

Cuba Opens the Door to the Economy for the Diaspora: Property, Bank Accounts, and Major Projects



Cuba's Minister of Foreign Trade, Óscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga (Source: [YouTube/Cubadebate](#))

While a [nationwide power outage](#) brought the island to a standstill yesterday afternoon, the Cuban government announced a sweeping economic opening: For the first time, Cubans living abroad who do not reside on the island will be allowed to own private businesses, maintain foreign currency accounts, and participate in infrastructure projects.

In an unusual move, Vice President and Minister of Foreign Trade Óscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga presented the reforms on Monday [first to the U.S. broadcaster NBC News](#) and [only afterward](#) on Cuban state television during the program Mesa Redonda.

Business Ownership Without Residency on the Island

The most far-reaching of the three core measures concerns property rights. Until now, only Cubans with actual residency on the island were permitted to establish or own private businesses. This restriction no longer applies to individuals who hold the immigration status of “investors and businesspeople” as defined by current Cuban immigration law.

Pérez-Oliva Fraga stated unequivocally: “This was not possible until now. This option was limited to those Cubans who held the status of actual residents within the national territory.” A Cuban who has lived in Miami, Madrid, or Mexico City for years will thus be able to legally establish and manage a private enterprise in Cuba in the future without giving up his or her residence.

The minister also emphasized that there are no upper limits or sectoral restrictions on the size of the companies: “There is no restriction from an administrative-legal standpoint that

would prevent this.” This opens the door not only to small service businesses but also to larger ventures in sectors such as manufacturing, tourism, or technology.

Foreign Currency Accounts for Cubans Living Abroad

The second measure is of a technical nature but has significant practical consequences: Cubans living abroad who operate businesses on the island will now be allowed to open and maintain foreign currency accounts at Cuban banks—under the same conditions as any other natural or legal person residing in Cuba.

“They will be able to do this in the same way as any person or institution resident in our country,” said Pérez-Oliva Fraga. Until now, business transactions—supplier payments, payroll, and wire transfers—had to be handled through intermediaries or informal channels, which burdened every investment with significant legal uncertainty. With their own foreign currency bank account, Cubans living abroad will, for the first time, have access to an institutionally secure financial infrastructure for their business activities on the island.

Major Projects and Infrastructure: Three Investment Pathways

The third measure is aimed at Cubans living abroad who wish to invest in Cuba through companies based overseas, and it opens up three formal pathways for doing so.

The first—already in place but now expanded—is participation in Cuban state-owned enterprises under Foreign Investment Law No. 118, which provides tax incentives and legal guarantees for foreign investors. The second route is entirely new: Cubans living abroad can now also partner with private Cuban companies under the same legal framework—previously, this was not provided for by law. The third route is the direct establishment or acquisition of private companies in Cuba, without going through foreign investment structures.

Pérez-Oliva Fraga explicitly named infrastructure as a priority sector: “We are not just talking about small projects; we are also talking about the opportunity to participate in key sectors of our development, such as infrastructure, which represents a significant transformation of certain activities at the national level.” One of the priorities could be the power grid, which, according to estimates, requires investments of around two billion U.S. dollars. As a reference model, he cited Vietnamese companies that [grow rice in Cuba under land-use rights contracts and achieve high yields](#). A similar model, the minister said, should now also become available to the Cuban diaspora.

In addition, the package provides for further measures: Cubans living abroad should be able to obtain licenses as providers of services in the field of virtual assets, participate in investment funds managed by Cuban financial institutions, and establish funds for international cooperation projects with local or national scope. Central Bank Decree No. 362 of 2018 governs the issuance of financial licenses.

Decades of Distance, Now a New Relationship

The announcements mark a shift in the official stance toward the Cuban diaspora, which is estimated to number several million people and lives primarily in the U.S., Spain, and other European and Latin American countries. For decades, the relationship between the Cuban state and its emigrants was characterized by mistrust and legal barriers; in the official narrative, emigration was often viewed more as a political threat than as an economic resource.

Many Cubans abroad have sent remittances for years to support family members or informally finance small businesses that were formally run by relatives. This legally precarious practice now has a formally secure foundation.

The government emphasized, however, that the U.S. economic blockade remains the greatest structural obstacle to the effectiveness of these reforms. Restrictions on access to international financial markets, the monitoring of dollar transactions, and trade restrictions directly affecting investments by the diaspora. Pérez-Oliva Fraga also explained that the announced measures do not require significant changes to the existing legal framework from the Cuban side, which would allow for prompt implementation.

Moreover, the idea is not entirely new. As early as December 2021, [Cuba announced](#) that it would open up to investments from the exile community. At that time, however, the focus was more on small-scale projects, and the legal foundations—such as the ability to open bank accounts—were never established. Attention was also directed toward China and Vietnam, two socialist countries where investments from the exile community played a central role in the course of economic reforms.

Tactical Offer Amid Tensions with Washington

The reforms come amid massive tensions with the U.S., which has imposed a military-enforced energy blockade on the island. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has repeatedly cited economic openness as a condition for any rapprochement with Havana. Speaking to the financial news agency Bloomberg, [he](#) recently stated: “I believe that their willingness to open up in this regard is a possible way forward.” Rubio added that change need not occur abruptly, and Washington would welcome “drastic” reforms that create “space for economic and ultimately political freedom for the Cuban people.”

In this context, the measures announced by Havana can be read as a tactical offer: economic concessions without touching the political order or the socialist constitution—a red line that Cuban authorities have described as non-negotiable. Whether economic opening without political concessions will be enough to appease the Trump administration, however, remains to be seen. President Trump [declared](#) from the White House that same Monday that he could “do whatever he wanted” with Cuba and described taking over the island as a potential “honor.” ([Cubaheute](#))