UNITED NATIONS
BARBADOS

Global Disability Fund

Situational Analysis on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Barbados

Country Brief

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations 2
1 Background 3
2 Introduction to Disability Context in Barbados 3
3 Findings 4
3.1 Stakeholders and Coordination Mechanisms 4
3.2 Preconditions for Disability Inclusion 7
3.2.1 Equality and Non-Discrimination 7
3.2.2 Inclusive Service Delivery 8
3.2.3 Accessibility 11
3.2.4 CRPD-Compliant Budgeting and Financial Management 11
3.2.5 Accountability and Governance 12
3.3 Cross-Cutting Approaches: Gender, Participation, Inequalities 13
3.3.1 Participation 14
3.3.2 Gender 14
3.3.3 Inequalities 14
3.4 Disability Inclusion in Broader Development, Humanitarian and Emergency Contexts 15
3.4.1 National Development Plans 15
3.4.2 Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Action 15
3.4.3 Climate Change 15
4.0 Conclusions 16

Disclaimer:

This brief was prepared by the Global Disability Fund (GDF) Technical Secretariat. It summarizes the key findings from the full Situational Analysis report and does not necessarily reflect the position of the GDF.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AKM	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSW	Centre for Social Work (singular)
ECI	Early childhood intervention
EUR	Euro
GDF	Global Disability Fund (formerly UNPRPD)
ILO	International Labor Organization
KII	Key informant interview
“MESTI”	“Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation”
MESPI	“Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure”
“MFLT”	“Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers”
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPEA	Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
“NDC”	“National Disability Council”
“NSRPD”	“National Strategy on Rights of Persons with Disabilities”
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
“OGG/OPM”	“Office for Good Governance (Office of the Prime Minister)”
OI	Ombudsperson Institution
OPD	Organisation of persons with disabilities (singular)
SDG	Sustainable development goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDCO	United Nations Development Coordinator Office
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Background

The United Nations Global Disability Fund (GDF) (former Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Partner Trust Fund – UNPRPD MPTF) is a global initiative supporting countries to implement their commitments as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Under its Strategic and Operational Framework 2020-2025, around 50 countries have been supported to carry out Situational Analyses of the rights of persons with disabilities.

The analysis aims to:

- Inform UN programming and serve as a baseline for interventions.
- Identify gaps in disability inclusion across national policies and programmes.
- Strengthen collaboration between the UNCT, government, OPDs and civil society.
- Provide a tool for advocacy and capacity building for OPDs and development actors

In Barbados, the Situational Analysis was carried out between July 2024 and February 2025. It provides a comprehensive assessment of the country's disability landscape, identifying progress and key challenges in CRPD implementation. The study used a mixed-method approach, including:

- Desk reviews of available policies, laws and statistical data.
- Information from a regional event "Breaking Barriers" (carried out late 2023), bringing together persons with disabilities to discuss systemic obstacles.
- A national induction training on CRPD implementation, involving government, OPDs, the private sector, humanitarian actors and UN agencies.
- Key informant interviews with 11 individuals, including government representatives, OPDs and UN staff
- Focus group discussions with 10 persons with disabilities and their families.
- Validation by the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs in January 2025, whose written feedback was incorporated into the final report.

2 Introduction to Disability Context in Barbados

According to the 2010 census, 5.3% of Barbados' population reported having a disability. However, international estimates suggest the actual prevalence may be closer to 10–15%. Forecasts by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) indicate that this figure is expected to rise significantly over the next 30 years.

Barbados ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2013, committing to eliminate discrimination and improve access for persons with disabilities. Since then, Barbados has introduced or drafted legislation and policies across sectors like employment, education and public services to foster inclusion. Despite these advances, persons with disabilities still encounter serious barriers to full participation in society, particularly in education, healthcare, employment and transportation.

The ongoing transformation is significantly supported by organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), particularly the Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD). These groups have been pivotal in service delivery, policy advocacy and in shaping national reforms—often preceding government involvement.

3 Findings

3.1 Stakeholders and Coordination Mechanisms

GOVERNMENT AND ITS COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Barbados hosts a diverse landscape of government and civil society actors working toward the advancement of disability rights. However, a key structural gap is the absence of a centralized national coordination body to guide and align disability inclusion efforts across all sectors.

Government Stakeholders

The **Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA)** plays a central role in delivering social protection and empowerment programmes for persons with disabilities. Its broad mandate includes oversight of agencies such as the National Assistance Board, Child Care Board, Welfare Department, and most critically, the **National Disabilities Unit (NDU)**. The NDU serves as the primary government body for disability affairs, coordinating policy implementation, monitoring and direct service delivery in education, employment and inclusion.

In December 2023, MPEA appointed two **National Disabilities Advocates** to advise the government on new disability legislation and policy, and to support cross-ministerial coordination toward national disability goals.

The **Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT)** is responsible for integrating inclusive practices within the education system and training teachers to support students with disabilities. Ongoing education transformation initiatives have the potential to significantly improve access and outcomes for learners with disabilities.

The **Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Third Sector** leads employment-focused disability policies, aiming to improve workplace accessibility and increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The **Department of Emergency Management (DEM)** ensures that persons with disabilities are included in disaster preparedness, response and recovery planning. The **Barbados Vulnerable Persons Committee (BVPC)** supports this effort by coordinating inclusion of disability considerations within shelter systems and broader emergency responses.

While several ministries have personnel with strong technical knowledge of disability rights, no formal disability focal points are designated within ministries to ensure coordination. This gap contributes to fragmented implementation, weak accountability and inconsistencies in data collection across sectors. Additionally, there is a widespread lack of understanding of the CRPD's rights-based approach, despite the openness of government officials to improve disability inclusion efforts.

A **CRPD Implementation Monitoring Committee** played a significant role in preparing Barbados' Initial Report to the UN CRPD Committee. Moving forward, the **proposed National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**, as envisioned in the draft legislation and national policy, could address current coordination challenges. This multi-stakeholder body is expected to include government, civil society and OPD representatives, with a mandate to monitor CRPD implementation, advocate for disability rights and lead public awareness campaigns. If effectively resourced and empowered, this Commission could provide the national coordination mechanism Barbados currently lacks.

ORGANISATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (OPDs) AND SERVICE PROVIDING CSOs

OPDs play a vital role in advocacy, service delivery and public education, forming the backbone of the disability rights movement in Barbados. However, despite their dedication and significant contributions, most OPDs are severely under-resourced, relying heavily on volunteer labour. Strengthening the institutional and financial capacity of these organizations remains a critical priority for achieving sustainable and inclusive disability rights advancement.

Key OPDs and Civil Society Organisations

- **Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD)**: The BCD is the leading umbrella organization advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities in Barbados. It coordinates a network of disability organizations and promotes disability inclusion through policy advocacy, awareness campaigns and service delivery. BCD receives a government subvention through the National Disabilities Unit to deliver key services such as accessible transportation and skills training. A flagship initiative is the *Fully Accessible Barbados (FAB) Programme*, which promotes access in transportation and education.
- **Barbados National Organization of the Disabled (BARNOD)**: A prominent cross-disability organization with strong grassroots representation. BARNOD engages in policy advocacy, research and outreach, and serves on several government committees. It provides a platform for persons with disabilities to collaborate and influence national development processes.
- **Autism Association of Barbados (AAB)**: Founded in 2004, the AAB works to raise awareness and understanding of autism spectrum disorder. It supports affected individuals and families through community engagement and advocacy tailored to the needs and preferences of autistic persons.
- **Barbados Association for Children with Intellectual Challenges**: This charitable organization provides early childhood, life skills and adult vocational training to children and young adults with intellectual disabilities. Its programmes include agriculture, food preparation, sewing and woodworking. It also runs the *Challenor School*, supporting students aged 5–18 with conditions including ADD, cerebral palsy, fragile X syndrome, Down syndrome and autism.
- **National United Society of the Blind (NUSB)**: NUSB focuses on the empowerment of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Its work spans education, vocational training and outreach. It also promotes inclusive sports through its affiliation with the International Blind Sports Association.
- **Barbados Horizon Deaf Charity (BHDC)**: BHDC advocates for accessible communication, inclusive education, and support for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. The organization works with both public and private sectors to improve accessibility and participation.
- **Barbados Organization for Down Syndrome**: A newer and growing advocacy group focused on supporting individuals with Down syndrome. It is part of a wave of emerging OPDs addressing specific disabilities with targeted advocacy and service initiatives.

The **National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities (NACPWD)** was established in 2022 to develop comprehensive disability legislation and policy aligned with the CRPD. The committee was composed entirely of persons with disabilities or individuals closely connected to the disability community, ensuring that lived experience informed its work.

Beyond its legislative mandate, the committee also advised on reducing discrimination and marginalization, and improving accessibility, social protection, and inclusion. A key strength of the NACPWD was its highly consultative approach—it conducted over **60 consultations** with stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, OPDs, advocacy groups and community organisations. These engagements helped surface key challenges and fostered widespread public dialogue on disability issues in Barbados.

The process culminated in the Comprehensive Report of the National Advisory Committee (June 2023), which outlined the barriers faced by persons with disabilities across sectors and made detailed recommendations. The committee's work not only informed the draft legislation and national policy but also laid the groundwork for establishing the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities. The NACPWD was formally decommissioned in 2023 after completing its mandate.

UN AGENCIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The **United Nations Sub-Regional Team (UNST)** for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean promotes disability inclusion as part of its broader development agenda. Aligned with the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), the UNST works with governments to strengthen inclusive public policies, improve accessibility, and enhance data collection and public awareness on disability rights. It also supports training for health and social protection workers and provides technical and financial assistance for integrating disability rights into national development planning.

The **Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)** contributes to disability inclusion by funding disability assessments and infrastructure accessibility projects aimed at fostering inclusive economic development in Barbados and the wider Caribbean.

The **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** plays a key role in inclusive education. It supports initiatives to improve educational quality, accessibility, and data systems for students with disabilities. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT), the IDB is implementing a **USD 20 million** project titled *"Skills for the Future II: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Quality Education"*, aimed at advancing a more inclusive and digitally resilient education system in Barbados.

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Although multiple government ministries and civil society groups are engaged in advancing disability rights, the absence of a national coordinating body and designated disability focal points within ministries has resulted in fragmented implementation, limited monitoring and accountability gaps. With the new national policy and legislation in place, there is a need to establish a mechanism to lead coordinated national efforts. The proposed National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, outlined in the new legislation, presents an opportunity to centralize efforts, improve cross-sector collaboration, and ensure that government, civil society and OPDs work in alignment.

While OPDs are highly committed and active, they remain significantly under-resourced, limiting their ability to scale and sustain advocacy and service delivery.

Development partners such as the UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) play a critical role by providing technical assistance, funding and capacity-building support to advance disability inclusion in Barbados.

3.2 Preconditions for Disability Inclusion

A critical element of the GDF strategy is its focus on the essential preconditions for disability inclusion to advance the CRPD. The following findings focus on the five preconditions.

3.2.1 Equality and Non-Discrimination

Barbados has ratified several international human rights treaties relevant to disability rights, including the CRPD, CEDAW, ICESCR, CRC and ICCPR. While Barbados has not yet submitted its initial report to the CRPD Committee, it has received concluding observations from other treaty bodies urging stronger protections for persons with disabilities—particularly women and children—and recommending inclusive education, anti-discrimination measures, improved healthcare access and public awareness campaigns.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has also issued recommendations, notably in its 2023 cycle, calling for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, inclusive education, employment opportunities, improved data collection and early intervention services for children with disabilities. A dedicated disability census was also recommended.

Though Barbados has taken important steps—such as revising the Immigration Act in 2018 to remove discriminatory language—the legal landscape remains fragmented and inconsistent. The Barbados Constitution, while affirming equality and non-discrimination, does not explicitly reference persons with disabilities. However, constitutional reform is underway, and persons with disabilities are actively participating in the process, with former BCD President Kerry-Ann Ifill appointed to the reform commission. The Charter of Barbados, adopted during the republic transition, affirms equality for all, including persons with disabilities.

The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act** (expected to be passed in 2025) marks a major legislative advancement. It establishes:

- A National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, tasked with implementation, policy advice, research promotion, and compliance monitoring.
- A Disability Rights Tribunal, with legal authority to adjudicate disability-related complaints.

The Act enshrines rights across key sectors:

- Education: Guarantees free primary and secondary education with accommodations.
- Employment: Mandates equal opportunity and reasonable accommodations, with temporary measures to boost public sector hiring.
- Accessibility: Requires accessible buildings, facilities, and transportation.
- Political Participation: Ensures accessible polling places and supports public engagement.
- Healthcare and Social Protection: Establishes entitlements and access standards.
- Justice: Affirms access to legal services and the right to participate fully in legal processes.

It also introduces penalties for non-compliance and transitional mechanisms to align existing laws with CRPD standards.

Approved by Cabinet in September 2023, the **2023–2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities** is grounded in values of dignity, empowerment, accessibility and equality. It outlines strategic priorities in:

- Improving access to physical environments, transportation, information and communication.
- Securing an adequate standard of living.
- Promoting inclusive and lifelong learning.

- Creating inclusive jobs and supporting self-employment.
- Ensuring quality, accessible health and rehabilitation services.
- Supporting access to justice and civic participation.
- Including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and emergency planning.
- Integrating disability data into national systems.
- Addressing gender and age-specific challenges.

An implementation strategy and monitoring framework are included. While these are not yet approved by Parliament, some elements are already being actioned by ministries, although the Ministry of Finance has noted that budget allocations for the policy are pending and need to be addressed.

Together, the 2025 Act and 2023–2030 Policy represents a comprehensive effort to align Barbados' legal and policy framework with international disability rights standards, but full realization will depend on effective implementation, coordination and resourcing.

KEY FINDINGS

Since ratifying the CRPD in 2013, Barbados has made notable strides in strengthening its legal and policy environment for disability inclusion. The approval of the 2023–2030 National Disability Policy and the expected passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2025) mark significant progress toward CRPD alignment.

Despite these advancements, much of Barbados' mainstream legislation remains misaligned with CRPD principles. There is no comprehensive anti-discrimination law, and existing laws insufficiently address key areas such as accessible communication, education and healthcare. Enforcement mechanisms are generally weak, limiting the effectiveness of the legal framework.

The success of the proposed National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Disability Rights Tribunal—both critical components of the new Act—will depend on adequate resourcing, authority, and political will. Without strong accountability structures, the practical impact of recent legislative gains may be limited, underscoring the need for a more robust institutional framework to drive implementation and oversight.

3.2.2 Inclusive Service Delivery

DISABILITY ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL SERVICES

The disability assessment process in Barbados is managed by various agencies, notably the National Disabilities Unit (NDU) and the Albert Cecil Graham Development Centre, which provides multidisciplinary evaluations for children and young adults. In education, the METVT conducts assessments via specialized psychologists and resource officers, feeding into Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Persistent challenges include long wait times (up to two years), lack of standardized tools and shortages of trained professionals (e.g., occupational therapists, psychologists), overwhelmed assessment centres unable to meet demand and high private assessment costs creating inequality in access.

A 2018 Health Needs Assessment (PAHO & Ministry of Health) revealed major service gaps, especially in referrals to mental health services, physiotherapy and speech therapy.

These bottlenecks negatively affect access to education, healthcare and social services. OPDs and focus group participants consistently describe the assessment process as fragmented and inefficient.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services are provided primarily by the National Assistance Board (NAB), the Welfare Department (WD) through the National Assistance Programme (NAP), and the Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD). Key services include Home Help Programmes (personal care, meals, chores). Assistive devices, transportation and care are also provided by centres like Elayne Scantlebury Centre. BCD delivers services, such as FAB (Fully Accessible Barbados) for public and tourist space accessibility and MIS (My Inclusive School) initiative supporting inclusive education.

Non-contributory pensions and special needs grants, expanded in October 2024 to include children and adults with a broader range of disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy, autism). A standard disability pension is between BBD 50–88 per week (approximately USD 25–44), depending on classification. Persons with severe disabilities may receive up BBD 164 per week (approximately USD 82). This is only 55% of the estimated poverty line in Barbados.

Mental health services include the Psychiatric Hospital, with new recreational and occupational therapy facilities (2023), Lifeline Barbados, a 24-hour mental health hotline and community outreach and education, supported by PAHO.

Challenges in the system include inadequate levels of financial support (often below poverty line), discretionary caseworker decisions that can limit access and limited information dissemination about entitlements. Caregivers are ineligible for support, despite leaving jobs to provide care. Also, persistent stigma and limited practical training opportunities for mental health professionals remain concerns.

The new legislation introduces a rights-based framework, reducing caseworker discretion and promoting transparent eligibility. The 2023–2030 policy aligns with CRPD Article 28, promoting inclusive social protection and proposing improvements in financial services, caregiver support and service provider training.

MAINSTREAM SERVICES

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Administered through the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and the Welfare Department through NAP, support to families in need includes food, clothing, rent, utilities and assistive devices. There are also non-contributory pensions for old persons and persons with disabilities, although these are very low as mentioned above. Social protection spending equals 11.4% of GDP, but disability-specific coverage is limited. The new policy proposes reforms to enhance coverage and increase benefit adequacy to ensure alignment with CRPD.

HEALTH

Current laws like the Health Services Act and Mental Health Act are outdated and lack CRPD-aligned provisions. However, the National Disability Health Policy addresses some barriers to inclusion and stipulate free transportation to appointments, assistive technologies and medication access. It also includes health worker training on disability inclusion.

Still, the main hospital - Queen Elizabeth Hospital - and other health facilities face issues with inaccessible infrastructure, limited communication support (e.g., for deaf patients) and disrespectful provider attitudes, marginalizing patients.

Persons with disabilities also face high insurance premiums and coverage limitations, despite insurer claims of non-discrimination.

EDUCATION

Governed by the Education Act (1987) and Student Support Services, METVT supports students with disabilities through assessments, IEPs, peripatetic teachers and parent-teacher workshops. Recent initiatives include:

- Expanded disability screening (ages 3.5–5+).
- Education transformation agenda (2023) promoting inclusive lifelong learning.
- IDB-funded Skills for the Future II project to modernize and digitize education.
- "My Inclusive School" initiative for infrastructure, training, and assistive technology.

Despite these initiatives, there are only 15 students with disabilities in mainstream schools in Barbados (vs. 710 in special schools in 2021/22). There is a lack of inclusive infrastructure, trained teachers and cultural inclusion. Discriminatory practices (e.g., potty-training requirements) block school entry. Social stigma and bullying undermine retention and engagement.

EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOOD

Barbados has an Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act, 2020, which is supported by the Employment Rights Tribunal, a National Employment Policy (2014) and ongoing revision, a First Jobs Initiative (METVT) and BARNOD's Job Prep Programme. While this serves as a good foundation, barriers persist for persons with disabilities. There is 90% unemployment rate among persons with disabilities (2010). There is discrimination, inaccessible workplaces, lack of accommodations resulting in exploitation, harassment and workplace exclusion.

Reforms under the revised Employment policy include:

- Public and private sector employment quotas (5% for government).
- Vocational training, assistive equipment, self-employment incentives.
- Mandated reasonable accommodations and flexible work options.
- Complaint mechanisms via the Employment Rights Tribunal and National Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Legally, persons with disabilities can testify, but lack of procedural accommodations (e.g., sign language interpreters) undermines their rights. Laws like the Evidence Act and Mental Health Act offer some protections, but enforcement is inconsistent. The new disability legislation mandates procedural accommodations to strengthen legal access and accountability.

KEY FINDINGS

Despite efforts to improve inclusion, persons with disabilities continue to encounter major obstacles in accessing quality education, employment and healthcare. These barriers are exacerbated by fragmented efforts and the absence of a unified implementation strategy, compromising both reach and effectiveness.

Public understanding of disability rights remains limited, perpetuating stigma and discrimination across sectors like education, employment and healthcare. A prevailing charity-based view of disability undermines recognition of these services as legal state obligations. Inconsistent enforcement of disability laws further weakens accountability.

Barbados' social protection system is hampered by bureaucratic barriers, restrictive eligibility criteria, and insufficient benefit levels, limiting effective support for persons with disabilities and their families.

The newly enacted disabilities legislation and 2023–2030 national policy represents major steps toward CRPD compliance, covering key areas such as education, healthcare and accessibility. However, weak enforcement of existing laws raises concerns about the implementation and impact of these new frameworks.

3.2.3 Accessibility

While Barbados has introduced a laws and regulations addressing physical accessibility, these laws often lack clear enforcement mechanisms. The standards for accessibility in new buildings are not legally binding, leading to inconsistent application. This results in varying levels of accessibility across public and private facilities.

Transportation remains a significant barrier for persons with disabilities in Barbados. Despite free transportation options and the introduction of wheelchair-accessible electric buses, the availability of these services is limited and does not fully address the transportation needs of persons with disabilities. The high demand and insufficient vehicle capacity often force persons with disabilities to rely on expensive private transportation, restricting their access to essential services and opportunities.

Persons with disabilities in Barbados face significant challenges in accessing information and communication services. Government websites and digital services often do not comply with accessibility standards, and printed materials are rarely available in formats like Braille or large print. The cost and availability of assistive technologies such as screen readers and adaptive keyboards are major barriers. Efforts to provide sign language interpretation and accessible formats are crucial but currently insufficient to meet the needs of the entire persons with disabilities community.

There is a notable lack of awareness and sensitization regarding the needs and rights of persons with disabilities among the general public and service providers. This contributes to ongoing discrimination and inadequate service provision in various sectors, including healthcare, education and employment. Limitations on accessibility in all services frequently stem from discriminatory mindsets and a lack of awareness about disability.

KEY FINDINGS

While Barbados has taken legislative and policy steps toward improving accessibility, significant gaps remain in enforcement, infrastructure and funding. The successful implementation of the new policy and the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2025)* will be critical to meeting the standards set out in the CRPD. Without strong accountability and adequate resourcing, many of the proposed improvements risk falling short of their intended impact.

3.2.4 CRPD-Compliant Budgeting and Financial Management

Barbados, with a population of approximately 290,000 and a GDP per capita of US$14,666 (2021), has faced persistent economic challenges, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis. Over the past decade, annual real GDP growth averaged -0.5%, leading to unsustainable debt levels. The government responded by launching the Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) Plan in 2018 to stabilize the economy and restore fiscal health.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the economic situation, with a 13.7% GDP contraction in 2020 and unemployment peaking at 21%. While the 2023 IMF Article IV Report notes that the economy is recovering—thanks to tourism and continued implementation of BERT—ongoing fiscal consolidation, business reform and strengthening of social protection programmes remain essential. The IMF emphasized support for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

There is no disaggregated data on disability spending within the budgets of the Welfare Department, National Assistance Board, or health sector, which makes it difficult to analyse disability-related budget allocations. The Ministry of Finance has acknowledged these data gaps and is developing a budget tagging system to track expenditures aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including disability-related spending.

The 2024–2025 national budget does however show some figures, such as:

- A 40% increase in funding for special schools. Still only about 10% of the education budget goes to special schools, with no clear figures for inclusive education.
- A 26% increase for the National Disabilities Unit (NDU). Still only 3% of the personal social services budget is allocated to the NDU, which also funds the Barbados Council for the Disabled.

Despite policy and legislative advances, resource shortages—human, financial, and technical—pose significant barriers to implementation. Government ministries have consistently reported limited capacity and resources to deliver on the commitments of the new disability framework.

To help bridge this gap, the *2025 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act* proposes the creation of a National Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities. Managed by the National Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, this permanent fund would support implementation through Parliamentary allocations, donations from international, regional and local donors and income from investments.

KEY FINDINGS

Barbados does not have dedicated tools to monitor or track disability-related expenditures, which undermines transparency, accountability and effective resource allocation. Implementing robust budget tracking systems is critical for identifying funding gaps and improving management.

Disability considerations are often treated as ad hoc rather than being fully integrated into national budget processes. This fragmented approach results in inefficient and inconsistent funding for disability-related programmes and services.

Although the new legislation and policy significantly advance CRPD alignment, Barbados' limited financial, human and technical resources pose major challenges for implementation. A coordinated national strategy, better resource management and international support will be essential to bridge these gaps.

3.2.5 Accountability and Governance

INCLUSIVE EVIDENCE AND DATA GATHERING SYSTEMS

Data on persons with disabilities in Barbados is fragmented, outdated, and unreliable. The 2010 Census reported 11,546 persons with disabilities, but unofficial estimates suggest the number is closer to 20,000.

The 2021 Census, which included the Washington Group Questions, failed to produce usable disability data due to pandemic-related disruptions, low participation and stigma-related underreporting. The Barbados Statistical Service (BSS), the official data agency, confirmed the 2021 results were inaccurate and unusable, but currently has no plans to conduct a dedicated disability survey due to high costs.

Data on disability is scattered across government ministries and agencies (e.g., METVT, NDU, Child Care Board), collected independently without coordination or data sharing. The BSS recommends creating a centralized, secure electronic database to consolidate data and support planning.

The absence of disability focal points within ministries contributes to disorganized efforts, inconsistent data collection and reduced accountability for disability inclusion in policymaking.

NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Although Barbados ratified the CRPD in 2013, it has not yet submitted its initial report to the CRPD Committee. A draft is currently being circulated, reflecting some progress. Existing accountability structures, such as the Employment Rights Tribunal and the Office of the Ombudsman, provide limited recourse for persons with disabilities and do not comprehensively address disability rights violations. The civil court system faces significant delays, further undermining access to justice for persons with disabilities.

To address these gaps, the newly passed *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2025)* proposes two key institutions:

- A National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to advise on policy, monitor rights violations, conduct public awareness campaigns, and support research. It will also maintain a national registry and refer cases to appropriate bodies.
- A Disability Rights Tribunal to adjudicate rights violations under the legislation, with decisions enforceable as Magistrate's Court judgments.

The new policy stresses the need for appropriate resourcing (financial, human, technical) for these bodies to function effectively.

The Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA) also plans to amalgamate key social service agencies (including the NDU) into a Department of Family Services, intended to improve efficiency. However, concerns have been raised that disability issues may be deprioritized within this broader structure.

KEY FINDINGS

Barbados lacks a coordinated governance system to ensure accountability for disability rights. Existing mechanisms like the Employment Rights Tribunal and Ombudsman's Office are limited in scope, and the delay in submitting the CRPD report reflects broader issues in oversight and enforcement. This fragmentation leads to weak policy integration and uncoordinated action across ministries.

The absence of reliable, centralized data on persons with disabilities severely limits effective policymaking and advocacy. Disability statistics are spread across multiple agencies, and recent census efforts have failed to produce accurate data, highlighting the urgent need for a coordinated national data strategy.

The proposed merging of key agencies into a new Department of Family Services aims to improve efficiency, but persons with disabilities fear that it may reduce focus on disability-specific issues. Institutional safeguards will be needed to maintain attention to disability inclusion within the new structure.

The lack of designated disability focal points within ministries contributes to poor coordination, inconsistent data collection and limited accountability in mainstreaming disability across policies and programmes.

3.3 Cross-Cutting Approaches: Gender, Participation, Inequalities

The GDF has adopted three cross-cutting approaches to be intrinsically applied across all of its work, including its structures, programmes and processes to ensure full and meaningful participation of all persons with disabilities.

3.3.1 Participation

While there is no legislative prohibition against persons with disabilities participating in political life and government affairs in Barbados, traditional perceptions have often deemed persons with disabilities unsuitable as political representatives. Both major political parties have appointed persons with disabilities to the unelected House of Parliament. Voters with disabilities can request assistance at polling stations.

Persons with disabilities and their organizations are increasingly represented in national advisory bodies and committees, including Social Justice Committee, National Wellness in the Workplace Committee, Monitoring Rights of the Child Committee, Vulnerable Persons Committee, and Building and Standards Advisory Committee. The Central Bank consulted disability groups when designing accessible features for new banknotes.

Participation in sports, culture, and religion is growing, with efforts like the Special Olympics, Blind Cricket Association, and Deaf Calypso Project, as well as inclusive events such as the 2024 Pic-O-De-Crop final featuring a visually impaired contestant.

Despite these gains, participation remains limited due to accessibility barriers and resource constraints.

3.3.2 Gender

Women with disabilities hold prominent leadership roles in many OPDs, with gender parity reported in key organizations like BCD and BARNOD. Despite their leadership, disability-specific women's organizations struggle for visibility within broader gender rights movements.

Major issues facing women with disabilities include

- Limited access to reproductive healthcare, with reports of non-consensual sterilization in the past. While collaboration with organizations like the BFPA and UNFPA is helping address gaps in sexual and reproductive rights, stigma and discrimination remain pervasive.
- Gender-based violence is disproportionally affecting women with disabilities, prompting BCD-led awareness and self-defence initiatives.
- Fewer girls than boys are enrolled in special education settings (e.g., 98 girls vs. 207 boys in Resource Centres in 2024).

LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities are largely invisible in both the LGBTQ+ and disability rights movements, with their specific needs excluded from policy and legal reforms.

3.3.3 Inequalities

Ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is lacking in the disability rights movement. The community remains predominantly Afrocentric, with limited representation of Muslims, Hindus, and individuals of Indian or Caucasian descent.

Persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities are underrepresented in OPDs, although recent policy changes suggest growing recognition of these groups.

3.4 Disability Inclusion in Broader Development, Humanitarian and Emergency Contexts

3.4.1 National Development Plans

With Barbados' current development plan, the National Strategic Plan (2005–2025) nearing its expiration, the 2023 Voluntary National Review (VNR) provides a more forward-looking insight into how disability inclusion aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The VNR highlights targeted initiatives—like the opening of the NDU's recreational facility and skill-building programmes for persons with autism and the Deaf community—but these are isolated efforts, not part of a systemic, cross-sectoral disability mainstreaming strategy. Key gaps according to the VNR include:

- Lack of disaggregated data on disability across sectors such as education, health and employment.
- No comprehensive analysis on inclusive education or employment integration strategies aligned with SDG 4 and SDG 8.
- Limited focus on accessible healthcare systems and absence of disability-specific disaster risk reduction measures.

The United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) outlines areas where the UN can support disability inclusion in Barbados, including improving disaggregated data collection; enhancing social protection and education systems; and supporting policies to combat discrimination and foster greater inclusion.

3.4.2 Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Action

Barbados has integrated general inclusion principles into disaster response frameworks like the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Policy (2022), but specific measures for persons with disabilities remain limited. The District Emergency Organizations (DEOs) have been effective in mobilizing support and ensuring evacuation for some persons with disabilities, but gaps remain, particularly for the Deaf community, which lacks accessible communication in emergencies.

During the pandemic, the government, supported by UNDP, provided general social protection measures, and the NDU offered care packages to persons with disabilities. However, many persons with disabilities reported being left out of meaningful support, facing communication barriers due to mask mandates, limited access to remote learning for children with disabilities and service disruptions without corresponding accommodations or additional support.

The new national disability policy aims to address these systemic shortcomings by:

- Mandating barrier assessments, inclusive planning and disability awareness training for emergency responders.
- Involving persons with disabilities in national disaster committees and community surveillance systems to enhance preparedness and resilience.

3.4.3 Climate Change

Climate change resilience efforts, including the flagship Roofs to Reefs (R2RP) initiative, do not currently address the specific vulnerabilities or needs of persons with disabilities. The lack of inclusion in climate adaptation strategies highlights the absence of intersectionality in environmental policy.

4.0 Conclusions

Barbados ratified the CRPD in 2013, committing to a rights-based approach that recognizes persons with disabilities as equal citizens. However, implementation has been slow and uneven, with many systems still reflecting a charity-based model. This has led to heavy reliance on OPDs to fill service gaps.

The adoption of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2025 and the National Disability Policy 2023-2030 marks a significant shift towards legal and policy alignment with the CRPD. Yet, financial constraints, a lack of public awareness, and insufficient capacity in infrastructure and personnel continue to hinder full implementation. Barriers include discriminatory mindsets among the public and service providers, fragmented services and weak accountability mechanisms as well as limited budget transparency and inadequate disability-focused funding.

To address these challenges and promote effective implementation of the rights-based approach, the UN Sub-Regional Team (UNST) has outlined eleven strategic priorities for its future engagement in Barbados:

1. **Supporting the implementation of the new disability Policy and Law** including development of concrete implementation plans, repeal of discriminatory laws, empowerment of OPDs, training officials, development of policy guidelines and ensuring inclusive stakeholder consultations.
2. **Undertaking a comprehensive legislative and policy review,** including an evaluation of all laws and policies affecting persons with disabilities and development of proposals for reform. Identifying and proposing reforms addressing gaps in enforcement, accessibility and inclusive service provision.
3. **Supporting establishment of disability focal points across Ministries** to enhance coordinated data collection, service delivery and cross-ministerial integration of disability considerations.
4. **Supporting establishment of a permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism**, led by the MPEA, to oversee CRPD implementation across government, coordinate actions, resolve barriers, align budgets and report progress. It will work with the National Commission and OPDs.
5. **Strengthening data collection systems** by supporting the development of a centralized disability database, improved census accuracy and training for government staff in disability data management.
6. **Enhancing CRPD compliant budgeting and financial tracking** by supporting the creation of tools for disability-inclusive budgeting and by increasing and monitoring allocations for CRPD-aligned programmes.
7. **Improving physical and digital accessibility** by supporting accessibility audits and promoting universal design of public systems and structures as well as training of professionals in CRPD-compliant infrastructure and digital standards.
8. **Supporting disability awareness raising efforts** by integrating disability rights into school curricula and public messaging. Training educators, health workers and employers on inclusive practices.
9. **Supporting efforts to promote an enabling environment**, especially communication access (e.g., sign language services) and inclusive education, transportation, and employment support.
10. **Enhancing food and nutrition security** by supporting efforts to ensure inclusive access to food programmes and markets and linking food security to agricultural employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
11. **Explicitly include persons with disabilities across all areas of the 2027–2031 UN Cooperation Framework** and in climate resilience, development and disaster risk management – emphasizing disability inclusive economic recovery and capacity-building.

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