

the implementation of a robust legislative agenda¹; Cabinet’s approval of the ICT in Education Policy in 2022; and plans by the Ministry of Education to roll out the National Coding Curriculum in schools across the country² - the first of its kind in the Caribbean. There is also the Government’s on-going “Go Digital Programme” which provides access to finance and technical assistance aimed at incentivizing MSME’s to digitalize their businesses. Furthermore, following a pilot, Jamaica’s Central Bank Digital Currency was rolled out in early 2022. It is designed to be part of Jamaica’s digital payments system to facilitate greater financial inclusion and increase transaction velocity, while reducing the cost of banking for the public. Additionally, a National Broadband Taskforce was formed by Jamaica’s Parliament in December 2020. Reporting to the Prime Minister, it is tasked with driving the rollout of broadband network across the island by 2030. Island-wide broadband coverage is pivotal to advancing Jamaica’s Digital Agenda. This is fully integrated in the Government’s strategic approach and will be reflected in the National Broadband Strategy, currently in preparation by the Ministry of Science Energy and Technology, with the support of the European Union. Jamaica is clearly making much progress in laying a solid foundation. However, much more remains to be done, as digital transformation is a costly, long term goal, being implemented in the context of limited fiscal space.

It is against this background that the budget support programme: *The Digital Transitioning Programme for Jamaica (Digital Jamaica)* has been designed. The *overall objective* is “To increase inclusive access to and use of ICT in Jamaica, in support of the country’s transitioning activities towards becoming a digital economy and society” The *specific objectives* are: (a) Increased access to and use of, robust, affordable and secure broadband connectivity by educational institutions and Places of Safety/Children’s Homes; (b) Strengthened digital competencies of early childhood and primary teacher educators and teachers. (c) Increased technology adoption and use by MSMEs. The main expected outputs are: (a) Improved broadband network with WANs and campus-wide Wifi access in participating schools and Places of Safety/Children’s Homes. (b) Digital competency integrated in training curricula of publicly-funded teacher-training institutions. (c) Increased number of new/ in-service early childhood and primary teachers trained in digital competency, with specific emphasis on diverse educational needs. (d) Digital transitioning services integrated within MIIC’s business development support system.

The present action will be part of the Global Gateway on Digital, and of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance in particular, given its focus on expanding broadband connectivity, addressing the digital divide and further integrating into the global digital ecosystem.

2 RATIONALE

2.1 Context

Jamaica is the largest democracy in the English-speaking Caribbean, with a population of 2.97 million. The country is a key regional opinion former and actor through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It partners with the US, Canada and recently with the UK through region-to-country free trade arrangements – these are its most important allies outside of the immediate region. Its democracy has been stable over the recent years.

Economic context

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Jamaican economy was on a good path to recovery having successfully completed an economic reform programme supported by the IMF. However, just a few months after this, in November 2019, the Pandemic hit Jamaica and the world. The resulting sudden drop in tourism receipts of 70 percent (Jamaica’s largest source of foreign exchange) generated a strong economic contraction of 12 percent in FY2020/21. This is the worst economic contraction in Jamaica’s history. The Pandemic exposed how much lives and economies, globally, depend on digital technologies. In Jamaica, in addition to the major fallout in the tourism sector, economic activities in other sectors were also negatively affected due to low digital technology adoption by the private sector which employ an estimated 90 percent of the working labour force. Inadequate and

¹ Reviewing the 2010 Cybercrimes Act, passing the ICT Authority Act in 2019, the Data Protection Act in 2020 and the National Identification and Registration Act in 2021

² <https://jis.gov.jm/400000-students-to-benefit-from-roll-out-of-national-coding-in-schools-programme/>