour market variables as well as nationality variables; if they include a breakdown by place of birth or citizenship to allow for CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals to be identified. This allows for comparisons of labour market characteristics of nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals.

Over the region as a whole, CARICOM nationals, at 64 per cent have a higher labour force participation rate than the national population, at 62 per cent, reflecting the high levels of migration in the region. Looking at comparisons by nationals, CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals (Figure 5.8, Panel A). This contrasts with non-CARICOM nationals who have a much lower participation rate of 50 per cent. The differences likely reflect the higher number of non-CARICOM nationals who move to the CARICOM region in retirement and are therefore classified as being outside of the labour force.

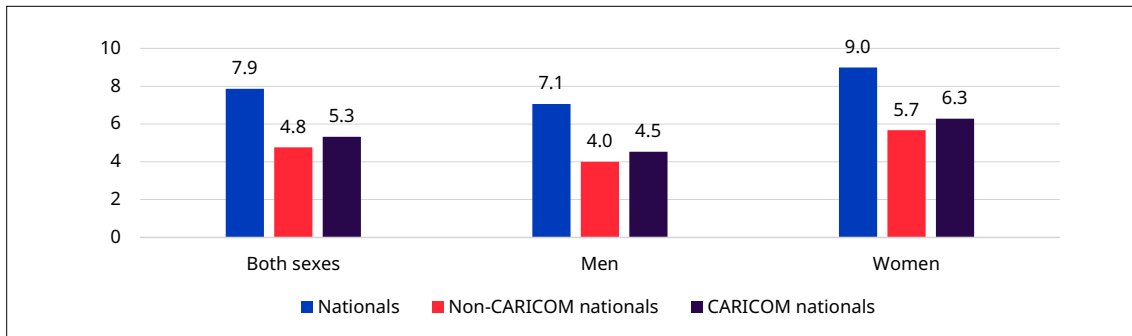
By sex, the difference is marked. Men have a much higher labour force participation rate than women, estimated at 75 per cent for men and 56.2 per cent for women. The differences between CARICOM nationals and nationals hold for both sexes (Figure 5.8, Panel B). There are however some differences between countries. For example, Trinidad and Tobago has a higher labour force participation rate for non-CARICOM nationals, which likely reflects a significant number of Venezuelans in the country. The difference in participation rates between migrant men and women chimes with global trends, with migrant women more likely to face obstacles to participation, and to be in work that is not necessarily captured in statistics, including household and care work (ILO 2024c).

► **Figure 5.8: Labour force participation rate for migrants and non-migrants, by sex, latest available year (%)**



Source: Author’s calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

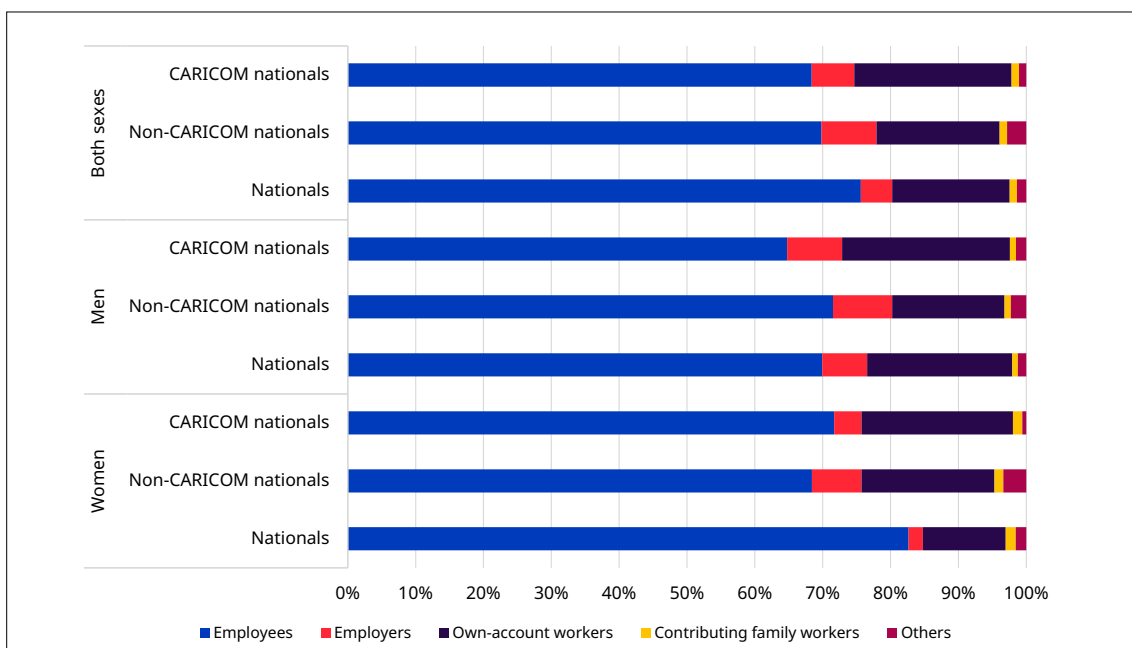
The unemployment rate for CARICOM and non-CARICOM nationals is lower than for the national population, in line with global trends. Globally, the unemployment rates for migrants versus non-migrants typically show higher unemployment rates for non-migrants (i.e. nationals) owing to the higher likelihood of them being eligible to social security, as well as the fact that many migrants will have travelled specifically in search of employment and may even have employer-specific visas or work permits. This is observed in Figure 5.9, which shows that the unemployment rate for both sexes is considerably higher for the national population than for CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals. The difference is even greater for women, with women nationals registering an average unemployment rate of 9 per cent, compared to 6.3 per cent for CARICOM nationals and 5.7 per cent for non-CARICOM nationals.

► **Figure 5.9: Unemployment rates, migrants and non-migrants, by sex, latest available year (%)**

Source: Author's calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals are less likely to be in wage and salaried work than nationals, potentially reflecting poorer conditions of work for migrants (panel B). There are some differences between CARICOM migrants and non-CARICOM migrants with a higher share of CARICOM migrants being own-account workers, and a slightly higher share of non-CARICOM migrants being employers. These findings have implications for job creation as both employers and own-account workers are forms of self-employment, albeit employers have employees and own-account workers do not.

Globally, migrants are often more vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions than non-migrants, even in wage and salaried jobs. Typically, higher shares of wage and salaried employment are associated with better quality jobs. They are more likely to have regular incomes and better job security. And salaried workers in particular are more likely to be eligible for social security and other benefits such as paid leave. However, this is not always the case. Many migrants in wage and salaried employment can be in poor quality jobs, particularly in the informal sector, and in some cases, in vulnerable situations owing to the reliance on their employer for a visas to stay in the country. In some instances, migrant workers in wage and salaried employment might even be in forced labour situations, owing to their vulnerable status as migrants (Latham-Sprinkle et al. 2019).

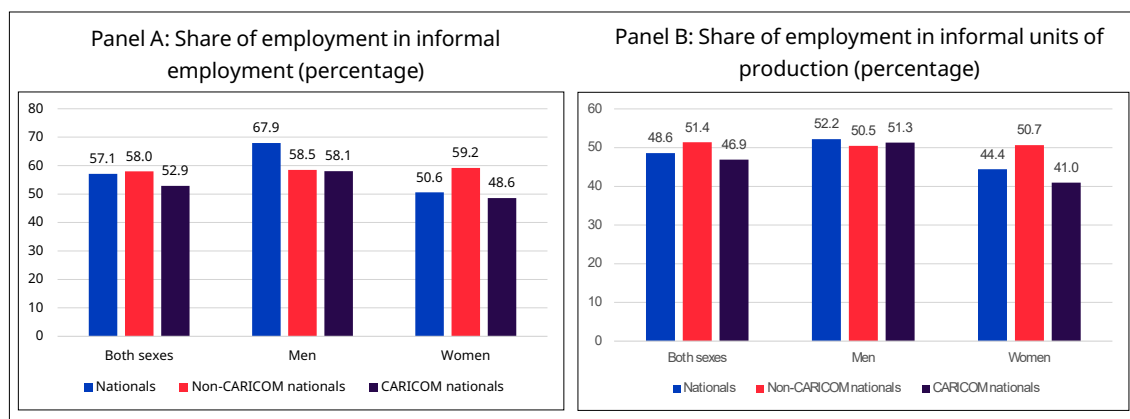
► **Figure 5.10: Distribution of employment by status in employment, by migration status (%)**

Source: Author's calculations based on national data from the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

Informality is relatively widespread for all workers across CARICOM labour markets. Figure 5.11 shows the share of employment that is informal (Panel A) and also share of employment in informal units of production (Panel B). Informality can mean that a worker does not have a written contract, nor is eligible to any paid leave. Employment in informal units of production refers to the entity in which the worker is employed. Informal units of production can include unregistered enterprises or enterprises that do not pay taxes. It is of course possible to be informally employed in a formalised business, if a registered business hires a worker on an irregular basis. It is important to bear in mind that the data sources are likely to have a bias towards regular migrants and so do not fully account for irregular migrants in the respective CARICOM Member States, who would be more likely to be in informal employment and/or working for informal units of production.

With more than half the CARICOM population in informal employment, local labour markets are likely have migrants working in informal jobs, unless using regular migration channels that place a worker in a formal job. Figure 5.11, Panel A, shows that for the national population, informal employment is relatively high in the CARICOM Member States for which data is available, at around 57 per cent. The shares for both CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals are relatively similar, at 58 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively. Notably, the share of CARICOM nationals in informal employment is slightly lower than the national average, which suggests that there might be a slightly higher propensity for CARICOM migrants to be employed formally owing to the administrative channels through which they enter the country, such as through work permits or through other free movement mechanisms. Figure 5.11, Panel B, shows the share of the employed population employed in informal units of production. Again, there is little difference between the national and migrant populations, which suggests that even though around half of all employment is in informal units of production, they may be relatively normalised in the CARICOM Member States for which there is data available. Overall it suggests no discernible difference for migrants.

► **Figure 5.11: Informal employment and employment in informal units of production by migrant status - latest available data**



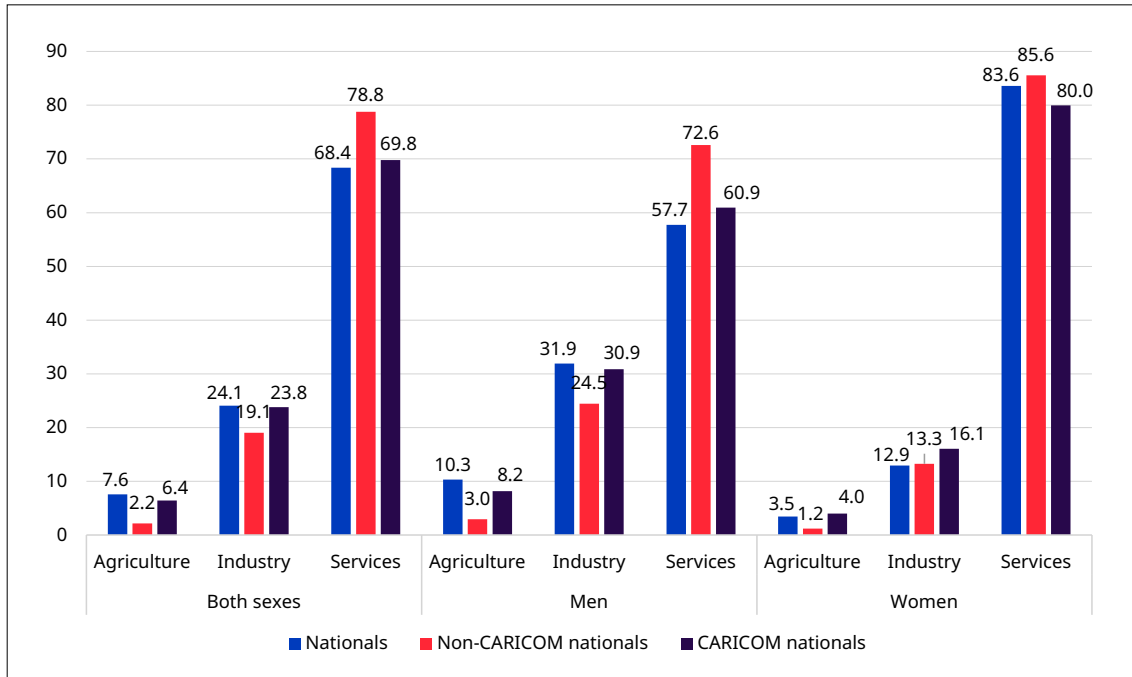
Source: Author's calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

In CARICOM Member States for which data is available, the vast majority of employment is in the services sector. Figure 5.12 shows the distribution of employment by broad sector (agriculture, industry and services) and sex. It shows that for nationals, 68.4 per cent of all employment was in services, with 24.1 per cent in industry and 7.6 per cent in agriculture. This varied by sex, with women being significantly more likely to be in the services sector than men, at 83.6 per cent, to 57.7 per cent, respectively.

Both CARICOM and non-CARICOM nationals were more likely to be working in the services sector than nationals. This was estimated at 69.8 per cent for CARICOM nationals and 78.8 per cent for non-CARICOM

nationals (Figure 5.12). Meanwhile the share of migrants in agriculture and industry were lower than for nationals, which suggests that both these sectors tend to be more reliant on national workers than migrants, even accounting for any seasonal fluctuations in demand for labour. The findings also support the notion that many migrant workers in the region, both CARICOM nationals and non-CARICOM nationals, are employed in tourism, part of the services sector. This may have long term implications due to the tourism sector's particular vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters (see Section 7).

► **Figure 5.12: Employment by broad sector group, by migration status, latest available data**



Source: Author's calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

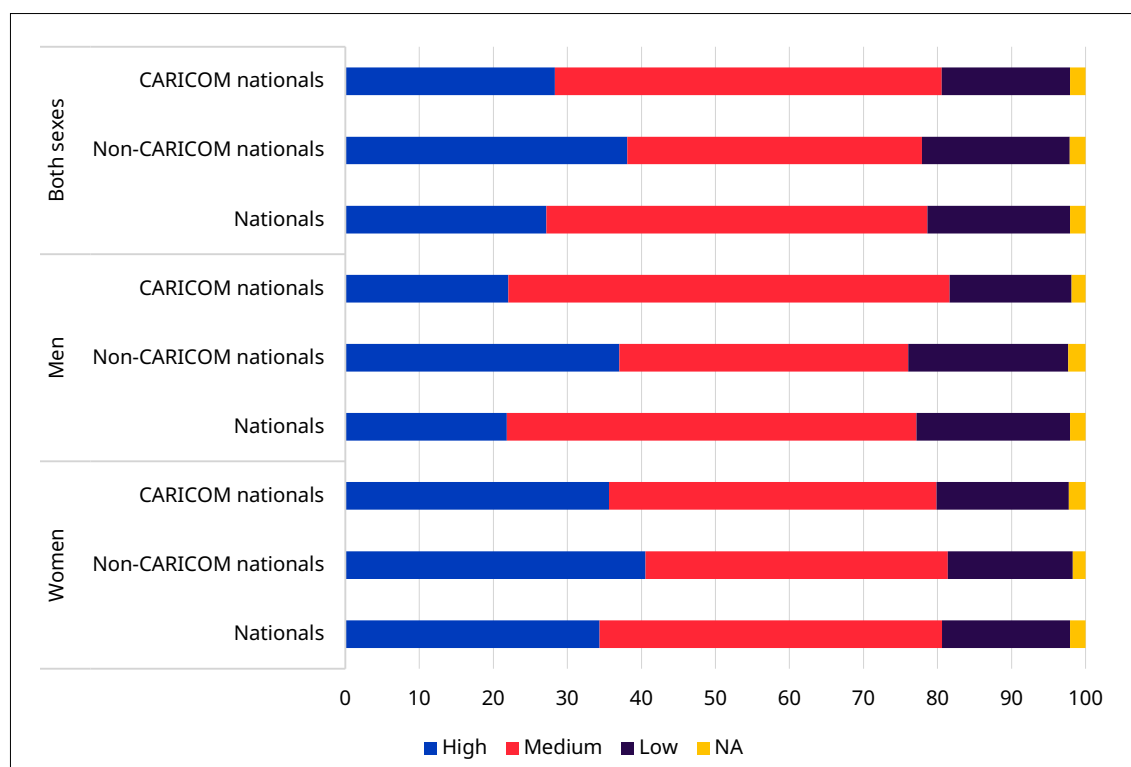
Well managed governance of labour can support local labour markets by facilitating the movement of labour to help fill skill gaps and attract talent to bolster growth and encourage job creation. Accordingly, the CARICOM Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime was developed to address skill shortages and retain skilled labour in the region by facilitating ease of movement for those with higher levels of education, while also facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications. Occupational skill levels serve as a proxy for skill levels in employment, based on the categorisation of skill levels associated within different occupations. These are categorised as low, medium and high skilled occupations, where low-skill occupations refer to elementary occupations such as cleaners, manual labourers and street vendors; medium-skill occupations include clerical support workers, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural and trade workers, and plant and machine operators; and high-skill occupations refer to managers, professionals and technicians, or associate professionals.

Breaking the data down by occupational skill levels suggests a reliance on non-CARICOM migrants for highly skilled roles. Figure 5.13 shows significant differences between nationals, CARICOM nationals, and non-CARICOM nationals in terms of occupational skill levels. Overall, the most noticeable difference was that a higher share of non-CARICOM nationals were in high-skilled occupations (38.1 per cent) than both nationals (27.2 per cent) and the CARICOM nationals (28.3 per cent). This suggests a reliance on high-skilled workers from outside the CARICOM region. Despite this, stakeholder consultations suggested that for CARICOM nationals it was more common for higher skilled migrants to stay in the region than lower skilled migrants, although it may be that this reflects difference between CARICOM nationals going to non-CARICOM destinations including North America and Europe versus staying in the CARICOM region.

Stakeholder consultations often highlighted the need for skilled labour from abroad, particularly in areas of the economy that would contribute to value-added growth. For example, frequent gaps included healthcare workers, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists; hospitality workers; and care workers. These gaps are often associated with national workers with these skills going abroad. At the same time, stakeholder consultations often identified a separate type of demand for skilled workers: information technology (IT) workers, engineers, and other “technological” occupations able to bring knowledge and investment, with an eye towards domestic productivity and economic growth. Overall stakeholder consultations confirmed the findings of the data and highlighted that, while there are many migrant workers from CARICOM in certain high skilled occupations such as the financial sector, higher skilled occupations are often filled by non-CARICOM migrant workers.

At the low end of skills, the picture is similar, with around 20 per cent of nationals and non-nationals being in low-skilled occupations. Meanwhile at medium-skilled levels, CARICOM nationals and the national workforce had similar shares of just over 20 per cent, with a lower share of non-CARICOM nationals. It is worth noting that occupational skill levels do not necessarily mean that workers have the appropriate level of education for these jobs, and skills mismatches will exist, which have a bearing on labour market demand and supply mismatches. Comprehensive skill needs assessments should be undertaken across the region and shared at the regional level, to facilitate labour migration governance across the region to the benefit of both migrants and national labour markets.

► **Figure 5.13: Occupational skill levels, by sex and migration status (%)**



Source: Author’s calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository. See Table 2.3 for data sources and reference years.

5.2. Outward labour migration from the CARICOM region

Many CARICOM migrants exit the region altogether rather than move to other CARICOM Member States. Nonetheless, in some CARICOM Member States, nationals from other CARICOM Member States make up more than half the stock of migrants. This is the case in Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Montserrat, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica, Saint Lucia and Grenada. However, in the more populous Member States of Jamaica and Haiti, the majority are from outside the CARICOM region.

The characteristics of labour migration out of the CARICOM region is different to migration within the CARICOM region. Stakeholder consultations highlighted that one of the main avenues for labour migration within CARICOM is the skills certificate. As a result, workers who do not fit within CARICOM skills certificate categories are more likely to look for options outside the region. This includes many low skilled workers, including farm workers, a number of whom participate in seasonal farm worker programmes with Canada and the US.¹⁰

The degree and characteristics of outward migration from the CARICOM region has implications for national labour markets. This is particularly the case with regard to the outflow of skilled labour whereby higher educated and more highly skilled workers migrate leaving a dearth of skilled labour for certain sectors. This is particularly the case for nursing and teaching, for which demand in more developed economies, particularly in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies, can be an attractive prospect for higher incomes and better livelihoods.

Outward migration is not, however, wholly negative, and migrant remittances are an important source of livelihoods in many CARICOM Member States. At the same time, returning migrants can bring skills, investment and other benefits. With that in mind, systems need to be in place to support the return of migrants, particularly those forcibly returned against their will. This section looks at characteristics of CARICOM migrants outside of the CARICOM region, particularly in OECD countries, and looks at its impacts upon CARICOM economies, including brain drain and the role of remittances.

“The diaspora can help build networks abroad that may potentially lead to increased trade, investment, and strengthen diplomatic ties between the home country and the host country” – **Consultation with key informant from Belize**

5.2.1. CARICOM nationals in OECD

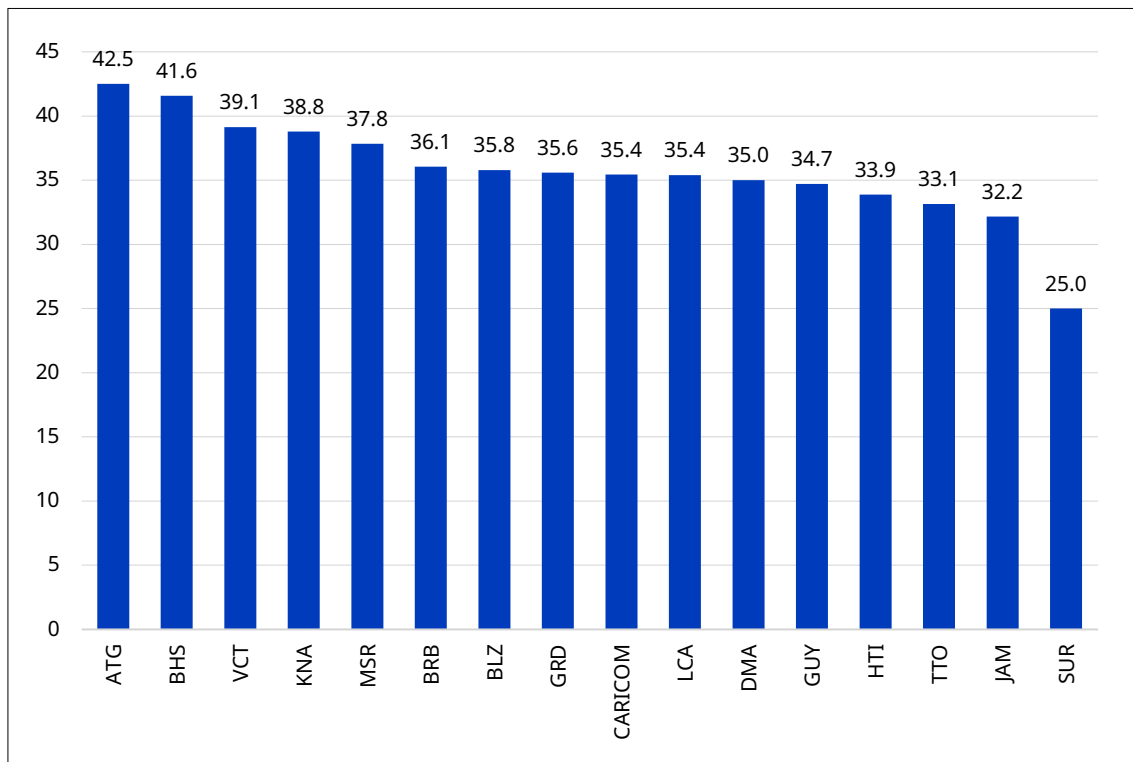
The migration of CARICOM nationals to OECD countries reflects a mix of language, cultural, family and historical ties, as well as post-colonial connections. There are large diaspora populations from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana in the UK, and from Suriname in the Netherlands. This reflects colonial ties, and more recently family-reunification stemming from historical migration, including the Windrush Era, named after the first vessel that brought Caribbean migrants to the UK in 1948. Migrants from Dominica and Haiti are more likely to be located in Spain, and France and Canada respectively, most likely due to linguistic links. Other OECD countries have facilitated visa programmes to attract Caribbean migrants, including the United States' H-2 Visa Program, and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in Canada. Many initially migrate through channels that are not employment-related, for instance, only 6 per cent of Jamaicans migrating to the US in 2022 used employment-based admission channels, while the remainder used other channels such as the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens and Family Sponsored Preferences.¹¹

¹⁰ Input provided by CARICOM Secretariat in June 2025.

¹¹ Consultation with Jamaica.

Many CARICOM migrants to OECD countries have higher levels of education. For instance, migrants with high levels of educational attainment (defined here as ISCED levels 5/6/7/8) accounted for 35.4 per cent of all employed migrants in OECD countries in 2015-16 (Figure 5.14). This ranged from 42.5 per cent from Antigua and Barbuda and 41.6 per cent from The Bahamas, to 32.2 per cent from Jamaica, and 33.1 per cent from Trinidad and Tobago.

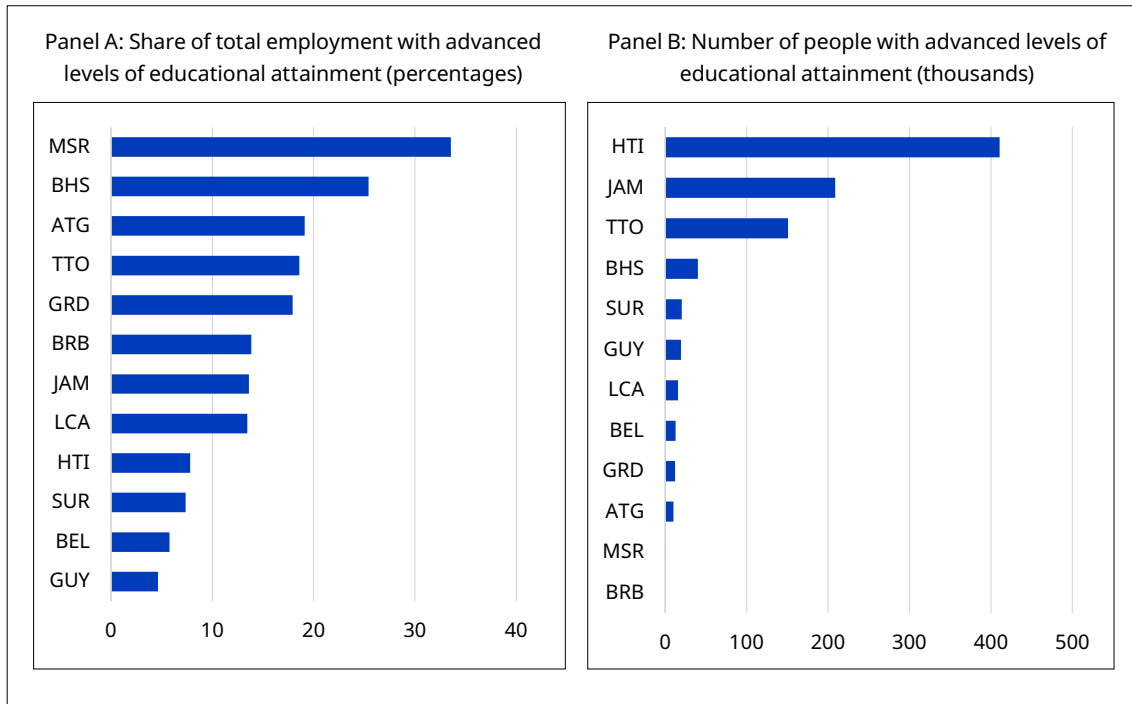
► **Figure 5.14: Share of employed migrants in OECD countries with high levels of educational attainment, by country of birth, 2015-2016 (%)**



Source: OECD migration database

For all CARICOM Member States, the outflow of highly educated migrants constitutes a brain drain from the region. And through the Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime, free movement of skills is being shaped in a way to encourage high educated workers to remain in the region. Looking at workers with advanced levels of education in the CARICOM Member States, we see that 33.5 per cent of the workers in Montserrat have advanced levels of education, 25.4 per cent in The Bahamas, and nearly 20 per cent in both Antigua and Barbuda, and Trinidad and Tobago (Figure 5.15, Panel A). Altogether, this equates to around 900,000 people (Figure 5.15, Panel B), mostly Haitians and Jamaicans (albeit the percentage of workers with high levels of education in these countries is low, their significantly higher populations means they have more in absolute terms). This means that as many as 900,000 people in the region could be eligible to migrate within the region under the University Graduate category of the Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime of the free movement protocol. Indeed a study by the CARICOM CSME Unit estimated that 29 per cent of the employed population of Belize, 26 per cent of Guyana, 33 per cent of Jamaica, 23 per cent of Saint Lucia, and 29 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago would all qualify under the occupation categories of the Free Movement of Skilled Nationals Regime (CSME 2023).

► **Figure 5.15: Highest levels of educational attainment by CARICOM Member State - latest available data**



Source: Author's calculations based on national data sources in the ILO Microdata Repository

While the emigration of highly skilled and highly educated people to OECD countries presents a risk of brain drain from the CARICOM region, not all highly educated migrants will necessarily end up in high skilled occupations. Instead, many will end up in jobs for which they are overqualified for due to a lack of recognition of their skills and qualifications, as well as other problems, including social integration. Skill mismatches, overqualification and underqualification are indicative of labour market inefficiencies, and have implications for job growth and productivity in the economy. Moreover, skill mismatches in the labour market can be reflective of poor working conditions and can be drivers of emigration. At the same time, skill mismatches in countries of destination can be indicative of better (or worse) opportunities for migrants in comparison to opportunities in their country of origin.

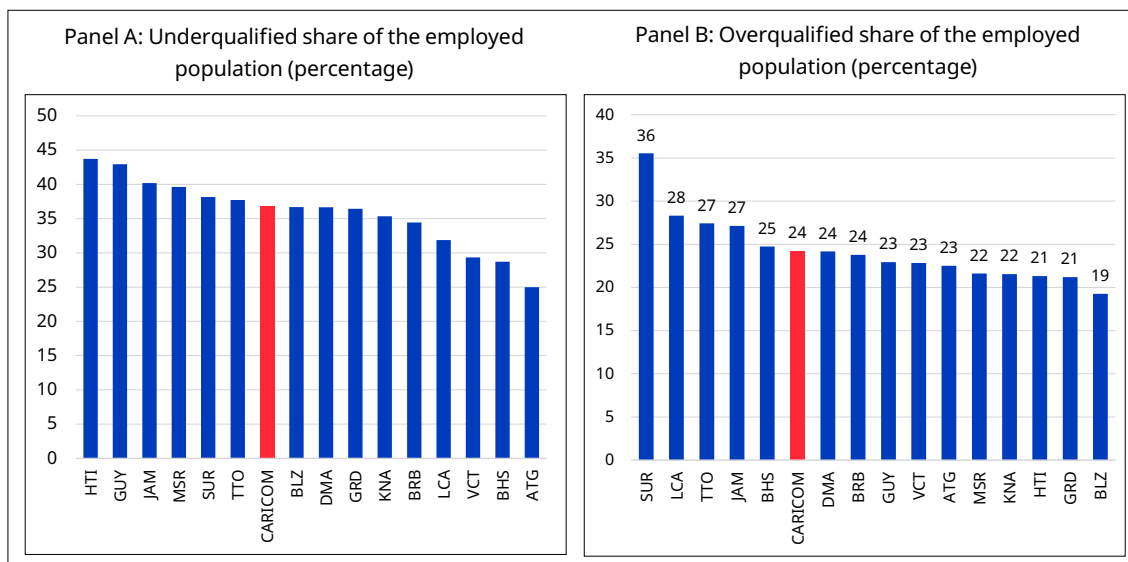
“Outward migration provides opportunities for Jamaicans to gain international experience, which can be beneficial if they return, returning with new skills and expertise that can serve the interest of the country” – **Stakeholder consultation**

Many CARICOM migrants to OECD countries, particularly from countries with significant levels of such migration, are overqualified for their roles – they have a higher level of education than is required. Figure 5.16 shows that, based on 2015-16 data, nearly a quarter of all employed migrants from CARICOM Member States in OECD countries were overqualified for their roles. This was as high as 36 per cent for Suriname, 28 per cent for Saint Lucia, and 27 per cent for Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, respectively. In Belize, Grenada and Haiti, overqualification rates were lower, ranging between 19 and 21 per cent.

At the same time, underqualification also reflects labour market mismatches, particularly when employers cannot find the skills and talent needed for certain roles. This means that people who do not have the equivalent educational attainment are hired. While this can be perceived as a positive thing for

workers, allowing exposure, higher salaries and more responsibility than might have otherwise been feasible, it can also be associated with lower wages and poorer quality of work (Quintini 2011). As such, the presence of underqualification for 37 per cent of CARICOM employed migrants in OECD countries deserves further attention and research, particularly when underqualification rates are as high as 44 per cent for nationals from Haiti and 43 per cent for nationals from Guyana.

► **Figure 5.16: Skill mismatches of employed migrants in OECD countries, by nationality, 2015/16**



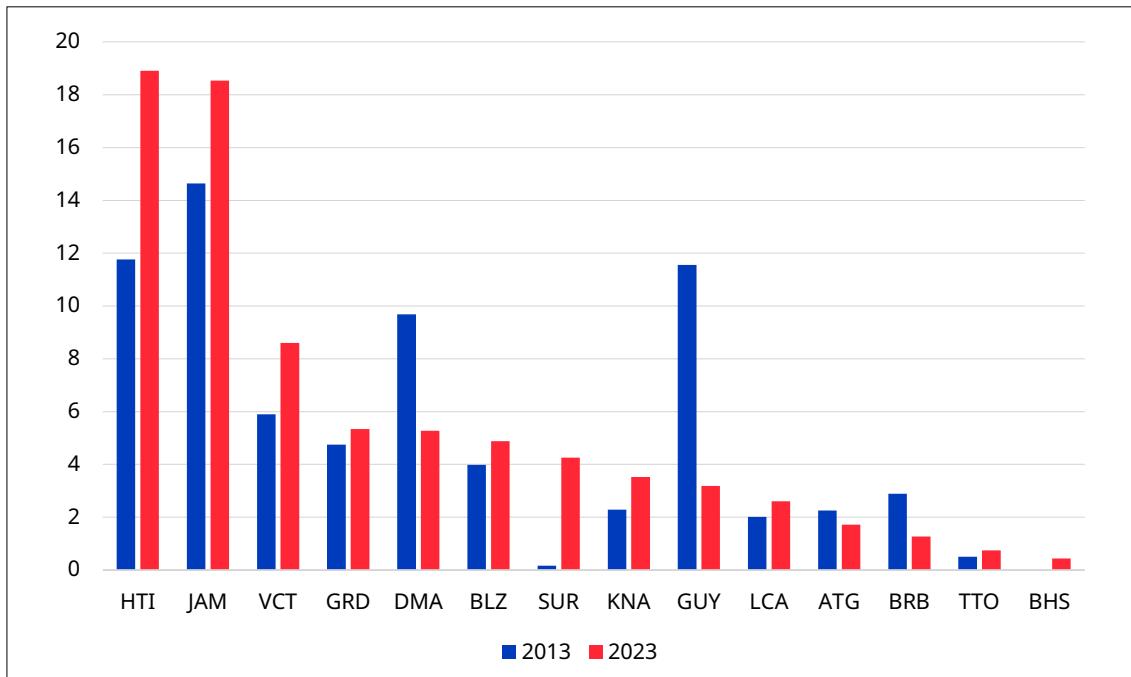
Source: OECD migrant database

5.2.2. Remittances

Across the Caribbean, remittances account for a higher share of GDP than foreign direct investment and official aid (Srinivasan et al. 2017; Jaupart 2023). For the Caribbean region as a whole, remittances are estimated to have amounted to around USD 18.4 billion as of the end of 2024 (Maldonado and Harris 2024). Remittances are associated with strengthened economies, more developed financial systems and improved creditworthiness at the national level (Clemens and McKenzie 2018). In addition, for the Caribbean, remittances may serve as a natural economic stabiliser in periods of economic disruption, such as in the aftermath of a natural disaster (Srinivasan et al. 2017).

“Outward migration contributes to increased remittances, which remain a vital source of income for many households and support national economic stability. According to data from the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ), remittances to Jamaica totalled US\$2.4 billion as of October 2024” – **Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica**

Personal remittances across the Caribbean account for around 7 per cent of GDP (Srinivasan et al. 2017). However, this varies significantly across the CARICOM Member States. For instance, Figure 5.17 shows that in 2023, remittances accounted for nearly 20 per cent of GDP in Haiti and Jamaica, representing a significantly bigger share of GDP compared to a decade earlier. In other Member States, particularly The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Antigua and Barbuda the contribution was less significant. However, these are higher income Member States, with higher GDP and less reliance on remittances. Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago are the only CARICOM Member States to actually be net senders of remittances over the last ten years (Jaupart 2023).

► **Figure 5.17: Personal remittances received, as a percentage of GDP, 2013 and 2023**

Source: World Bank staff estimates based on IMF balance of payments data, and World Bank and OECD GDP estimates. World Development Indicators.

5.3. Labour market information on migrant workers

Effective, evidence-based labour migration policymaking can only be informed through reliable and timely labour market statistics. Labour migration statistics sit at the intersection of international migration statistics and labour statistics. International migration statistics should comply with international standards established by the United Nations Statistics Division in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Meanwhile, labour statistics ought to follow the guidelines and recommendations established by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians. Statistics on international migration include data from border management systems and other administrative records, as well as data from Population and Housing Censuses. Meanwhile national labour statistics are primarily drawn from labour force surveys, but also from Population and Housing Censuses, other household surveys, enterprise surveys, and administrative records.

There are avenues to improve international migration statistics, and the Global Compact for Migration recognises this. It encourages Member States to strengthen the evidence base on migration by improving and investing in the collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate, reliable, comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other characteristics relevant in national contexts (United Nations 2021). The IOM supports governments in border management systems and data processing, and works with National Statistics Offices, Immigration and Border Control Authorities, as well as other ministries and departments (IOM and OECS 2024).

The CLMIS includes standard labour market variables for the labour force, employment and unemployment, disaggregated by age and sex. While these are relatively limited, the CLMIS also includes an aspirational list, which includes data on non-national workers and overseas placement.¹² The specific indicators include:

¹² These indicators are aspirational in that they are unlikely to be available for all Member States at present and instead require a longer-term plan to be able to provide these additional variables.

- ▶ Number of documented (work permit or similar) foreign labourers in the country (by occupation, sector of economic activity and duration of stay - more or less than a year)
- ▶ Ratio of documented foreign labourers to the employed population
- ▶ Number of CARICOM Skills Certificates issued
- ▶ Number of CARICOM Skills Certificates verified (duration of stay - more or less than a year)
- ▶ Number of workers in Foreign Labour Placement Programmes per year

All labour migration indicators are to be sourced from administrative records, within the responsible agencies including those who manage work permits, such as the Free Movement Desk. While some of this data might be obtained through official data sources such as the Population Census, the responsible authorities are mostly ministries and departments outside of the National Statistics Office. This has implications for the processing and sharing of labour market information, as ministries or national authorities with responsibility for labour or immigration that hold these administrative records, typically do not capture the information for primary purpose of statistics. Consequently, they do not necessarily have the safeguards, systems and capacity to process, manage and disseminate this data in as robust a manner as National Statistics Offices.

“One of the outcomes I would like to see is that we arrive at a mechanism for capturing more labour-related data in terms of movement of people and intra-regional labour migration – to better understand the labour market in the Caribbean.” – **Sen. the Hon. Claudette Joseph, Attorney General and Minister for Legal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Affairs, Grenada and Chair, COHSOD Labour, at the Thirty-fourth Special Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) Labour (CARICOM 2025b)**

It should be noted that the CLMIS list of aspirational indicators, while important, captures only a narrow set of information on labour migration, and more information is needed to better understand the complex dynamics of labour migration in the region. Insights can be drawn from other regions, particularly the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (see Box 1), the Southern Africa Development Cooperation (SADC) and other regions including the Pacific, all of which are using a minimum set of indicators that cover international migrant stock, international migrant inflows and outflows, stock of nationals abroad, and returnees. They use a set of 21 indicators that are requested from focal points per country or territory and compiled in the ILO International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) Database. This could be used as a benchmark to assess the availability of data per country or territory, and to assess available and potential data sources to help fill gaps. These indicators constitute a baseline that can be used to calculate additional labour market indicators such as the labour force participation rate and employment-to-population ratios, among others. There are three modules of indicators:

Module A: International migrant stock

1. Working-age population by sex, age and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
2. Working-age population by sex, education and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
3. Foreign-born or non-citizen working-age population by sex and country of birth or citizenship (Persons)
4. Employment by sex, age and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
5. Employment by sex, economic activity and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
6. Employment by sex, occupation and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
7. Employment by sex, status in employment and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)

- 8. Employed foreign-born persons by sex and country of birth or citizenship (Persons)
- 9. Unemployment by sex, age and place of birth or citizenship (Persons)
- 10. Mean nominal monthly earnings of employees by sex and place of birth or citizenship (Local currency)

Module B: International migrant flow

- 11. Inflow of foreign-born or non-citizen working-age population by sex and country of birth or citizenship (Persons)
- 12. Inflow of foreign-born or non-citizen working-age population by sex and education (Persons)
- 13. Inflow of foreign-born or non-citizen employed persons by sex and economic activity (Persons)
- 14. Inflow of foreign-born employed persons by sex and occupation (Persons)

Module C: Nationals abroad

- 15. Stock of nationals abroad by sex and country of residence (Persons)
- 16. Inflow of nationals returned from abroad by sex and country of previous residence (Persons)
- 17. Outflow of nationals by sex and country of destination (Persons)
- 18. Outflow of nationals for employment by sex and country of destination (Persons)
- 19. Outflow of nationals for employment by sex and education (Persons)
- 20. Outflow of nationals for employment by sex and economic activity (Persons)
- 21. Outflow of nationals for employment by sex and occupation (Persons)

It is recommended that a review be undertaken in the CARICOM region to assess available data under these indicators along with potential data sources per CARICOM Member State. This can be used for resource mobilisation to support Member States in strengthening labour migration statistics as a means of improving labour migration governance.

► Box 1: Enhancement of International Labour Migration Statistics in ASEAN

International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) in ASEAN has improved dramatically over the last decade, filling an important knowledge gap for national and regional policymakers and for the broader research community. This is due, in part, to regional collaboration and commitment by ASEAN Member States (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam) to improvements in the collection, processing and dissemination of ILMS at the national level. Part of the success in improving coverage lies in the use of the ILMS Database for benchmarking progress and as a minimum set of indicators. A network of focal points and annual regional meeting of these focal points allows for regular review of progress, capacity building, identification of areas of support, knowledge sharing and peer learning.

The ILO works with focal points in different ASEAN Member States, providing national-level and regional support and capacity building, to validate, annotate and gather together information from relevant surveys and administrative records produced in the ASEAN Member States. This information has been published annually in the ILO's ILMS Database in ASEAN since December 2014 as a special collection on the ILO's central database, ILOSTAT, as well as through the AP-Migration web-portal. The ILMS database globally has been important both for SDG monitoring, national planning, and global evidence base on labour migration.

Source: (ILO 2025b)

▶ 6. Labour migration governance in the CARICOM region

This section provides an overview of labour migration governance in the CARICOM region. It is based on a structured analytical framework (see Section 2.3), based on three pillars:

- ▶ Pillar I: Strengthening labour migration governance mechanisms
- ▶ Pillar II: Enhancing the protection and integration of migrant workers and their families
- ▶ Pillar III: Supporting functions for migrants' participation in the labour market.

The original version of the assessment is available in Annex I. This section provides a summary of the main findings. While the information is drawn partially from a desk review of available materials, it is also informed by information provided through stakeholder consultations. Accordingly, information may be biased toward the views of these stakeholders. Taking these caveats into account, the main findings are summarised as below.

6.1. Pillar I. Strengthening labour migration governance mechanisms

6.1.1. Coordination of labour migration at regional and national levels

Regional labour migration coordination and dialogue processes

There is no official regional dialogue process or coordination mechanism on migration in which all CARICOM Member States participate. Regional coordination and dialogue on labour migration is important for sharing information on skills gaps and labour migration strategies and policies; for developing regional solutions to common challenges; and for harmonising laws, policies and practices to bolster migrant workers' protection and its impact of labour migration on economic development. The Caribbean Migration Consultations, launched in 2016, brought together 20 governments and 10 international organizations to deliberate on migration issues, however not all CARICOM Member States took part, and it came to a standstill during the COVID-19 pandemic (Párraga 2021).¹³

There is regional dialogue on migration outside of CARICOM in which some CARICOM Member States participate. One such dialogue take place via the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM). The RCM is a regional institution, established in 1996 covering Central and Northern America and the Dominican Republic (IOM 2020). Of the CARICOM Member States, only Belize participates. Meanwhile Barbados, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have participated in regional policy dialogues on migration in the Inter-American Development Bank.¹⁴

Regional mechanisms through which labour migration is discussed and coordinated within CARICOM

At the regional level there are two Ministerial Councils, namely the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), consisting of CARICOM Ministers of Labour; and the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), which sometimes discusses labour migration issues. These policy

¹³ Interview with IOM staff, 28 March 2025.

¹⁴ Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

making bodies are responsible for the free movement and labour aspects of the CSME.¹⁵ The COHSOD, which develops policies and initiatives related to human and social development in the region, sometimes discuss labour migration, and has also been engaged in the development of the draft CMPF, which covers labour migration. During COHSOD meetings, CARICOM Member States can highlight regional issues affecting them and discuss possible ways forward.¹⁶ Labour migration is also sometimes discussed by the COTED, by the Community Council, and is also sometimes placed on the agenda of the Conference of Heads of Government.¹⁷

National CSME focal points have been in place since 2002.¹⁸ These focal points coordinate the implementation of CSME initiatives in their Member States, including the implementation of Free Movement, based on the guidance received from the Policy bodies (Párraga 2021). Their role includes sharing information on labour migration based on an agreed template designed to provide statistics in relation to the Free movement. These focal points are the main point of contact to address practical obstacles to labour migration and facilitate the movement of people in the region. They coordinate a complaints procedure through which CARICOM nationals may lodge a complaint online with CSME focal points. These complaints can be addressed through coordination between the CSME focal points.¹⁹

Efforts have been made to strengthen the network of CSME Focal Points through regional meetings and the establishment of dedicated communication channels.²⁰ The focus of these regional meetings is to discuss matters related to the implementation and advancement of the CSME, including issues related to labour migration. Focal Points are required to oversee the preparation of national position papers, which may touch on labour migration, as part of the preparatory steps for their country's participation in CARICOM Meetings.²¹ Meanwhile there is a dedicated communication channel which is used to communicate with one another to assist nationals of CSME Member States to migrate within the region.

Each CARICOM Member State has a CARICOM ambassador, which is hosted by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and forms part of the Committee of CARICOM ambassadors. These CARICOM ambassadors serve as the interlocutors between technical level officials and the political leadership of Member States, and meet twice a year, before the Community Council of Ministers meeting.²²

Numerous CARICOM Member States have expressed the need to bolster regional cooperation to facilitate mobility and ensure that CARICOM nationals know their rights, and are abreast of opportunities for labour migration in the region (Párraga 2021). Regional coordination on labour migration is important for sharing information; for harmonising labour migration related laws, policies and practices; and for peer-to-peer learning. Information sharing and coordination on labour migration are essential for strengthening regional cooperation.

15 See articles 15 (COTED) and 17 (COHSOD) of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. There is also the Community Council of Ministers (Art 13), for which the Community Council shall, in accordance with the policy directions established by the Conference, have primary responsibility for the development of Community strategic planning and co-ordination in the areas of economic integration, functional co-operation and external relations. The Conference (Art 12) is the supreme Organ of the Community. The Conference shall determine and provide policy direction for the Community. The Committee of CARICOM Ambassadors was established following a Heads decision.

16 Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

17 Stakeholder consultation with Belize.

18 Interview with CARICOM Secretariat, 27 March 2025.

19 CARICOM has an agreed complaint procedure "CARICOM Complaints Procedure - Point of Entry / Departure" for CARICOM nationals, A CARICOM national arriving in, transiting or departing a Caribbean Community Member State, and or seeking to exercise a right under the CSME, may have had certain experiences about which he / she wishes to file a complaint with the relevant authorities. The experience(s) may have been at a port of entry, after entry into a Member State, or both. Source: Interview with CARICOM Secretariat, 27 March 2025.

20 Interview with CARICOM Secretariat, 27 March 2025.

21 Interview with CARICOM Secretariat, 27 March 2025 and input provided by CARICOM Secretariat in June 2025.

22 Interview with CARICOM Secretariat, 27 March 2025.

There is a need to strengthen regional coordination on labour migration to facilitate the harmonisation of CSME legislation and the standardisation of the implementation of regional policy at the national level. CARICOM decisions need to be reflected in national legislation for them to be implemented, and it can take a long time before the necessary legislation is enacted at the national level (Párraga 2021). Moreover, greater coherence in the implementation of regional policy at the national level is needed, as Member States implement regional policy in different and ad hoc ways (Párraga 2021). To optimise the benefits of the CSME, its provisions need to be harmonised across Member States; must be clear to CSME country nationals; and ought to be available online, such as on government websites that are easily accessible, and widely publicised.

National labour migration coordination and dialogue processes

The lack of formal mechanisms for information sharing and policy coherence between government agencies impede effective migration governance in CARICOM Member States (IOM 2018). National coordination and dialogue on labour migration is key to developing national labour migration objectives, and to developing the steps to achieve these objectives within government ministries and agencies, the social partners and other stakeholders. Regional and national labour migration governance is hampered by a shortfall in coordination and information sharing on labour migration. This points to the need to bolster regional cooperation to help facilitate mobility, fill skills gaps and enhance CARICOM nationals' knowledge of their rights, and the opportunities for labour migration in the region.

The Global Compact considers that migration is a multidimensional reality that cannot be addressed by one government policy sector alone. To develop and implement effective migration policies and practices, a whole-of-government approach is needed to ensure horizontal and vertical policy coherence across all sectors and levels of government (UN 2018).

National coordination on labour migration in CARICOM Member States should be strengthened. Interviews undertaken for this study indicate that limited internal coordination on labour migration within Member States hampers information sharing and effective labour migration governance. Government ministries and agencies with mandates that touch on labour migration are not sufficiently coordinating with other government agencies working on sectors related to labour migration – such as education, health, economic development - and not well informed of one another's activities and strategies.²³

Moreover, CARICOM Member States have expressed the need for government agencies working on immigration and labour issues to improve coordination and information sharing so that the issuing of work permits is informed by national skills shortages (IOM 2018). Member States often fail to use data on occupations or skills shortages to set quotas for the recruitment of migrant workers. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines sets a good example by offering free work permits to Maths, English, Business and Science teachers, which they lack in their own labour market (IOM 2018). Such ideas could be replicated. Accordingly, there is a need to facilitate the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning on labour migration between CARICOM Member States by establishing an enhanced dialogue on regional labour migration, or by incorporating such exchanges into established CARICOM meetings.

To reinforce the benefits of labour migration and effectively address related challenges, a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach to coordination on labour migration needs to be pursued. This requires involving all government agencies whose work touch on labour migration (including ministries with responsibility for labour, immigration, education, foreign affairs, national security,

²³ Stakeholder consultations with multiple CARICOM Member States.

planning, and national and social development); the social partners; civil society; migrants or their representatives; recruitment agencies; and academia. All will contribute different insights, experiences and knowledge and facilitate a more comprehensive approach to labour migration management and national planning. Such an approach would facilitate a more holistic approach that looks at the impact of migration on economic development, while also strengthening the integration and protection of migrants.

The Global Compact promotes broad multi-stakeholder partnerships to address migration in all its dimensions by including migrants, diasporas, local communities, civil society, academia, the private sector, parliamentarians, trade unions, National Human Rights Institutions, the media and other relevant stakeholders in migration governance (UN 2018)

No CARICOM Member State has a single national coordination mechanism on labour migration. However some do have national coordination mechanisms where labour migration is discussed as part of a broader agenda. Jamaica stands out as a good practice example. Its National Working Group on International Migration and Development coordinates migration and development activities of governmental and nongovernmental actors and is co-chaired by the Planning Institute of Jamaica and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.²⁴ It guides the implementation of Jamaica's National Policy on International Migration and Development; coordinates migration-related policies and programmes; drives the integration of migration into national development planning; and promotes diaspora engagement, migrants' rights, research on migration and data sharing.²⁵ Jamaica also has three inter-agency coordinating committees that discuss labour migration issues, namely the Work Permit Committee and the Free Movement of Persons Committee, which are chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons, which is convened and chaired by the Ministry of Justice.²⁶ However, for most Member States, there is a need for membership to be broadened to include non-governmental stakeholders, to allow for a whole-of-society approach. The lack of opportunities for non-governmental agencies to participate in decision-making related to labour migration governance hampers effective labour migration governance (Párraga 2021).

6.1.2. Standards that inform labour migration governance

Ratification of key Conventions related to the protection of migrant workers remains low among the CARICOM Member States, which impedes the implementation of the CARICOM Migration Policy Framework (CMPF). The draft CMPF specifically recommends the ratification and implementation of the migrant workers conventions (ILO C97 and C143) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW). Specifically, the key Conventions are:

- ICRMW – International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
- C097 – Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)
- C143 – Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)
- C181 – Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)
- C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)

²⁴ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

²⁵ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

²⁶ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

The ratification of these conventions confirms a Member State’s commitment to international labour standards and the protection of migrant workers (Párraga 2021). Moreover, it expresses their willingness to be held accountable in this regard and develop or make the necessary amendments to laws, policy and practice to uphold these standards. Table 6.1 below indicates whether CARICOM Member States have signed, ratified or taken no action regarding the above conventions. It was compiled with information from the UN Treaty Body Database, which indicates which countries have signed, ratified or taken no action regarding the ICRMW (OHCHR 2025); and with information from the NORMLEX²⁷ database, the ILO’s Information System on International Labour Standards. There is a need to raise awareness on the key Conventions related to the protection of migrant workers with CARICOM Member States and increase the number of ratifications of these conventions.

► **Table 6.1: Status of selected International Labour Standards, by CARICOM Member State**

CARICOM Member States	ICRMW	C097	C143	C181	C189
1 Antigua and Barbuda	No action	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force	In Force
2 The Bahamas	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
3 Barbados	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force since 24.05.2025
4 Belize	Signed	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
5 Dominica	No action	In Force	Not ratified	In Force	Not ratified
6 Grenada	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force
7 Guyana	Ratified	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force
8 Haiti	Signed	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
9 Jamaica	Ratified	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force
10 Monserrat ²⁸	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
11 Saint Kitts and Nevis	No action	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
12 Saint Lucia	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
13 Saint Vincent and Grenadines	Ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
14 Suriname	No action	Not ratified	Not ratified	In Force	Not ratified
15 Trinidad and Tobago	No action	In Force	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified

27 NORMLEX is available at https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:1:13136228949787 and was accessed on 27.04.2025 to compile this table.

28 For British Overseas Territories, such as Monserrat, the ratification must be declared applicable by the UK. For more information, please see the status of ILO Conventions for Monserrat: https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:1:1200:0:NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103647

6.1.3. Policy development and implementation

Labour migration policies, at the regional and national level, serve to build a common approach to labour migration management. Developing a labour migration policy provides an opportunity to craft shared objectives and pathways for ILO constituents and other relevant stakeholders to contribute to achieving these objectives in a coordinated way. This should lead to synergies and policy coherence between the various sectors that touch on labour migration. The ILO's Practical guide on developing labour migration policies is a useful tool, which can steer the development of national labour migration policies (ILO 2022b). Labour migration policies ought to guide the development of related laws, policies and practice to ensure that labour migration governance instruments are in harmony. Labour migration policies should be developed through a whole-of-society approach, driven by tripartite constituents and by consulting all relevant stakeholders. It ought to be informed by data on available skills and skills shortages, as well as by good practices on labour migration in other countries and regions.

CARICOM is in the final stages of developing a regional Migration Policy Framework, based on extensive consultations with Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders, including UN agencies, development banks, international partners, non-governmental organisations, labour, academia, and the media.²⁹ The draft CMPF has a section on labour migration governance and contains various pertinent recommendations, such as implementing the CARICOM Labour Market Information System (LMIS) to strengthen data-driven decision-making; and implementing mechanisms for effective skills matching. CARICOM also plans to develop a regional labour migration policy framework. This study is informed by the draft CMPF and will feed into its development as a regional migration instrument.

This regional labour migration policy framework is expected to strengthen regional coordination on labour migration and meet national and regional labour migration objectives. It ought to be developed through a whole-of-society approach, on the basis of good practices and solid data on skills supply and skills gaps within the CARICOM Member States. Moreover, it should provide a harmonised framework that ensures the fair treatment of workers, prevents exploitation, facilitates skills matching, and strengthens regional economic integration.³⁰

Only one CARICOM Member State, Trinidad and Tobago, has developed a national labour migration policy (see Table 6.2 below), which is expected to be submitted to Cabinet for consideration. However, other Member States have either adopted or are developing national migration policies, which include labour migration. Belize is currently developing a national labour migration policy, while Suriname indicated that it plans to develop one. CARICOM Member States should develop national labour migration policies or labour migration objectives that are anchored in other policies, such as broader migration policies or development policies. An example of this is Jamaica's 2017 National Policy on International Migration and Development which includes labour migration objectives and has a thematic area on Labour Mobility and Development. Labour migration objectives are also captured in the Labour Market and Productivity Sector Plan of Vision 2030 Jamaica, 2009-2030. Montserrat provides another example. Its labour migration objectives are captured in its 2024 draft Population Policy and associated strategic plans.³¹ Meanwhile, Suriname adopted its Migration Policy in April 2025, and its first thematic area deals with labour mobility, remittances, labour market opportunities, and economic development.

Migration policies have been developed by Jamaica and Suriname and include some labour migration elements (as mentioned above). Besides these, Haiti has a draft migration policy, which aims to promote inter-agency cooperation, enhance migration management and ensure that the social needs of migrants are met (IOM 2022a). In 2024, Barbados announced that it is developing a National Migration Policy and

²⁹ CARICOM (2025). Draft Regional Migration Policy Framework for the Caribbean Community.

³⁰ Stakeholder consultation with Barbados.

³¹ Stakeholder consultation with Montserrat.

that an intergovernmental task force is having technical discussions on the policy (Rawlins-Bentham 2024). According to the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, Belize is developing a comprehensive labour migration policy, which is supported by various legal reforms, and which demonstrates its commitment to managing labour migration more effectively.³²

► **Table 6.2: Summary of status of labour migration and migration policies**

	Completed	Draft	Planned
National Labour Migration Policy	None	Trinidad and Tobago	Belize Suriname
Migration Policy	Jamaica Suriname	Haiti	Barbados Belize

6.1.4. Policy coherence

All CARICOM Member States should formulate clear and comprehensive labour migration objectives and anchor them in a national labour migration policy, other related national policies, or as part of a national development strategy or plan. Policy coherence between a national labour migration policy and other national policies, such as policies on economic development, employment and education ensures synergies between related thematic areas and spurs national economic development. The draft CMPF recommends “policy coherence by aligning national and regional migration policies with labour policies to not only guarantee the right to work but also facilitate access to decent work and protect national and migrant workers’ rights and align job opportunities with skills.” CARICOM Member States should also facilitate policy coherence by incorporating labour migration objectives into Decent Work Country Programmes.

CARICOM Member States can advance policy coherence by including labour migration objectives in related policies, and by putting mechanisms in place to ensure that policy coherence is actually realised in policy implementation. Some Member States have taken steps towards enhancing policy coherence between labour migration objectives and other national policies, including by integrating labour migration objectives into national development plans and into Decent Work Country Programmes, for example:

- The Bahamas and Jamaica have both integrated migration issues into their development strategies (IOM 2018). The Bahamas included immigration policies in its National Development Plan (IOM 2018), while Jamaica’s National Policy on International Migration and Development (IMDP) serves as a framework for integrating international migration into development planning processes (IOM 2024). The National Working Group on International Migration and Development, which oversees the implementation of the IMDP, drives policy coherence with Jamaica’ national development plan (Vision 2030 Jamaica) and other sectoral policies.³³
- Guyana is working on a Migration Profile for Guyana, which is expected to support policy coherence (IOM 2021a).
- Suriname’s 2022–2026 Multi-Year Development Plan (2021), includes labour migration objectives and priorities, such as shorter procedures in applying for work permits for highly skilled migrants, and language and citizenship tests as a requirement for work permit applications to strengthen the

³² Stakeholder consultation with Belize.

³³ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

integration of immigrants (IOM 2022b). Moreover, Suriname has integrated labour migration priorities into its Decent Work Country Programme 2023-2026.

- Trinidad and Tobago has indicated that the development of the proposed comprehensive labour migration policy for the region would further facilitate policy coherence on labour migration.³⁴

6.2. Pillar II. Enhancing the protection and integration of migrant workers and their families

6.2.1. Fair Recruitment and the protection of migrant workers' rights

The draft CMPF, which includes a dedicated section on fair and ethical recruitment, highlights concerns with practices within the region.³⁵ Fair recruitment is carried out within the law, in line with international labour standards, with respect for human rights, without discrimination, protecting workers from abusive situations (ILO 2022c). The draft CMPF's subsection on fair and ethical recruitment sits within the section on labour migration. It recognises that "concerns have been raised about the growing role of unscrupulous employment agencies, informal labour intermediaries and other operators acting outside the legal and regulatory framework that prey especially on low-skilled workers." In its recommended actions it calls on Member States to apply Fair Recruitment Principles and Guidelines to labour migration agreements and programmes, including by providing clear information to migrants in a language that they understand. It also calls for the establishment of transparent, fair, and ethical recruitment systems that are aligned to the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and that these are reinforced by laws and regulatory frameworks which ensure non-discrimination and equal treatment in the workplace.

Some labour migration programmes in which CARICOM nationals participate are not fully aligned to the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment. Principle number seven states that no recruitment fees or related costs should be charged to, or otherwise be borne by, workers or jobseekers (Párraga 2021). The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme (SAWP) is one such example. It allows Canadian employers to hire temporary foreign workers from ten participating CARICOM Member States³⁶ to work in farming, when national workers do not meet this demand for labour (Párraga 2021). The SAWP requires employers to pay for migrant workers' travel from their home country to their workplace in Canada, and to cover other costs. However, employers may deduct some of the costs from workers' wages, up to 5.45 USD per working day. The worker must consent to the deduction or otherwise pay for the goods and services themselves (Párraga 2021).

It is important that CARICOM Member States ensure that the labour migration programmes in which they participate, either as sending or receiving countries, comply with the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, to ensure that migrant workers enjoy the necessary protection. The UN Network on Migration's 2022 Guidance on Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) is a useful tool that can guide the development and implementation of BLMAs (UNNM, n.d.). An IOM study on labour migration in the Caribbean found that in the protection of migrants, such measures to prevent work exploitation and forced labour, are at times not sufficiently prioritised, as the emphasis falls on managing cross-border movements (Párraga 2021).

CARICOM Member States are taking steps toward enhancing fair recruitment and the protection of migrant workers, yet more awareness raising is needed. Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname all have laws in place to regulate recruitment agencies.

³⁴ Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

³⁵ This section is informed by the ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines on Fair Recruitment (ILO 2019).

³⁶ They are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago.

However, research undertaken for this assessment suggests that more awareness raising on fair recruitment is required. CARICOM Member States must ensure that laws policies and labour migration agreements and programmes are in line with fair recruitment principles and promote the protection of migrant workers. Under the subsection *Labour migration governance and policy coherence*, the draft CMPF calls upon CARICOM Member States to enhance cooperation with key destination countries, like Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands to improve labour migration governance and enhance the protection of migrant workers.

6.2.2. National labour laws and social protection laws apply to migrant workers

The CARICOM Agreement on Social Security (CASS) facilitates access to social protection benefits for nationals of CARICOM countries and territories and their family members, while they are working in another CARICOM country or territory (ILO 2021a). The Agreement was signed in 1996 and entered into force in 1997. All CARICOM Member States, apart from Haiti and Suriname, are party to the Agreement. The Agreement aims to harmonise social security legislation and covers invalidity, disability, old-age and survivors' pensions and death benefits (ILO 2021a). The CASS includes five of the nine branches of social security benefits outlined in the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). It applies to all employed and self-employed persons who are currently covered by social security legislation of any of the states and territories that are party to the agreement (Hirose et al. 2011).

While the CASS Agreement follows the principles of equal treatment for residents of CARICOM Member States under their national social security systems, the draft CMPF calls for the CASS to be expanded to include more areas. The CASS Agreement follows the principles of equal treatment for residents of CARICOM Member States in line with their own national social security systems; retaining rights vis-a-vis the payment of pensions abroad and the totalization of contribution periods; and the protection of these rights in all the countries and territories that are party to the Agreement (ILO 2021a). However, the draft CMPF calls for the CASS to be expanded to include healthcare benefits; maternity and paternity benefits; unemployment benefits; family benefits; financial assistance for dependents of migrants; and access to education and childcare. It also calls for the harmonization of laws so that the provision of social security across the region functions effectively.

The draft CMPF also calls for the development of a Regional Social Protection Strategy, recommended by COHSOD in 2016, which would ensure that migrants have access to essential social protection services. Research undertaken for this assessment indicates that CARICOM Member States provide various degrees of social protection to migrant workers. For instance, in Barbados migrant workers can access the National Insurance Scheme, which covers benefits related to maternity, sickness, unemployment, old age and invalidity. However, migrants often face challenges in accessing the system when employers do not register them and pay the necessary contributions to the government, even when the migrants themselves provided these contributions to their employer (Jones 2022). In Grenada, migrant workers who pay into the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) can access its benefits,³⁷ including maternity; employment injury benefit; funeral grant; age benefit; invalidity benefit; survivors benefit; unemployment benefit; and sickness benefit (National Insurance Scheme, n.d.).

It is unclear to what extent national labour laws apply to migrant workers with irregular status in CARICOM Member States. For a number of Member States, national labour laws were found to apply to 'legally employed migrants' only (see Annex I for more details), although it was not always clear to what degree this was applied. For instance, in Jamaica, it is very clear that national labour laws apply to migrant workers who are legally employed.³⁸ The aim is to ensure that they enjoy the same rights and protection as nationals in laws related to fair treatment, decent work, and occupational safety and

³⁷ Stakeholder consultation with Grenada.

³⁸ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

health. In Trinidad and Tobago, only legally employed migrant workers are protected by labour law, albeit migrant workers in an irregular status will not be denied assistance.³⁹ In Montserrat, on the other hand, migrant workers with an irregular status have limited or no formal protection under national labour laws.⁴⁰ Accordingly, awareness should be raised with Member States on the need to ensure that all migrant workers, regardless of their status, are protected by national labour laws.

6.2.3. Family reunification, and access to employment for family members and education for children

The 2018 CARICOM Protocol on Contingent Rights allows spouses and dependents of CARICOM Nationals, moving within the CSME regime, to access work, as well as health and education services, albeit temporary service providers moving within the CSME are not included. Spouses may access work without a work permit, and dependent children are granted the same access to state-funded primary education on the same as nationals. In addition, dependent children have access to pre-primary education; secondary education; and uniforms, meals, books and transportation on the same terms as nationals. Moreover, the principal beneficiary resident, his/her spouse, and their dependants can access primary healthcare on a non-discriminatory basis.

The draft CMPF highlights that accessing the rights provided by the Protocol of Contingent Rights is hampered by its uneven application in Member States. National legislation granting access to education and employment for the family members of migrants vary. This highlights a need for improved harmonisation with regards to implementation of the Protocol on Contingent Rights across the region. Examples of varying degrees of access to education and employment include the following: Grenada allows the family members of migrant workers to live and work in the country,⁴¹ and grants access to free education healthcare, but spouses require their own work permit to access the labour market⁴²; Jamaica allows the family members of migrant workers to live and work in the country,⁴³ and spouses of CARICOM nationals who moved to Jamaica through the CARICOM skills regime are allowed to work without a work permit, while other dependents require a work permit to access employment⁴⁴; in Trinidad and Tobago, family members of migrant workers are permitted to live in the country and may access the labour market with the necessary permission to work, and children of migrant workers are permitted to access education with a student permit, as per the Immigration Act, Chapter 18:01.⁴⁵

6.3. Pillar III. Supporting participation in the labour market

6.3.1. Skills recognition systems in CARICOM

The CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF) was developed in 2012 and approved in 2017 (Katayama, n.d.). The CQF aims to make qualifications more understandable, comparable and transferrable across the region, thereby aiding labour mobility and skills development. The CQF contains ten reference levels with learning outcomes that capture knowledge, understanding and the ability to perform due to learning (ACTT, n.d.). The ten levels are progressive, ranging from Level 1: Certificate 1, to Level 10: Doctoral Degree (ACTT, n.d.). CARICOM Member States are encouraged to develop National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), which set out national standards for qualifications at different levels, and align their NQFs to

³⁹ Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

⁴⁰ Stakeholder consultation with Montserrat.

⁴¹ Stakeholder consultation with Grenada.

⁴² Stakeholder consultation with Grenada.

⁴³ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

⁴⁴ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

⁴⁵ Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

the CQF (CARICOM Secretariat, n.d.). For this process to be effective, NQFs must be based on a solid system of quality assurance, which ensures that qualifications and assessments of learning outcomes meet the necessary standards (CARICOM Secretariat, n.d.). The CARICOM Secretariat has drafted NQF development guidelines, and some Member States have developed NQFs, while others are still in the process of developing them (Katayama, n.d.).

To facilitate the movement of labour, CARICOM has also developed the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) system, under which national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes developed by Member States are assessed by the Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities (CANTA), and approved by COHSOD. They are then given a CVQ that can be used at the regional level (UNESCO et al. 2022). CVQs and the NVQs are TVET awards that are grounded in Occupational Standards set by industry experts. These awards are categorized into five distinct progressive levels, starting with Level 1: Semi-skilled, supervised worker, followed by Level 2: Skilled worker, all the way up to Level 5: Advanced Professional/Senior Manager. Each level represents a different degree of expertise and responsibility within the workforce (UNESCO et al. 2022). This system should be further strengthened to increase the number of CVQ certificates that are issued (Fletcher 2020). Moreover, it is critical to strengthen the region's capacity to issue CVQs beyond levels 1 and 2, for which more instructors qualified to provide training beyond levels 1 and 2 are needed.⁴⁶

Ministries of Education in CARICOM Member States are tasked with setting curricula that are aligned to the approved standards and supporting schools to deliver these curricula, but the scheme is yet to be widely implemented (IOM 2020).

The draft CMPF draws attention to educational disparities across CARICOM member states, which hamper the integration of migrants and the recognition of their qualifications. Differences in educational standards, curricula, and certification processes present obstacles to migrants who wish to further their education or seek employment in their new host states. The draft CMPF recommends the streamlining of education and human resource development and the mutual recognition of qualifications to aid the integration of migrants.

Member States are at various stages of developing NQFs and aligning it to the CARICOM CQF. For example:

- Guyana is making progress in aligning its National Qualifications Framework to the CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF).⁴⁷ CANTA authorised Guyana to award CVQs in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Programmes in 2016, thereby recognising that Guyana's TVET Programmes met regional standards, and facilitating the mobility of Guyanese in the CARICOM region. This also aids the processing of Skills Certificates for CARICOM applicants who hold the abovementioned qualifications.⁴⁸
- The University Council of Jamaica assesses foreign qualifications, and the Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission has developed standards for qualification assessments. Jamaica's NQF-J has been aligned with the CARICOM Qualification Framework.⁴⁹
- In Saint Kitts and Nevis the Ministry of Education recognises the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs).⁵⁰
- In Suriname the Surinamese National Training Authority (SNTA) supervises and certifies vocational education institutions according to CANTA, Competency-based Education and Training and the

⁴⁶ Information provided by the Education Programme of the CARICOM Secretariat.

⁴⁷ Stakeholder consultation with Guyana.

⁴⁸ Stakeholder consultation with Guyana.

⁴⁹ Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

⁵⁰ Stakeholder consultation with Saint Kitts and Nevis.

CARICOM Qualifications Framework (IOM 2022b). In 2019, SNTA adopted CARICOM's CVQ, allowing certificate holders to work within the CSME.

- In 2022, Trinidad and Tobago's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was approved by the Cabinet and it is aligned to the Caribbean Qualifications Framework.⁵¹

Nonetheless, labour mobility in the CMSE is hampered by the verification of skills certificates. CSME Member States have the right to verify skills certificates, but the process is not standardised across CSME countries. Consequently CSME nationals may not always have sufficient information regarding how the skills certificate verification process works, or how long it takes (Párraga 2021).

6.3.2. Access to Finance

Access to financial services is important to facilitate the integration of migrant workers and to foster their contribution to the national economy through business development, as well as to their home country by sending remittances. The draft CMPF calls for migrants and their families to be provided with easy access to banking services to support remittances being used for productive investments in their home country. Access to finance for migrant workers varies across the region, for instance: in Belize CARICOM nationals have the right to receive the same treatment as Belizeans when opening a bank account; they simply require a CARICOM passport, utility bills and an employment letter. However banks require a residency card to secure a loan.⁵² In Jamaica migrant workers can open bank accounts with a work permit, as well as the standard documents required of nationals to open a bank account.⁵³ And in Suriname, migrant workers need to be registered with the civil registry to open a bank account.⁵⁴ The differences across Member States highlights a need for CARICOM Member States to enhance the financial inclusion of migrants as a means of bolstering their integration and their contribution to economic development. The means to do so should be researched further.

6.3.3. Facilitating remittances

Despite the importance and significance of remittances to the region, transaction costs are high, averaging 10 per cent for amounts of less than 200 dollars, which is typically sent by poorer workers (Lacarte et al. 2023). Measures to reduce the cost of remittances at the regional level could not be identified. Policy efforts to enhance the impact of remittances should focus on developing formal channels for sending remittances and reducing the cost, including by developing new mechanisms, such as mobile money (Cerovic and Beaton 2017). The widespread use of mobile phones facilitates access to mobile money, which can be used by communities in areas that lack banking infrastructure (AFI and FILAC 2024). Digital services and the use of cryptocurrencies have helped to reduce remittance transfer costs by up to 50 per cent (AFI and FILAC 2024).

The draft CMPF calls attention to the high cost of Caribbean remittance corridors, some of which have the highest transaction fees in the world. It calls on Member States to reduce the cost of transfers and promote formal channels for sending remittances to enhance financial inclusion and security. Opportunities should also be created for the channelling of remittances into productive investments, such as small businesses, education, and vocational training. For remittances to contribute to financial inclusion they need to be part of the formal financial system (AFI and FILAC 2024). The IOM report, *Migration Governance Indicators. Migration Governance in the Caribbean Community: Well Developed Areas and Opportunities for Development* calls for the "creation of formal remittance schemes and financial inclusion programmes for migrants and their families", as this is an area of migration governance that is not well developed in the region (IOM 2024). There is also a need to create opportunities for channelling

51 Stakeholder consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

52 Stakeholder consultation with Belize.

53 Stakeholder consultation with Jamaica.

54 Stakeholder consultation with Suriname.

remittances into productive investments, such as small businesses, education, and vocational training.⁵⁵ Jamaica is one example of a Member State that has started reviewing regulations to reduce remittance costs and spur the use of remittances for investment.

6.3.4. Portability of Social Security benefits

The CASS, which puts in place mechanisms for the portability of social security benefits in the CARICOM region, is considered a significant achievement. However, challenges remain with implementation. This is evident as procedures for implementing the CASS differ among the countries and need to be further standardised (Párraga 2021). As a result, there is a need to standardise the implementation of the CASS across Member States to enhance the portability of social security benefits.

Outside of the region there are few mechanisms for the portability of social security benefits, highlighting a need to initiate more mechanisms for the portability of social security outside of the region to aid labour migration and its impact on economic development. Consequently, Caribbean workers may be deployed abroad through temporary work programmes for years without accruing social security benefits (Párraga 2021). Despite this, some CARICOM Member States have bilateral agreements with other states on the portability of social security benefits, for instance: Barbados and Jamaica have reciprocal portability agreements with Canada and the United States, which allows nationals to access their pensions upon their return to their home country (IOM 2018); Belize has a bilateral agreement with Mexico on social security benefits (IOM 2020); Montserrat has portability agreements with Canada and the United Kingdom; Saint Kitts and Nevis has a portability agreement with Canada, with regards to migrant workers that participate in the Canada Caribbean Agricultural Workers Programme (CC/SWAP)⁵⁶; and Suriname has agreements with the Netherlands that allow for the portability of social security benefits. Migrants that voluntarily return from the Netherlands may receive Dutch social benefits in Suriname (IOM 2021b).

55 Draft CMPF.

56 Stakeholder consultation with Saint Kitts and Nevis.



► 7. Climate change and its implications for labour migration

The CARICOM region is particularly exposed to climate-related shocks. Many Caribbean islands - particularly Barbados, Dominica, Grenada and Monserrat - are located in a regional belt of major hurricanes; the low-lying nature of many areas in the Caribbean basin, such as Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas increases their exposure to both long-term rising sea levels and short-term tidal surges (IPCC 2022; Andrewin et al. 2015). Irregular weather patterns and subsequent drought and flooding can also contribute to biological epidemics, including the spread of cholera. Overall exposure is set to increase due to rising temperatures impacting upon weather patterns, and causing rising sea levels, coastal erosion and increased frequency of storms and flooding.

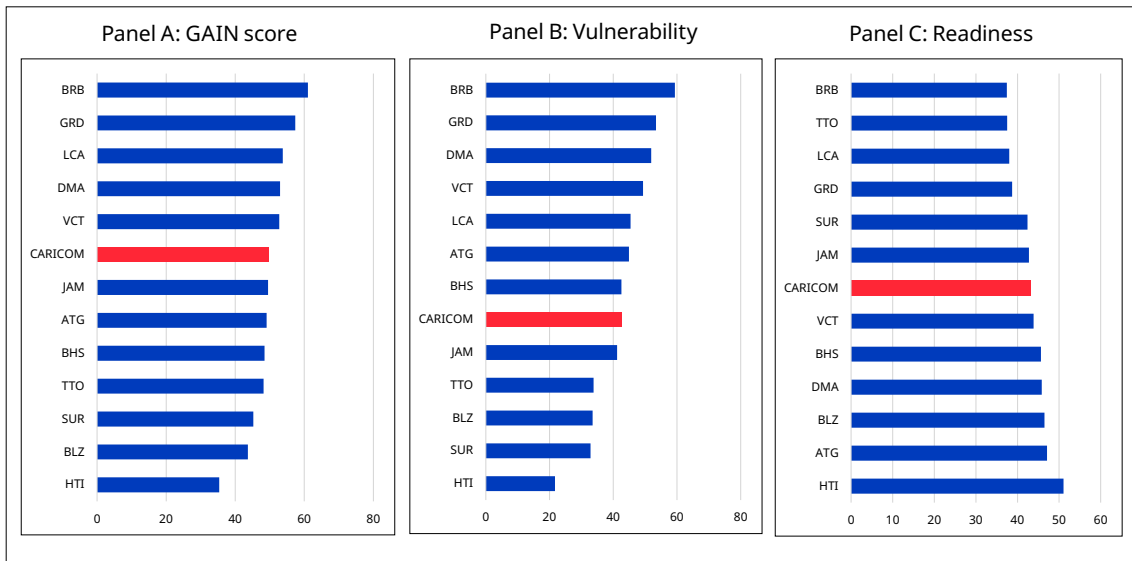
The impact on incomes, jobs and livelihoods is multi-faceted and likely to contribute to migration both within and from the region (Roy 2023). The tourism sector is one industry that is heavily impacted. It accounts for significant shares of the employed population in many CARICOM Member States. The impact of climate-related events on the local population is multi-faceted, impacting upon food security, water supplies, infrastructure and basic services; and contributing to migration flows within the region. Yet at the same time, it also results in changing demand for labour. For instance, post-disaster reconstruction and development results in a surge in demand for certain occupations, particularly in construction, often requiring labour from abroad. Despite this, there is a lack of data to fully reflect the impact of climate change on migration in the region (IOM 2025). Reviews of existing legislation have also pointed out the need for more efforts to improve and standardize the collection of climate-induced migration data at a national and regional scale (Batista et al. 2024).

This section looks at different components of climate change and the implications for labour markets, particularly labour migration in the region. It considers factors related to climate change vulnerability and assesses the region's readiness to adapt using the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND GAIN) index. ND GAIN is based on indicators related to i) vulnerability to climate change, and ii) readiness to deal with the impacts of climate change. ND GAIN scores are presented for the CARICOM Member States and compared with the CARICOM average. It should be noted that the section does not primarily seek to compare the vulnerabilities of CARICOM Member States but instead seeks to highlight that they are all vulnerable. It also assesses the adaptive capacity and readiness of Member States, which varies due to different economic, social and governance factors in place to help mitigate the impact of climate change. It ought to be noted that the data for Saint Kitts and Nevis is incomplete, and there is no specific data for Monserrat. Both are therefore excluded from the analysis.

There are increasing prospects for 'climate justice' in the region, particularly related to claims for reparations and adaptive support following a July 2025 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion. CARICOM Member States, like many small island developing states (SIDS) globally, bear the brunt of climate change, despite being relatively small contributors to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The recent ICJ Advisory Opinion Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change, confirmed that all states have legally binding obligations to mitigate GHG and protect the planet from environmental harm, and that failure to do so could constitute an internationally wrongful act. This means that countries and territories, such as those in the CARICOM region, have a strengthened basis for claiming reparations and climate support from high GHG-emitting states.

The ND GAIN index illustrates how the different CARICOM Member States are performing in terms of readiness to deal with the challenges of climate change. Figure 7.1, Panel A shows the composite score for the region, based on both vulnerability and readiness factors, as outlined above. It shows that while all CARICOM Member States are vulnerable to a similar degree (Panel B), the scores for readiness vary rather more (Panel C). These vulnerability and readiness scores are unpacked further in the following subsections.

► **Figure 7.1: ND GAIN score, overall and for vulnerability and readiness factors, CARICOM Member States**



Source: Notre Dame, Global Adaptation Index. No data available for Saint Kitts and Nevis and Monserrat. Note: GAIN score and readiness are scored 1-100, where 100 is best and 0 is worse. Vulnerability score is the inverse, where 0 is worst and 100 is best.

7.1. Vulnerability and adaptation to climate change

Vulnerability to climate change has significant labour market impacts, including job losses, and sometime worse. It is therefore a driver of migration flows. This section highlights the importance and role of readiness factors and mitigating impacts, including through social protection programmes.

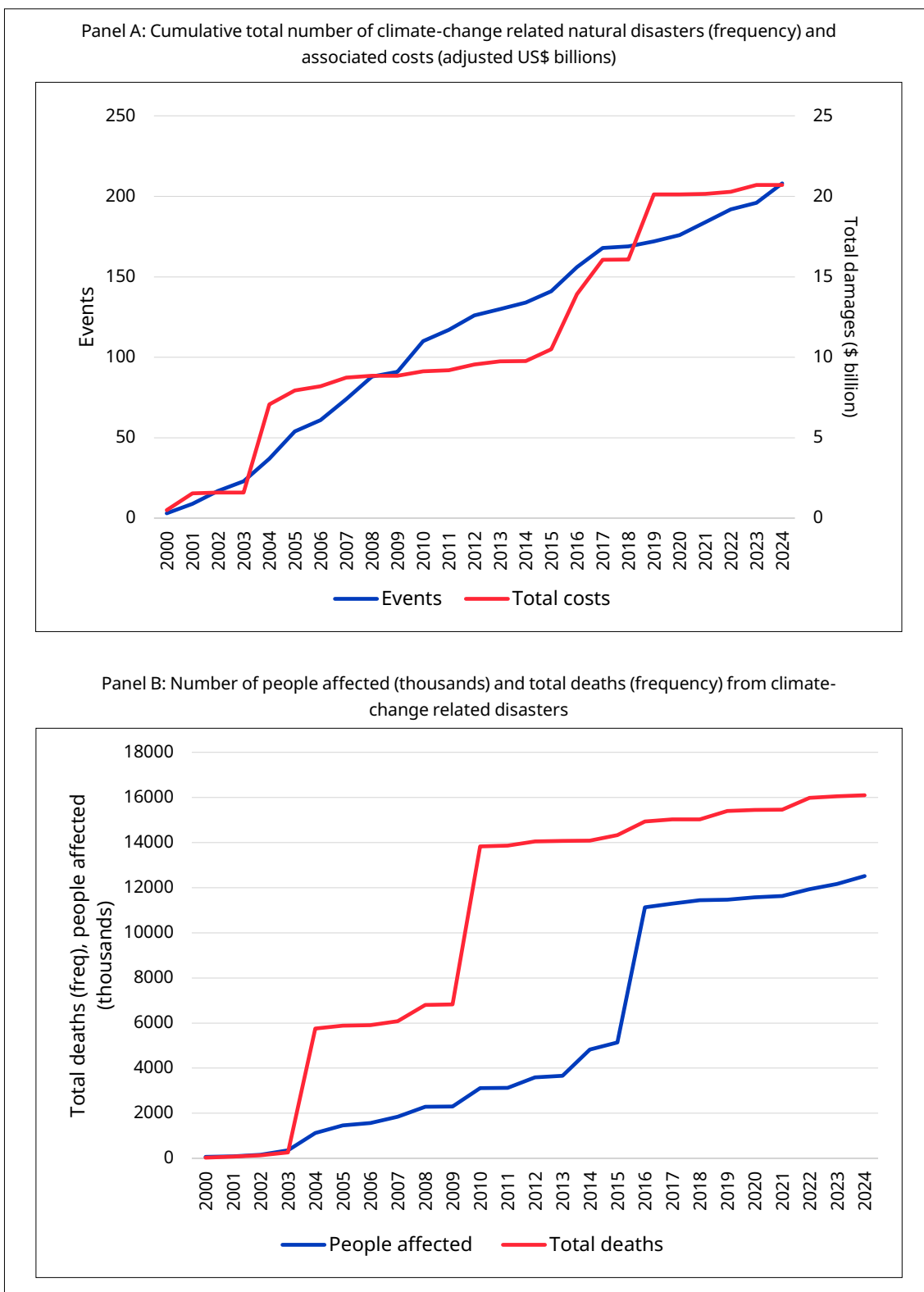
7.1.1. Natural disasters

Figure 7.2 shows the cumulative number of climate-change related natural disasters in the region, the associated costs (Panel A) and number of people affected and total deaths (Panel B). The events covered by Figure 7.2 include flash floods, tropical cyclones, droughts, tidal surges and landslides, amongst others. It also includes epidemics for which the incidence can be exacerbated by climate change through higher temperatures and increased vector-borne disease; floods and extreme weather increasing water and food-borne diseases; as well as other factors including displacement and changing ecosystems (Oliveira and Tegally 2023).

Overall, between 2000 and 2024, there were around 200 major climate-change related natural disasters in the CARICOM region, contributing to around \$20 billion in total damages.⁵⁷ Over this period there have been around 16,000 deaths and 12 million people affected. As per Figure 7.2 Panel B, the surge in 2010 of total deaths was driven by a cholera outbreak in Haiti; and the surge in people affected in 2016 was driven by the impact of Hurricane Matthew on Belize, The Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. It should be noted that the number of people affected in the EM-DATA database does not reflect the total displaced population, and therefore gives an incomplete picture of disaster displacement and environmental-related migration (IOM 2025). At the same time, there is insufficient information on internal displacement in the Caribbean, limiting the understanding of climate-change related disasters on displacement, both internal and external (IOM 2025).

⁵⁷ Major natural disasters are only included in the EM-DAT database if they meet certain criteria that factors in the number of people affected, international assistance and whether or not there is a state of national emergency.

► **Figure 7.2: Natural disasters, frequency of events, costs and human toll, CARICOM region, 2000-2024**



Source: EM-DAT Database. Note: In this context climate-change related natural disasters includes the following: hydrological (floods, landslides), meteorological (storms, extreme temperatures), climatological (droughts, wildfires) and biological - indirect - (epidemics linked to changing habitats of vectors).

These natural disasters contribute to significant displacement. For instance, Hurricane Maria in 2017 severely impacted Dominica, resulting in many Dominicans moving to other CARICOM Member States, particularly Saint Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, all also OECS Member States. Under the OECS free movement regime, these Dominicans were able to exercise the right to free movement and many continue to live and work in these countries eight years on from the impact.⁵⁸ The OECS and CARICOM's free travel arrangements also helped facilitate entry for people who had lost or damaged documents, sometimes even without passports (Francis 2019).

There are many examples of climate change and associated extreme climatic events already affecting migration in the Caribbean, setting the context and highlighting need for policy action. For example, Antigua and Barbuda has been ranked as among the countries most exposed to the impacts of climate change worldwide (IOM, n.d.). Following Hurricane Irma's destruction of about 95 per cent of the housing on the island of Barbuda, the island's entire population was relocated to Antigua (GIZ 2023). The Bahamas has already experienced significant climate-related human displacement; though they mostly stayed within the territory of The Bahamas, almost 10,000 people were forced to evacuate their islands during Hurricane Dorian in 2019 (The Bahamas 2024).

Migration and climate change is an important topic for Haiti, and this has been reflected in its policymaking. Even before the recent political crisis, Haiti was recognized, both inside and outside of the country, as having particularly complex relationship with migration. Most Haitian migration is to the Dominican Republic and the United States (République d'Haiti 2015). Much of Haiti's population is thought to be at particular risk of climate change, with projections suggesting up to 100,000 could be at risk in the event of a one metre sea level rise occurring this century (Batista et al. 2024). At times, CARICOM members have reportedly failed to honour the free movement principles when Haitian citizens have sought to move (Lacarte 2024), highlighting the importance for Haiti of better functioning regional migration arrangements.

7.1.2. Climate-change and environmental vulnerability

Vulnerability to climate change and environmental risks encompasses a range of dimensions including excessive heat, prolonged drought, and rising sea levels, all of which have implications for the CARICOM Member States. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider a wider range of variables for climate-change and environmental risk. In the context of the ND GAIN Index, vulnerability refers to the "exposure, sensitivity and capacity to adapt to the negative effects of climate change". This is assessed through six life-supporting sectors, which are in turn analysed based on three factors: i) Exposure - the degree to which a system is exposed to significant climate change from a biophysical perspective, capturing the physical factors external to the system that contribute to vulnerability; ii) Sensitivity - the extent to which a sector is affected by climate-related hazards; and iii) Adaptive Capacity - the ability of a sector to cope with or adapt to the impacts of climate change. Combined, these dimensions help determine how vulnerable a country or territory is to climate change across the different life-supporting sectors (see Box 7.1).

⁵⁸ Findings from stakeholder consultations.

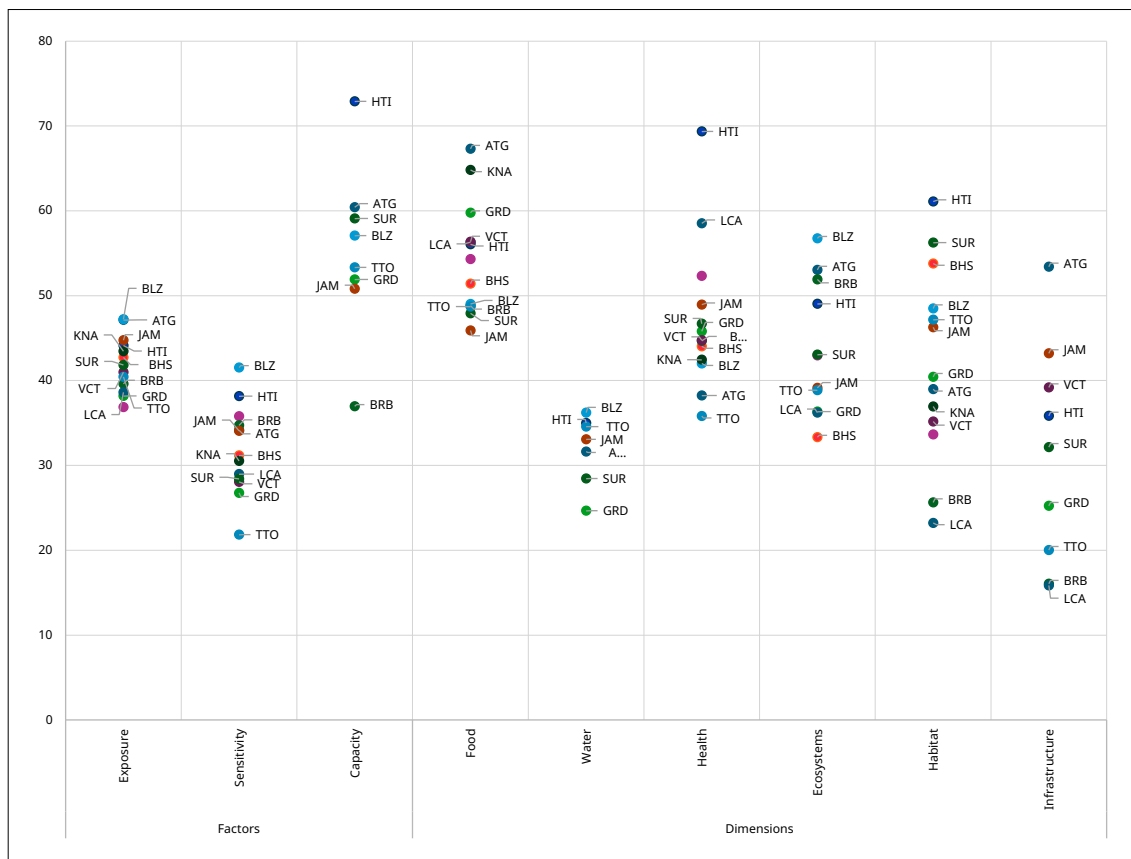
▶ Box 7.1: Vulnerability dimensions of ND-GAIN Index

- ▶ **Food: Measures the impact of climate change on food security. Indicators include agricultural production, food import dependency, and malnutrition rates.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected change in cereal yields; projected population growth
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Food import dependency ratio; prevalence of undernourishment
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Agricultural capacity; diet diversification
- ▶ **Water: Assesses water availability and stress due to climate change. Indicators include renewable water resources, water dependency ratio, and projected water supply variability.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected change in annual runoff; projected change in annual groundwater recharge
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Freshwater withdrawal rate; access to reliable drinking water
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Dam capacity; irrigation capacity
- ▶ **Health: Evaluates climate-related health risks. Indicators include disease burden (e.g., malaria, dengue), access to healthcare, and climate-driven mortality risks.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected change in heatwave hazard; projected change in vector-borne diseases
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Healthcare access; child mortality rate
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Healthcare expenditure per capita; health infrastructure
- ▶ **Ecosystem Services: Examines the impact of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Indicators include protected biodiversity areas, soil degradation, and dependence on ecosystem services.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected biome change; loss of biodiversity
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Dependence on natural capital; ecosystem fragmentation
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Protected biome area; forest management effectiveness
- ▶ **Human Habitat: Assesses how climate change affects settlements and urbanization. Indicators include urbanization rate, flood risk in settlements, and population living in low-elevation coastal zones.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected change in urban extent; sea-level rise threat
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Population living in slums; housing quality index
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Urban planning capacity; building code enforcement
- ▶ **Infrastructure: Measures the resilience of physical infrastructure to climate hazards. Indicators include transportation vulnerability, energy dependency, and climate-related damage to infrastructure.**
 - ▶ Exposure: Projected change in extreme weather events; flood-prone infrastructure
 - ▶ Sensitivity: Energy transmission loss rate; transportation network vulnerability;
 - ▶ Adaptive Capacity: Infrastructure investment; emergency response readiness.

Being exposed to similar biophysical risks, CARICOM Member States have only slight differences in vulnerabilities to the impacts. The first three variables in Figure 3 show the overall scores for CARICOM Member States according to ‘exposure’, ‘sensitivity’ and ‘adaptability’ – see definitions above. It shows that for ‘exposure’ [1st variable in Figure 7.2] the Member States are clustered together, reflecting the similar climate-change risks the different CARICOM Member States face from a biophysical perspective. Logically, as regional neighbours, the biophysical risk is similar for this cluster of countries and territories. When considering the degree to which different dimensions are impacted by these risks [‘sensitivity’ – 2nd variable in Figure 7.2], we can see that, while severe everywhere, the impact varies, with Belize and Haiti having relatively greater levels of exposure to risk than their regional counterparts. Finally, while considering ‘adaptability’ we see even more variance, with wider differences in terms of the ability of a sector to cope with or adapt to the impacts of climate change. Here, the economic dimensions (see Section 7.1.2) come into play, with Haiti showing a much lower level of adaptive capacity than the rest of the CARICOM Member States, and The Bahamas faring much better.

With regard to the different risk dimensions there is more variability, with food and health generally being the dimensions with the greatest risks for the region. This reflects the impact of climate change on food security as well as climate-related health risks. This has a number of implications. For a start it reflects the impact of climate change on agriculture and food security, and the long-term impacts of prolonged droughts and excessive heat, which, as observed elsewhere in the world, can result in migration away from key areas owing to low and unprofitable yields. In addition, it highlights the need for health workers, and the vulnerability for entire populations from shortages in this sector. As discussed elsewhere in this report, the health sector is cited as an area of labour shortages for many CARICOM Member States.

► Figure 7.3: Vulnerability, six life-supporting dimensions, and summary score for exposure, sensitivity and capacity



Source: Notre Dame, Global Adaptation Index. Note: Scores based on (0-100) where 0 is least vulnerable and 100 is most vulnerable.

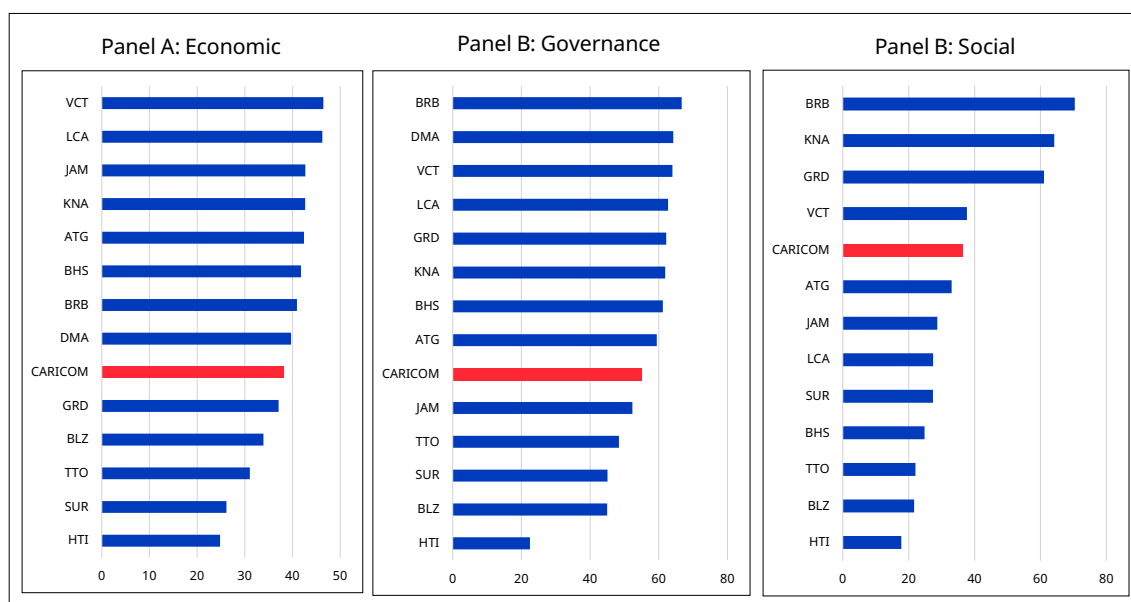
7.2. Climate-change and environmental readiness

A key dimension of the previous section on climate-change and environmental risk relates to countries' or regions' ability to cope with or adapt to the impacts of climate change. This depends on a variety of issues, including social, economic and governance factors. In the context of the ND GAIN Index, this can also be assessed through a 'readiness' component. In this context, readiness refers to the "ability to leverage investments and convert them to adaptation actions". Accordingly, this is assessed through three dimensions, economic, governance and social readiness.

Figure 7.4 shows the scores for different Members States under each of these readiness dimensions. It is important to bear in mind that the economic components (Panel A) do not reflect just the country's income level but also the ability of a country's business environment to attract investment that could be used in adaptation measures that reduce vulnerability. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia and Jamaica have the highest scores in this regard, with Haiti and Suriname at the lower end of the spectrum. Lack of fiscal space for both investment in climate adaptation, resilience and post-impact response and reconstruction exacerbates countries' exposure to the risks brought about by climate change (Patrick 2024; Roy 2023). Moreover, expenditure on responding to climate events has contributed to the elevation of public debt levels in CARICOM Member States.

Higher-income CARICOM Member States typically are typically better equipped to cope with climate change risks. The Governance components (Panel B) assess the institutional infrastructure in place to make use of investments in adaptation and mitigation measures. The Bahamas is the most advanced, followed by Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia. Further information on this is provided in Section 7.2.1, which looks in more detail at the regulatory context for climate-change related migration and mobility. Finally, the social factors that determine how well investments in adaptation and mitigation measures are used falls under Social factors (Panel C). Barbados scores highest, followed by Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Grenada, while Haiti lies at the lower end.

► Figure 7.4: Selected environmental readiness indices, CARICOM Member States



Source: Notre Dame, Global Adaptation Index

7.2.1. The regulatory context for climate-change related migration and mobility

Regional context

CARICOM Member States have a long history of migration and this is likely to continue, including for reasons relating to climate events (Thomas and Benjamin 2018). Different studies have shown that while some degree of pre-emptive movement can be rational and help to avoid disruption and loss of life, if it is not well managed this can also bring significant economic and non-economic losses (Thomas and Benjamin 2018). In contrast to some Pacific Island nations, national emergency and natural disaster policies in the Caribbean are seen as generally lacking in explicit 'migrant-focused provisions' or proactive approaches (Lacarte 2024). Despite this, both the CARICOM and OECS Free Movement Arrangements operating in the Caribbean have both been used extensively during times of climate-induced migration.

"During the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season, the CARICOM and OECS Free Movement Regime provided displaced persons a right of entry in other countries, authorized travel document requirement waivers, granted indefinite stays to some persons displaced by disasters, and eased access to labour markets." (Jaupart 2023)

The Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC), while limited in activity since the COVID-19 pandemic, could serve as a means of incorporating climate-change into migration discussions. Supplementing the scope of the Free Movement Arrangements, the CMC was established in 2016 with a view to strengthen and coordinate migration governance (see Section 6). While the pandemic paused its activities and a lack of funding has impeded it from reaching its full objectives, this is an area in which regional coordination on climate-change related matters could be channelled effectively into broader consultations on migration.

The OECS has produced a Ministerial Declaration that recognises the concern around climate change and its links to migration (OECS 2023b). The Declaration itself recalls different relevant international frameworks, instruments and conventions and outlines a set of commitments for its Member States and Associate Members. However, these commitments mostly relate to managing migration and displacement. While they acknowledge the impact on different groups, as well as socio-economic benefits of remittances, trade and investment, there is nothing explicitly on facilitating labour market access, nor on the impact of climate change displacement on the labour market.

Several, wider international policies and strategies also help to set policy direction and best practice for climate-induced migration in the Caribbean. At the highest level, UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13.1 calls for "safe, orderly and regular migration", though it made no explicit reference to climate-related human mobility" (GIZ 2023). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and several European governments supported the Nansen Initiative, later absorbed into the Platform on Disaster Displacement through a consultation process between 2012 and 2015. This aimed at increasing international cooperation, improving standards for the treatment of affected people and developing operational responses (Platform on Disaster Displacement, n.d.). The IOM also presented a package of tools to OECS Member States in 2023 with a view to supporting migrant safety during climate evacuations, including national assessments and best practices (UN 2023). The Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action was signed in 2014 to "uphold the highest international and regional protection standards, implement innovative solutions for refugees and other displaced people and end the plight of stateless persons throughout the [Latin America and the Caribbean] region within a decade" (UNHCR 2014). Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago all signed the Declaration.

There are several potential paths to help strengthen these existing policies and frameworks in a way that would support the likely scale and complexity of climate-induced migration in the future. The GIZ Global Programme on Sustainable Management of Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change was developed to support partner countries in understanding the complex interrelations between human mobility and climate change (GIZ 2023). Their work focuses on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including in the Caribbean, that are among the most at risk of rising sea levels and find themselves disproportionately impacted by other climate change effects (Batista et al. 2024).

Given existing and emerging gaps and shortfalls reported, there is arguably need for enhanced “development of laws and policies that address issues such as forced displacement, resettlement, and access to basic services in destination countries” (Batista et al. 2024). CARICOM and OECS Member States apply significant discretion and temporary, ‘ad hoc’ measures when using the current Free Movement Arrangements, particularly during large-scale migration (Lacarte 2024). This was evident following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and Hurricane Maria in 2017. Free Movement Agreements would therefore need to expand in scope and coverage to account for increasing climate-induced migration (Francis 2019). While to date Free Movement Agreements have helped to facilitate the safe movement of people in times of natural disaster, if the number of displaced people rises significantly as a result of increased climatic events, free movement could become less appealing for different Member States (Francis 2019). The ILO’s Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market (ILO 2016a) and Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) can provide further guidance for CARICOM Member States in this regard.

Notably, the Free Movement Regime does not provide for asylum and refugee protection, which may become more integrated into climate-change vulnerabilities and its push factors for migration. Only a few countries in the wider Caribbean region have a full asylum procedure or substantial humanitarian protections in place, both of which are likely to be important in the case of large movements following climate incidents (Lacarte 2024). Many also argue that policies need to be more holistic, and consider factors such as health, language and vulnerabilities when advising on climate-related migration (Batista et al. 2024). It is also important to include the skills required to support the socio-economic integration of migrant populations in the host countries. The ILO’s Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (ILO 2015) emphasizes that readiness includes equipping workers with the skills required for emerging green sectors, while ensuring social protection for those at risk of displacement. Strong institutions to protect asylum and refugee rights also form an important part of preparation for climate-led migration. Although it still lacks legislative frameworks in this area, Jamaica is one of the few countries in the region with formal refugee policies that conducts Refugee Status Determination (Lacarte 2024), an area with logical links to climate-induced migration and climatic events.

Examples from Member States

Policy and strategy in The Bahamas have increasingly focused on the relationship between migration and climate change. In its 2024 update to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), The Bahamas recognizes that climate change can threaten human settlements, infrastructure and power networks, all of which can initiate short- or longer-term migration. The Bahamas has outlined potential policy options to help mitigate these risks, including improved building codes and contingency planning to better deal with climatic events and therefore minimize disruption and human displacement.

Likewise, Barbados has aligned its climate resilience strategies with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk reduction, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It has invested significantly in modelling climate scenarios for the coming 50 to 100 years in collaboration with national and international researchers (IDB 2022), providing a strong base from which to develop its climate and migration policies.

Belize has included the planned migration of some of its most exposed populations in coastal areas as one of its 'priority adaptation measures' (Government of Belize 2022). Such migration is anticipated to be gradual, and the plans also reflect these communities' important tourism-focused economies. The Belize government's plans also outline options to move or modify certain infrastructure such as roads and a municipal airport to increase the population's resilience, as well as identifying potential urban areas to which any populations forced out of coastal areas could 'retreat'.

Despite its weak economic situation, Haiti has a relatively developed migration strategy for 2015-2030. Though the current economic and political crisis limits its ability to implement this strategy at present, this reveals a lot about the intended priorities and potential approaches. Achieving "sustainable development.... in the face of natural disaster and climate change risk (République d'Haiti 2015)" is the number one stated priority, followed by the intent to formalize approaches to migration in the form of improved data, clearer administrative processes, and more resilient institutions.

Jamaica actively recognizes the impacts that climate change may place on its territory, population, labour force and migration patterns. It has a dedicated Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) to support national preparedness, established under its 1993 Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management Act (Lacarte 2024).

Saint Lucia's strategy and policy documents "acknowledge the climate and environmental change, disaster, and human mobility nexus (Serraglio et al. 2021)", for example in the 2017 Third National Communication on Climate Change. The 2018-2028 National Adaptation Plan, while clear that migration alone should not be seen as a viable climate change adaptation strategy, explores the potential impacts of increased rural-urban migration due to climate change impacts, for example in light of falling agricultural output, which they note could also affect 'education continuity' in the country. Though migration is presented as a last resort, and the planned mitigation and adaptation plans seek to avoid it, the Plan mentions potential steps to "promote empowered migration", to support those who are displaced, and preserve "non-economic values that may be impaired during human mobility (Government of Saint Lucia, n.d.)."

Gaps and barriers in policy development

In many instances, CARICOM Member States recognize that more work is required to ensure readiness for well-managed migration as a result of climate change. In the early steps of developing its policy, The Bahamas' has assessed the groups that may be at particular risk during climate-related events, including existing migrants and more vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities and the elderly. Moreover, undocumented migrants are known to be more likely to fear deportation and therefore avoid seeking appropriate shelter.

Though not yet linked to migration or labour markets, Barbados has assessed its current barriers to achieving a fully robust sustainability and adaptation plan. With ongoing debt challenges, climate finance is likely to be a significant barrier, as well as limited public sector expertise, capacity and interministerial coordination on climate-specific topics (IDB 2022). It is likely therefore that Barbados' plans will include international engagement beyond the Caribbean region; looking to international climate finance mechanisms to draw in the necessary capital and expertise to develop and implement its strategies.

Saint Lucia's climate change and migration documents recognize the need for more consideration of the topics and policy development:

"To be able to respond to climate-change related disasters and their impacts, including the protection of people displaced by the impacts of climate change, effective legal, financial and institutional response mechanisms must be in place, based on climate-change related assessments." (Government of Saint Lucia 2017)

Trinidad and Tobago's 2024 National Adaptation Plan (NAP) recognizes that negative climatic events such as droughts and storms can also bring 'indirect impacts' including mass migrations (Government of Trinidad and Tobago 2024).

An IOM study on migration and climate change data in made several recommendations to close current gaps. These include making the Customs Declaration Form more comprehensive, improving the Border Management Service to specifically include climate-related mobility, and increased sharing of data among public agencies. While recognized as an essential actor in the management of one-off events, it was highlighted that the National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) currently lacks any sort of data repository and that setting one up would be helpful. These findings are likely applicable to other countries in the region and would logically be included as a recommendation for any national or regional migration policy and strategy.

The Bahamas has also begun to explore the sectors and population subgroups most at risk of job losses in the aftermath of potential natural disasters and the heightened health and lifestyle risks that can result. There is a clear recommendation in the TNC to "establish a framework for handling climate-influenced or caused migration or human mobility" (The Bahamas 2024). In a recent policy statement, The Bahamas recognizes that, as a small island nation with land close to current sea levels, they must also look to international cooperation as well as domestic actions. The TNC lists pursuing climate migration and/or migration agreements with neighbouring countries as one option to be explored.

Jamaica has announced significant steps to better prepare itself for the impacts of climate change on its population. It has expressed its intent to develop a Migration Crisis Operational Framework that is in line with international humanitarian and human rights laws, with a focus on the treatment of vulnerable groups and refugees (Lacarte 2024). It has also committed to develop a 'Migrants in Crisis' framework (Government of Jamaica 2017) and surveillance system by 2030, with a core objective of supporting vulnerable migrants during emergencies and ensuring their access to basic services. This will also complement Jamaica's participation in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s CityAdapt project, an initiative aimed at enhancing "urban climate resilience through the integration of natural ecosystems into urban planning and development". The project's focus is on introducing ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) in Jamaican cities, for example by increasing the use of urban vegetation.

The proposed adaptation strategies in Trinidad and Tobago's National Adaptation Plan could be very applicable to migration perspectives, even though they aren't currently linked to migration. These proposed measures include: improved data collection and analysis; promoting collaborative learning; adapting approaches over time based on feedback; and "enhancing the human and technical capacities of key stakeholders to understand and manage climate risks towards informed decision making" (Government of Trinidad and Tobago 2024). These also align with the list of current challenges to climate adaptation more broadly that Trinidadian government have identified, including data gaps, information quality, budgetary constraints and technical capacity.

7.3. The implications of climate change on labour market and labour migration

Climate-change and environmental risk have unmistakable impacts on the region, as documented in Section 7.1 through examples of different climate-change related natural disasters on CARICOM Member States. There is also a recognition of its implications on migration, with different member States putting policies and plans in place (Section 7.2). This section sheds light on the impacts of climate change and environmental risk on labour migration. While there is clear disruption to different sectors – most prominently the tourism agriculture sectors – there is also evidence of surges in demand for construction workers for post-disaster reconstruction and development, often exceeding the labour supply in local labour markets. At the same time, the increasing impact of climate change has resulted in growing demand for employment in 'green jobs' in the region including in renewable energy, solid

waste management, eco-tourism and related to climate-change adaptation.⁵⁹ With this in mind, shifting to a green growth model, namely an economic development model that decouples growth from environmental degradation while ensuring social equity and resilience to climate risks, can result in significant job creation potential (see Box 2).

“Climate change adaptation is creating new job opportunities [in the country], particularly in sectors related to infrastructure development, disaster risk management and environmental sustainability. Although this area is still emerging, there is growing recognition that investments in climate resilience can also serve as a catalyst for employment creation” – Stakeholder consultation

► Box 7.2: The job creation potential of a green growth model: A case study for Jamaica

Green growth involves transitioning to low-carbon, resource-efficient sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism, while enhancing productivity and job creation. A recent study uses a dynamic, economy-wide model to simulate three green growth scenarios in Jamaica: (i) renewable energy transition, (ii) energy efficiency improvements, and (iii) sustainable agriculture. The study found that green investments can stimulate higher GDP growth while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, under the renewable energy scenario, Jamaica could achieve a 4.2 per cent GDP growth rate by 2035 compared to 3.3 per cent under the baseline, while reducing CO₂ emissions by 8.2 per cent. These strategies support a vision of inclusive, climate-resilient development and align with Jamaica’s Vision 2030 and its international commitments under the Paris Agreement and the SDGs.

The results show that green growth has significant employment and poverty reduction potential. The renewable energy scenario could support the creation of up to 16,000 additional jobs by 2035, particularly in construction, maintenance, and clean energy manufacturing. Energy efficiency interventions, including retrofitting buildings and improving industrial processes, also lead to cost savings and job creation, contributing to productivity gains across sectors. Sustainable agriculture practices are projected to increase rural incomes and food security while reducing environmental stress. Importantly, these gains are achieved without sacrificing fiscal stability, as public investment is strategically targeted to crowd in private financing. The report concludes that a green growth model is not only environmentally imperative but also economically and socially beneficial, offering Jamaica a viable path to sustainable and inclusive development.

Source: (ILO and UNDP 2025)

7.3.1. Agriculture

Food security is at major risk from climate-change in the CARICOM region and linked directly to its impact on the agricultural sector. As outlined in Section 7.1, there are considerable food security risks for the region stemming from multiple factors, but particularly from climate change’s impact on the agricultural sector and its value chains. In stakeholder consultations, the agricultural sector was regularly cited as being heavily prone to climate-change related disasters. The impacts on this sector span from disruption from natural disasters such as hurricanes, to longer-term changes including prolonged drought, irregular weather patterns, and excessive heat. All have implications for productivity in agriculture and consequently on workers job security in the region.

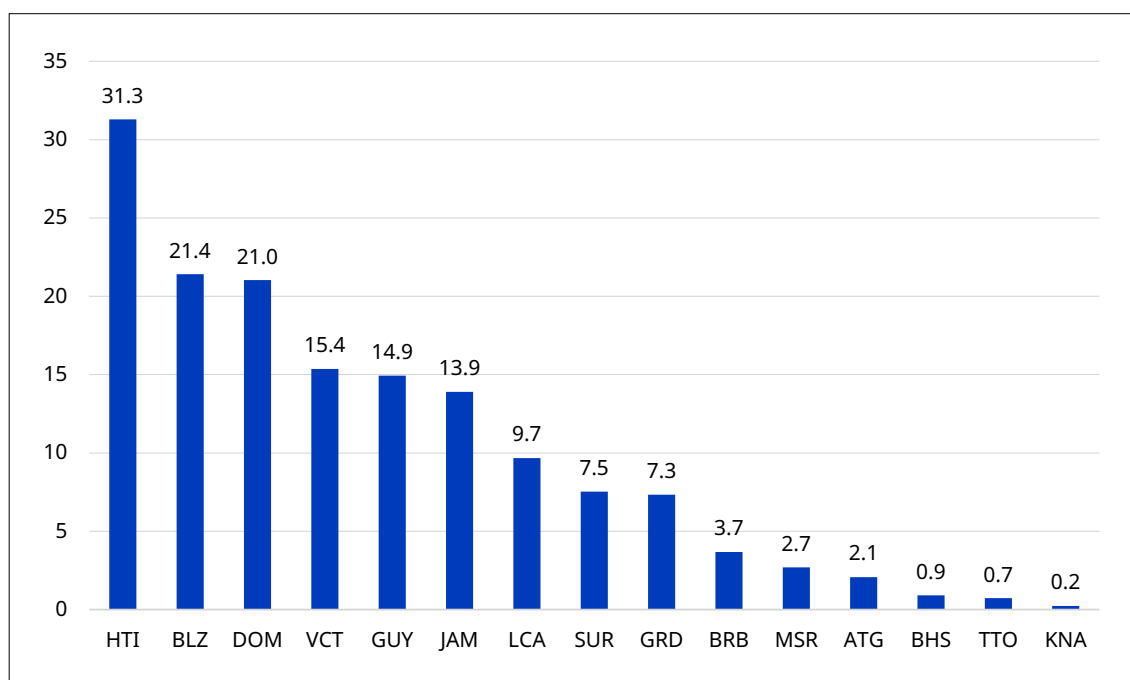
⁵⁹ Stakeholder consultations

“In sectors like agriculture, periods of prolonged drought or excessive heat can cause severe damage to crops, resulting in reduced food production. This disruption not only impacts the agricultural sector but can have a ripple effect on business activity and supply chains, leading to delays, reduced output, and financial losses.” – Stakeholder consultation

Around 30 per cent of total employment in the region is in the agricultural sector, decreasing to 10 per cent when excluding Haiti (see Section 4.2.4). This equates to 2.3 million people, of which 2 million are engaged in agriculture in Haiti and around 340,000 in the rest of the CARICOM region. Many agricultural workers in Haiti are engaged in smallholder farming. The share of those employed in agriculture ranges from 31.3 per cent of total employment in Haiti, to around 21 per cent in Belize and Dominica, to less than 5 per cent in Barbados, Monserrat, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Kitts and Nevis (Figure 7.5). For the rest of the region, stakeholder interviews suggested that it was less likely that climate change was causing migration out of the country or territory, and more likely that it would result in movements to other sectors, particularly tourism. It is likely that this also reflects shifts in terms of structural transformation with movements from low value-added activities such as agriculture, to higher-valued added activities.

“Climate change is having a growing and tangible impact on Jamaica, affecting not only the environment, but also key economic sectors and the overall labour market [...] The agricultural sector was particularly hard hit due to Hurricane Beryl in July 2024, thus it experienced significant crop losses and the lowest output per worker in that quarter (July- September 2024).” – Consultation with Jamaica

► Figure 7.5: Employment in agriculture, share of total employment, latest available data (%)



Source: National data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2.

At the same time, climate change is opening up new opportunities for the agricultural sector, including environmental management and climate-resistant agriculture. For example, in Jamaica stakeholder interviews highlighted the increasing prevalence of projects promoting climate-smart agriculture, sustainable land use, and watershed management. These are providing employment for agricultural extension officers, environmental specialists and community-based workers engaged in land restoration, reforestation and water conservation. It is likely that many of these specialist activities will increase demand for skills that exceed domestic supply, unless there are targeted education and technical and vocational educational and training (TVET) curricula that respond to the demand. Despite this, the lack of information and data on the nexus between migration, environment and agriculture complicates efforts toward evidence-based policymaking around climate-smart agriculture and other adaptation measures (IOM and CYEN 2024).

7.3.2. Tourism

The tourism sector is a major source of employment for CARICOM Member States, for both nationals and foreign workers alike. It is heavily exposed to the impacts of climate change. It is estimated to contribute nearly 33 per cent of GDP in parts of the region⁶⁰; to directly account for around 18 per cent of all employment, and 43.1 per cent of total employment when including those indirectly linked to the sector (ILO 2020b).⁶¹ At the same time, as many as 50 and 60 per cent of the tourism sector's workforce are women, and is also an important source of employment for youth (ILO 2025c). The sector is particularly vulnerable to climate-change related disruption, including hurricanes, which, when arriving during the main tourism season, can have major livelihoods impacts. Besides major one-off climate shocks such as hurricanes, estimates suggest that coastal erosion from rising sea levels could contribute to a reduction of nearly 50 per cent of direct tourism revenue (Spencer et al. 2022).

"The tourism sector, which is highly dependent on stable weather conditions and infrastructure, also faced disruption [from Hurricane Beryl]. The hurricane caused a decline in tourist arrivals, vessel visits, and air passenger movements, all of which negatively impacted businesses and workers in hospitality, transportation and related services." – Stakeholder consultation

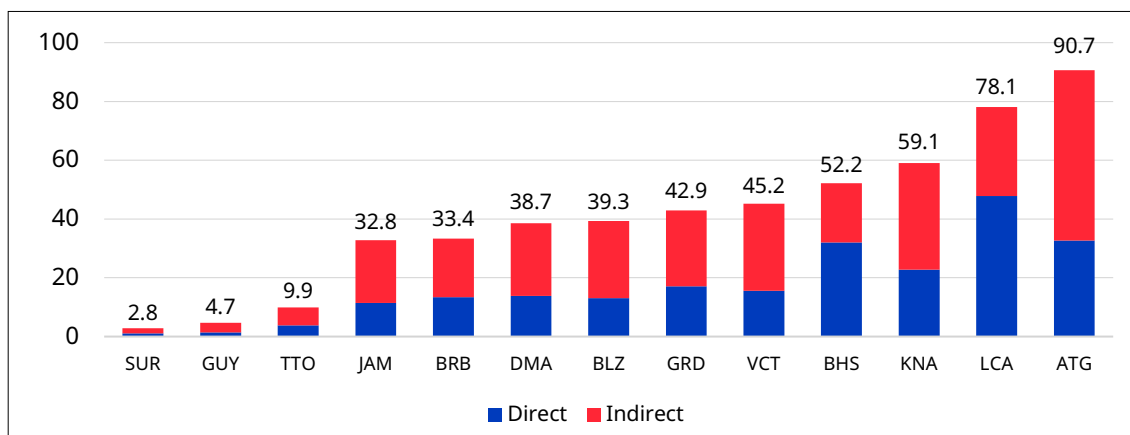
In Antigua and Barbuda around a third of total employment is directly engaged in tourism. This includes hotels and restaurants, marine hospitality and tour operators, amongst others. On top of this, a further 58 per cent of employment is indirectly linked to the tourism sector, including food and drink manufacturers, construction workers, and wider service providers. In total more than 90 per cent of total employment in Antigua and Barbuda is directly or indirectly linked to the tourism sector (Figure 7.6). In Saint Lucia, this figure is 78.1 per cent; for Saint Kitts and Nevis it is estimated at 59.1 per cent; and in The Bahamas, 52.2 per cent. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, where the tourism sector accounts for around 45.2 per cent of total employment (Figure 7.6), stakeholder interviews highlighted the impact of Hurricane Beryl in July 2024. The hurricane caused widespread destruction across the Grenadine islands, with over 90 per cent of buildings on Union Island, Mayreau, and Canouan damaged or destroyed. These islands play a crucial role in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' tourism industry and the hurricane's devastation led to the displacement of thousands, disrupting livelihoods and causing major job losses.⁶²

⁶⁰ These estimates refer to the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean and include the following: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. Excludes Cuba, Dominica Republic Haiti and Puerto Rico.

⁶¹ These figures are based on estimates derived from the World Tourism and Tourism Council (WTTC). The definition of tourism sector employment used by WTTC differs from the ILO definition of the tourism sector. Please see further information here: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/tracking-the-rebound-in-tourism-employment/> and footnote 18 of the cited report (ILO 2020b).

⁶² Stakeholder consultation.

► **Figure 7.6: Direct and indirect employment in the tourism industry, share of total employment, selected CARICOM Member States, 2019 (%)**



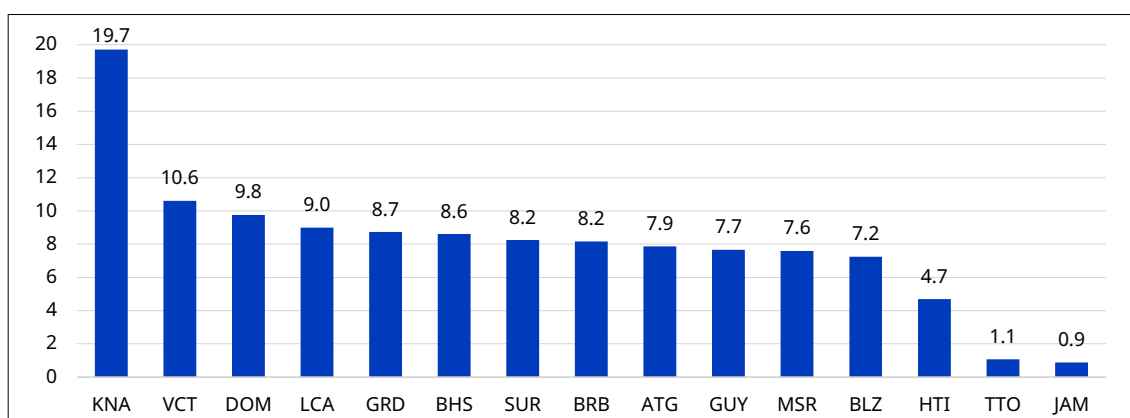
Source: (ILO 2020b). For details of what constitutes 'direct' and 'indirect' please see source link.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an insight into the risks to the tourism sector and the potential impacts on employment in the CARICOM region. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic provided some insights into the impacts of widespread disruption to the tourism industry in the Caribbean. Estimates suggest that around 70 per cent of hotels laid off employees and more than half cut salaries in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean (ILO 2020b). There are however differences. The COVID-19 pandemic saw some CARICOM governments contain job losses through stimulus packages and relief measures, which are not always available for sudden or long-term climate-change related impacts, which instead require significant investment and action at the global level towards the longer-term goals of climate change adaptation and resilience (ILO 2025c).

7.3.3. Construction

The construction industry is a significant source of employment in the CARICOM Member States including for migrant workers. The industry accounts for nearly 20 per cent of total employment in Saint Kitts and Nevis, and between 7 and 10 per cent of total employment in most other CARICOM Member States (Figure 7.7). The sector is closely tied with the tourism sector as it is linked to the construction of hotels and resorts, as well as associated infrastructure development. At the same time, the sector is, in and of itself, a major source of employment of migrant workers globally, and CARICOM Member States are no exception (Lyu et al. 2025).

► **Figure 7.7: Employment in construction, share of total employment, latest available data (%)**



Source: National data sources – for further details on national data sources and reference years, please see Table 2.2

With the onset of climate-change related disasters, including hurricane damage, stakeholder interviews highlighted the surge in demand for construction workers for reconstruction and development. Oftentimes, the urgency in demand for labour requires the use of migrant workers from other CARICOM Member States or from outside the region. Migrant construction workers are often seen as a means of filling an immediate demand for labour while keeping costs down, and as a result these migrant workers are often more subjected to exploitation and poorer conditions of work (Lyu et al. 2025). Safeguards need to be enforced for safe and well managed labour migration of construction workers, both for long and short-term employment.

Stakeholder consultations also highlighted the longer-term demand for construction workers as a result of climate change. This includes the construction and reinforcement of sea defences, such as retaining walls and coastal barriers aimed at protecting vulnerable areas from rising sea levels and storm surges. These projects typically require both skilled and unskilled labour, including engineers, masons, equipment operators and other types of construction workers. Additionally, the repair and climate-proofing of public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and drainage systems is expected to create short- to medium-term employment in the construction sector.⁶³

7.3.4. Health workers

There is a shortage of health workers in the region, driven largely by an exodus trained healthcare workers, and undermining the region's ability to deal with health emergencies. This was highlighted earlier in the report (Section 4.2.4) and has implications for the population's access to basic services in general. However, it is also very relevant in the context of climate change and the potential for more frequent epidemics, as well as surges in demand for healthcare post crisis or emergency. Recent regional discussions on the topic, notably the Forty-Seventh Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), called for unified and collective responses to help address the issue, which may include collaboration between specific agencies such as the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Human Resources for Health Caribbean Commission, as well as social partners (CARICOM 2024).

“The healthcare sector has faced even greater challenges due to migration. A significant number of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, radiologists, and medical laboratory technologists have sought better opportunities overseas, reducing the country's capacity to provide adequate healthcare services. Unlike the education sector, where replacements were developed internally, the health sector has relied on recruiting foreign professionals to fill these gaps, highlighting a critical workforce challenge” – Stakeholder consultation

Recent studies suggest that the exodus of workers is likely to continue unless significant changes are made to improve conditions in the healthcare sector in the CARICOM region. A recent study highlights some of the driving factors to be poor working conditions, inadequate and low wages, poor treatment and lack of respect for health workers;⁶⁴ and inadequate facilities, equipment, and medical supplies to perform work (PAHO and WHO 2019). Notably, the same study found that while around 60 per cent of healthcare workers surveyed who were, at the time of the survey, residing in the Caribbean would migrate if they had the opportunity, also found that 92 per cent would stay if conditions improved, such as the possibility of being promoted becoming available to them. The study also found that 26 per cent of the healthcare diaspora surveyed would consider returning if conditions in the home countries improved (PAHO and WHO 2019).

A challenge will be to find sustainable solutions with regards to access to basic healthcare services, but also to consider temporary options specific to post-crisis response. Stakeholder consultations raised

⁶³ Stakeholder consultations.

⁶⁴ Please see this recent report on the linkages of occupational safety and health to climate change: (ILO 2024a).

concerns that in attempting to address the issue of the shortage of healthcare workers, there was little consultation with workers' groups, particularly nursing trade unions, which would help gather more direct insights and perspectives from the healthcare workers concerned.⁶⁵

Efforts to address the outward migration of healthcare workers from the region may be undermined by private recruitment agencies. The Caribbean Cooperation in Health (CCH) was established by CARICOM and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and is mandated to coordinate health policy across the region (CARICOM, n.d.-a). The CCH's focus is on human resource development in health in the Caribbean, and it does attempt to address the migration of health workers. Bilateral arrangements for healthcare workers are in place which allow for government-arranged migration management within the CARICOM region. However, there are signs that private recruitment agencies operate in the region beyond the scope of these arrangements and facilitate the migration of health workers out of the region.⁶⁶ While CARICOM nationals have the right to migrate, there are also systems in place, including the WHO Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, that provides guidance to prevent the sourcing of health workers from countries and territories with understaffed health systems (WHO 2010). Given the shortage of health workers in many CARICOM Member States and the ongoing emigration of health workers, it is possible that this Code of Practice is not being effectively upheld.

65 Stakeholder consultation with workers' group representative.

66 Stakeholder consultation with workers' group representative.



▶ 8. Recommendations for free movement in CARICOM

This report provides an analysis of different economic, employment, labour and labour migration factors in CARICOM Member States. A special focus is placed on the impacts of climate change and labour migration governance. This Section outlines strategic recommendations, based on the findings of the report and aligned with the draft CARICOM Migration Policy Framework (CMPF).

Bolster labour migration policy development and implementation

International Labour Organization

- ▶ Raise awareness and build capacity on the key Conventions and non-normative tools related to the protection of migrant workers with CARICOM Member States.

CARICOM Member States

- ▶ Ratify key Conventions related to the protection of migrant workers and align national laws, policies and practice to these Conventions.
- ▶ Develop and implement comprehensive national labour migration policies or labour migration objectives that are anchored in other policies, such as migration policies or development policies, through a whole-of-society approach.
- ▶ Reinforce policy coherence between labour migration objectives and related policy areas (particularly employment, social protection, education and training and climate change) by capturing labour migration objectives in related policies and putting mechanisms in place to ensure policy coherence in the implementation of these policies.

CARICOM Secretariat

- ▶ Develop the CARICOM regional labour migration policy framework to strengthen regional cooperation on labour migration, strengthen data sharing on national skills gaps and skills supply, facilitate skills matching, and set regional standards for the protection and integration of migrant workers and their families.
- ▶ Develop the CARICOM labour migration policy framework through a whole-of-society approach, based on good practices and a rights-based approach to migration.
- ▶ Guide and monitor the implementation of the CARICOM labour migration policy framework through a regional labour migration dialogue process or other regular CARICOM meetings of Member States.

Strengthen coordination of labour migration at regional and national levels

CARICOM Secretariat

- ▶ Bolster regional cooperation via the CSME on labour migration to facilitate mobility, fills skills gaps, and enhance CARICOM nationals' knowledge of their rights and opportunities for labour migration in the region.

- ▶ Strengthen regional coordination on labour migration to aid the harmonisation of CSME legislation and the standardisation of the implementation of regional policy at the national level.
- ▶ Create opportunities for the social partners and non-governmental stakeholders to participate in decision-making related to labour migration at the regional level.
- ▶ Facilitate the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning on labour migration between CARICOM Member States by establishing a regional labour migration dialogue, or by incorporating such exchanges in established CARICOM meetings.

CARICOM Member States

- ▶ Introduce a national coordination mechanism on labour migration or, alternatively, include labour migration in other relevant national coordination mechanisms, such as on migration or trade, and involve the social partners and all other relevant stakeholders through a whole-of-society approach.
- ▶ Create opportunities for the social partners and other non-governmental stakeholders to participate in decision-making related to labour migration at the national level.

Enhance Fair Recruitment and the protection of migrant workers

International Labour Organization

- ▶ Raise awareness on Fair Recruitment with CARICOM Member States and assist them in aligning laws, policies and practice to the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment.
- ▶ Raise awareness with CARICOM Member States on the need to ensure that all migrant workers, regardless of their status, are protected by national labour laws.

CARICOM Member States

- ▶ Ensure that all labour migration laws, policies, practice and programmes comply with the ILO Principles and Guidelines for Fair Recruitment.
- ▶ Align the provision of social protection for migrant workers with CARICOM regional policy and instruments, including the CARICOM Agreement on Social Security (CASS).
- ▶ Clearly specify the protection of all migrant workers, regardless of their status, in national labour law.

CARICOM Secretariat

- ▶ Expand the CASS and fully align its coverage to the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).
- ▶ Support CARICOM Member States to harmonise the provision of social protection to migrant workers.

Support family reunification and the integration of migrant workers and their families

CARICOM Secretariat

- ▶ Facilitate the harmonised implementation of the Protocol on Contingent Rights across CARICOM Member States and the work in relation to the built-in agenda of the Protocol.

- Support CARICOM Member States to standardise the implementation of the CASS to enhance the portability of social security benefits.

CARICOM Member States

- Enhance the financial inclusion of migrants to bolster their integration and contribution to economic development.
- Initiate more and better mechanisms for the portability of social security outside of the region to aid labour migration and its impact on economic development.

Strengthen functions for regional labour migration and its impact on economic development

CARICOM Secretariat

- Support and strengthen the harmonisation of educational standards and skills recognition across the region.
- Strengthen the Caribbean Vocation Qualification (CVQ) system to increase the number of CVQs that are issued.
- Facilitate the further standardisation and simplification of the application and verification of skills certificates across the Region and raise awareness on how this process works with CARICOM nationals.

CARICOM Member States

- Develop and align National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and the CARICOM Qualification Framework (CQF).
- Increase formal channels for sending remittances and reduce the cost of sending remittances, including by developing new mechanisms, such as mobile money (Cerovic and Beaton 2017).
- Create opportunities for the channelling of remittances into productive investments, such as small businesses, education, and vocational training.⁶⁷

Improve labour market information to promote evidence-based labour migration governance

CARICOM Secretariat

- Conduct a detailed stocktaking review of the availability of international labour migration statistics across the region, reflecting statistics on stocks and flow of migrants; develop a framework of minimum indicators, data sources and guidance for the systematic improvement in coverage of international labour migration statistics across Member States and expand the minimum list of international labour migration statistics indicators in the CARICOM Labour Market Information Systems (CLMIS) list of indicators; and facilitate regional workshops for knowledge sharing and capacity building on the systematic expansion of international labour migration statistics in CARICOM Member States.
- Conduct a stocktaking review of data sources for information on demand for labour, skills gaps and skills shortages across the region and facilitate regional workshops for knowledge sharing and

⁶⁷ Draft CMPF

capacity building on alternative and effective approaches for measuring the demand for labour in CARICOM Member States, including web scraping of online job boards.

- ▶ Facilitate regional dialogue, including among education and TVET institutions, and social partners, to help provide qualitative insights into skills gaps per sector and to facilitate curriculum development to address gaps at the regional level.
- ▶ Produce regular reports in collaboration with Member States that consolidate labour market issues and highlight trends and characteristics in labour supply and demand at the regional level, with a focus on key sectors including health and education.
- ▶ Conduct research into work permits to determine the degree to which they are driven by skill needs and skill gaps, particularly to understand why there is a propensity to hire non-CARICOM nationals, and whether the process of issuing work permits is preferred to using other free movement entry points; and examine the educational composition of migrants receiving skills certificates to ascertain how this aligns with skill needs and skills gaps across the CARICOM Member States.

CARICOM Member States

- ▶ Ensure delivery of timely and reliable data on the issuing of work permits, skills certificates, and other information relevant to the CARICOM Secretariat.
- ▶ Develop roadmaps for the improvement of international labour migration statistics, using a CARICOM framework of minimum indicators.
- ▶ To ensure production and availability of labour market information, Member States must invest in an annual survey along with capacity building to enhance the ability of relevant National Statistics Offices to process, clean, analyse and disseminate labour market information. This is important to ensure the timeliness and overall relevance of labour market analysis.
- ▶ Strengthen collaboration between National Statistics Offices and other ministries and agencies, including those dealing with immigration and labour issues through a whole-of-government approach, to assist with the processing of administrative data sources on international labour migration statistics.
- ▶ Establish sector skills councils for broader policy areas, to help with the identification of specific labour market issues per sector including labour shortages and skills gaps, and to strengthen collaboration between the private sector and education and training institutions.
- ▶ Explore opportunities for harvesting job posting information with private sector job boards to expand insights into national-level labour demand.

Better understand the impacts of climate-change on labour migration

CARICOM Secretariat

- ▶ Mainstream labour migration into regional climate and development strategies. This can include labour migration considerations in the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre's (CCCCC) Planning, the Regional Adaptation Strategy, and other regional initiatives.
- ▶ Establish an inter-agency task force on climate change and labour mobility, including key regional institutions, including CCCCC, OECS Commission, national stakeholders and technical experts to help coordinate regional efforts with regards to labour migration and climate change.
- ▶ Improve data and foresight tools on climate-related labour migration. Establish partnerships with institutions to strengthen data and forecasts on climate-change related labour migration to help

understand anticipated displacement and labour migration outcomes, including potential labour reallocation across sectors. The production of climate-related scenarios would help both national and regional level planning.

- Recognise and incorporate climate-change related displacement and migration and the right and need to access labour markets in other CARICOM Member States, drawing from relevant resources including the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition (ILO 2015). In particular, the CARICOM Secretariat should incorporate these Guidelines into the regional labour migration policy framework.

CARICOM Member States

- Conduct sectoral assessments to gauge the potential impact of climate-change related risks on the labour market and the potential implications for labour migration, with a particular focus on agriculture, tourism, construction and healthcare.
- Facilitate the formation of sector skills councils for specific areas related to climate change mitigation, to share information between the private sector and education and TVET institutions to ensure that curriculum and skills development respond to future skill needs around climate adaptation.
- Convene tripartite regional consultations at the sectoral level to assess and address labour migration outcomes emanating from climate-change, particularly in agriculture, tourism, construction and healthcare.



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