

Nearly 2,500 Jamaicans secure employment in US

■ KINGSTON

THE Jamaica government says a total of 2,482 Jamaicans have travelled to the United States for employment between January and June this year under the H-2A and H-2B visa programmes. Labour and Social Security Minister, Parnell Charles Jr told a Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JACLO) webinar that the figure represents 36 per cent of all Jamaicans who have secured overseas employment for the year to date.

'For us, it's not just numbers. These are our sons, our daughters, our mothers, our fathers whose lives and communities are being transformed and impacted because they have access to meaningful work,' Charles said.

He said the ministry continues to support participants in the Overseas Employment Programme through skills training, work readiness preparation and the management of a national database of prescreened workers.

'We respond swiftly to your needs as employers and we also conduct pre-departure orientation, covering labour rights, financial literacy and cultural expectations. Again (this is) another element in Jamaica's effort to prepare our candidates for the transition to this jurisdiction where we want them to expose themselves but also to represent Jamaica with excellence,' Charles said. He told the webinar that liaison officers play a vital role in safeguarding the welfare of Jamaican workers overseas, helping to resolve disputes, and ensuring that both workers and employers are supported throughout the employment period.

'Many of our employers can testify that our liaison officers become their best friends, because they're the ones whom they can rely on sometimes to communicate, sometimes to understand. 'Additionally, we also have moved, now, to have a sort of mentorship programme where we pair the experienced workers with the newcomers, promoting discipline, emotional preparedness, and just getting them to really be their brothers' and sisters' keepers,' Charles said.

Charles noted that while the H-2A (agricultural) programme remains Jamaica's flagship for overseas agricultural employment, the Jamaica government is actively working to expand access to the H-2B (non-agricultural) programme, which facilitates temporary non-agricultural work opportunities.

He said that these persons have contributed to the seasonal operations in states like Florida, Michigan,

Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Missouri and Colorado.

'This programme has created valuable opportunities, seeing many openings in hospitality, landscaping, construction, janitorial services, seafood processing and amusement and recreation. We have persons who fit the bill for all of those categories. In 2024, over 12,000 Jamaicans were employed through the H-2B programme,' Charles said.

'These workers continue to shine in their roles, some of them are cooks, housekeepers, drivers, bartenders, landscapers [and] front desk agents...they are the face of hospitality in your jurisdiction.

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