UNITED NATIONS
BARBADOS

Global Disability Fund

Situational Analysis on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Barbados

Country Full Report

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List of Acronyms

AAB – Autism Association of Barbados

BFPA – Barbados Family Planning Association

BARNOD – Barbados National Organization of the Disabled

BSS – Barbados Statistical Service

BVPC – Barbados Vulnerable Persons Committee

CDB – Caribbean Development Bank

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

FAB – Fully Accessible Barbados Programme

GDF – Global Disability Fund (formerly UNPRPD)

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IDB – Inter-American Development Bank

ILO – International Labour Organisation

METVT – Ministry of Education Technological and Vocational Training

MPEA – Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs

NACPWD – National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities

NAB – National Assistance Board

NAP – National Assistance Programme

NDU – National Disabilities Unit

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OPD – Organization of Persons with Disabilities

PAHO – Pan-American Health Organization

RCO – Resident Coordinator's Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

UNPRPD – United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

UNST – United Nations Sub-Regional Team for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

WD – Welfare Department

Disclaimer:

The data and analyses presented in the report are based on the situational analysis conducted at country level and were drafted by participating UN agencies, with the support of international and national consultants. The United Nations Global Disability Fund (GDF) has not verified the findings for accuracy. This report does not necessarily reflect the position of the GDF.

1. Executive Summary

The situational analysis of persons with disabilities in Barbados examines the current landscape of disability inclusion in the country highlighting the key gaps in inclusion, accessibility and legal frameworks. Conducted as part of the **United Nations Global Disability Fund (GDF)** (formerly UNPRPD) initiative, this analysis aims to inform future programmatic actions to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities across all sectors of Barbadian society.

While significant progress has been made since the ratification of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** in 2013, with the introduction of legislation such as the **Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act** and the development of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act** 2025, several challenges remain to achieve full compliance with international disability standards. The analysis shows that, despite a growing awareness of the need for inclusion, many persons with disabilities in Barbados face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in society.

Employment remains a critical area of concern. Despite existing laws that promote the employment of persons with disabilities, the unemployment rate among this group remains alarmingly high, estimated at over 90%. Although there are policies in place aimed at promoting employment for persons with disabilities, these have not been sufficiently enforced or supported by adequate training and workplace accommodations. Many employers are either unaware of or resistant to inclusive hiring practices, and discriminatory attitudes prevail in the workplace. This situation is compounded by societal stigma and a lack of understanding of the capabilities of persons with disabilities, which often results in discrimination in both hiring practices and within the workplace itself.

In the field of education, efforts have been made to introduce inclusive education measures to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. However, the report reveals that most students with disabilities are not educated in mainstream environments and many students with disabilities are still marginalized due to a lack of adequate support services, including specialized teachers and assistive technologies. Schools across the country are unevenly prepared to accommodate students with diverse needs. This inconsistency highlights the broader issue of resource allocation and the inability to fully integrate CRPD principles into educational planning and infrastructure development.

Healthcare access is another significant challenge identified in the analysis. Many healthcare facilities remain physically inaccessible, and healthcare providers often lack the necessary training to adequately support persons with disabilities. Communication barriers for persons with sensory disabilities, such as those who are deaf or visually impaired, further complicate access to care. This situation underscores the broader issue of insufficient enforcement of CRPD standards, particularly around the provision of “reasonable accommodation” in public services.

Housing and transportation present additional challenges for persons with disabilities in Barbados. Although there have been some positive developments, such as the introduction of accessible public buses, many public spaces and buildings remain inaccessible to persons with disabilities, including housing options. The lack of enforcement of building codes and standards for accessibility has led to inconsistent implementation, meaning that persons with disabilities often face difficulties in finding adequate and accessible housing.

The analysis also highlights a critical gap in data collection on disability, which hampers the ability of policymakers to design effective, evidence-based interventions. Without

comprehensive data on the number of persons with disabilities and their specific needs, it is difficult to formulate targeted policies and allocate resources appropriately. The absence of reliable data is a major obstacle to meeting the CRPD's requirement for informed, inclusive policymaking, and represents a missed opportunity for progress.

In terms of public awareness and societal attitudes, the report makes clear that pervasive stigma and discrimination are ongoing barriers to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. Addressing these attitudes will require sustained public education campaigns and efforts to promote the rights and capabilities of persons with disabilities.

The analysis advances several recommendations for action by the United Nations Sub-Regional Team for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean (UNST), aimed at addressing these gaps and advancing disability inclusion. Key recommendations include supporting the Government of Barbados in implementing the new disabilities policy and recently passed disability legislation,[1] and conducting a comprehensive review of national legislation and policies to ensure alignment with the CRPD and to fill existing gaps in implementation. The UNST can provide technical assistance and capacity-building to help establish governance structures, such as the designation of disability focal points in government ministries, and to improve the collection of comprehensive, up-to-date disability data.

Other key recommendations include promoting disability sensitivity training and public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote inclusion across sectors such as healthcare, education and employment. Furthermore, the UNST should ensure the mainstreaming of disability inclusion in the upcoming **2027-2031 UN Cooperation Framework** for the Caribbean region, developing programmes to create an enabling and empowering environment for persons with disabilities. This can be achieved through supporting the government in implementing CRPD-compliant budgeting practices, improving accessibility in the digital and physical environment, and enhancing food and nutrition security to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities.

2. Background

According to 2010 census data, approximately 5.3% of Barbados' population comprises persons with disabilities, although global estimates suggest the figure could be between 10% and 15%. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) projected in 2017 that the prevalence of persons with disabilities in Barbados will increase over the next thirty years.[2]

Barbados ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) in 2013, making a commitment to uphold and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, ensuring their full and equal participation in society, and taking measures to eliminate discrimination and improve accessibility across all sectors. As a state party to the CRPD and other international human rights treaties, Barbados is obligated to uphold the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities as enshrined in these instruments. This includes an obligation to implement appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to fulfill the rights recognized in the CRPD.

[1] The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2025 was in progress at the commencement of this Situational Analysis, but subsequently passed by the House of Assembly on January 7, 2025, and by the Senate on January 15, 2025. As of April 7, 2025, the Act is awaiting proclamation to come into full effect.
[2] ECLAC – Studies and Perspectives Series – The Caribbean – No. 64 Disability, human rights and public policy. P.23

Since ratification, Barbados has either drafted or introduced legislation and policy aimed at promoting the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities across various sectors, including employment, education and public services, such as expanding social services and "special education" services for persons with disabilities. However, significant barriers remain that hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. Feedback from focus group participants and multiple key stakeholders makes clear that persons with disabilities in Barbados still do not have full and equal access to education, employment and healthcare services. Accessibility in multiple areas, particularly accessible transportation, remains a hindrance to persons with disabilities' ability to attend school, maintain employment, go to medical appointments, or otherwise participate in daily life.

Following ratification of the CRPD, Barbados has worked to make legislative and policy advancements. **The Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act** of 2020 is one of the only pieces of legislation that incorporates provisions that speak specifically to the rights of persons with disabilities. This Act not only prohibits discrimination based on disability but also on other grounds such medical condition, sex, sexual orientation and social status. The legislation speaks not only to discrimination but requires employers, at the request of the employee, to make "reasonable adjustments" for employees as may be required due to a disability. This is a pivotal piece of legislation aimed at reducing the high unemployment rate among persons with disabilities and promoting their inclusion in the mainstream economy.

The development of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2025** and the **2023-2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities** show substantial progress toward bringing Barbados into better alignment with the provisions of the CRPD. The new legislation and policy outline comprehensive measures to improve accessibility, healthcare, education and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. They emphasize the need for inclusive infrastructure, early detection and intervention programmes for children with disabilities, and the application of technology to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities.

The advancement of disability rights in Barbados must also be attributed to the work of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) such as **The Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD)**, established in 1976, and the organizations that fall under its umbrella, which have been instrumental in pushing for these changes. These organizations have collaborated with government to be at the forefront of delivering services to the persons with disabilities community in Barbados years before the ratification of the CRPD and continue to be invaluable partners to the government in all aspects of support and engagement with persons with disabilities.

3. Purpose of the Situational Analysis

The **United Nations Global Disability Fund (GDF)** is a unique collaboration that unites UN entities, governments, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and broader civil society to advance the implementation of the CRPD and disability-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at national level.

This Situational Analysis Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Barbados was developed as part of GDF's inception phase in Barbados, which is managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and coordinated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean (RCO). The situational analysis (SitAn) report aims to inform the design of future GDF programmes in the country or subregion, serving as a baseline for these initiatives. Specifically, the analysis is designed to inform the UN in Barbados of gaps in

disability inclusion within ongoing national processes and programmes, and to recommend where further in-depth responses are needed. It builds a base of mutual understanding and working relationships between UN entities, the government, OPDs and other civil society organizations, as well as the private sector and academia, forming a basis for future co-designed joint programmes. The analysis also aims to strengthen the capacity of these stakeholders to more effectively address the rights of persons with disabilities as outlined in the CRPD. It also serves as an advocacy tool for OPDs and other national and international civil society partners.

Moreover, the report seeks to provide pertinent information for policy planning and implementation, including sectoral policies, SDG national plans and governance mechanisms to ensure that disability inclusion is integrated into all aspects of national development.

Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of persons with disabilities during humanitarian crises and disasters, this situational analysis examines how disaster preparedness, response and recovery processes in Barbados address the specific needs of persons with disabilities. This allows for the identification of gaps and opportunities for more inclusive disaster risk management and response strategies.

4. Methodology

Desk Review/Literature Review: A comprehensive literature review was conducted, utilizing both formal and informal data and secondary sources. This included Barbados' 2023 Voluntary National Review and documents related to Barbados' appearances before the CEDAW and the CRC Committees. Additionally, academic literature and relevant legal and policy documents were reviewed, including national legislation, sectoral policies and strategic plans in areas such as health, education and employment, ensuring that the analysis captured how these frameworks align with the CRPD and broader international standards. Newspaper articles and internet searches for grey literature and programme evidence were also analyzed.

Feedback from Workshops/Consultations:

- On 10 November 2023, the UN Resident Coordinator Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),and the Caribbean Regional Spotlight Initiative (UN Women, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), UNFPA and UNICEF) convened a one-day consultation "**Breaking barriers: inclusion, participation, and freedom from violence for persons with disabilities**." The consultation provided a platform for persons with disabilities across the Eastern Caribbean region to share valuable feedback on barriers that hinder persons with disabilities in the region from full enjoyment of their rights.
- On 24-26 April and 6-7 May 2024, the UN Resident Coordinator Office for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean and UNDP, in coordination with GDF, convened the **GDF [UNPRPD] Joint Programme Induction Training Programme Cross Cutting Approaches and Pre-conditions for Disability Inclusive Development**. The workshop consisted of participants from the Barbados government, organizations of persons with disabilities, humanitarian actors, the private sector and representatives from UN agencies. The discussions from the Induction workshop sessions also provided valuable feedback on the situation of persons with disabilities in Barbados.

Focus Group Discussions: A focus group of ten participants from BCD and BARNOD was convened in July 2024. The group was comprised of eight women and two men, all of whom are

persons with disabilities including persons with visual, hearing, mobility and intellectual impairments. Sign language interpretation was provided for the focus group discussion.

Key Informant Interviews: Multiple bilateral interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including representatives from OPDs, government officials, public service providers and UN staff from various entities. These interviews provided detailed insights and information into the challenges and opportunities related to disability inclusion in Barbados.[3]

Contextual Analysis: This involved examining the unique challenges and opportunities within Barbadian society, focusing on barriers in policies, systems, structures and practices that hinder CRPD implementation. The analysis identified opportunities to influence ongoing national processes or programmes, pinpointed urgent and catalytic reform measures and assessed the capacity needs of key stakeholders. This was done to inform the design of programme interventions aimed at facilitating CRPD implementation in collaboration with relevant partners.

Methodological limitations: Some key interviews and materials could not be secured for the purposes of the situational analysis. Interviews could not be secured with the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Third Sector, the Ministry of Transport, Works and Water Resources, the National Assistance Board and the National Emergency Management System. Further, certain key documents such as current strategic plans regarding education, employment and climate change were not made available and could not be reviewed for the purposes of the situational analysis.

Another critical methodological challenge was the lack of available data on the monitoring, evaluation and enforcement of legislation and policies concerning persons with disabilities in Barbados. This absence of reliable data significantly limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of existing programmes or to track compliance with laws aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Barbados Council for the Disabled has highlighted the critical gap in statistics regarding the number of persons with disabilities, the types of impairments, and their access to essential services such as employment, education, health, and housing. This scarcity of data poses a major barrier to evaluating the true impact of disability-related policies.[4]

Verification: The SitAn was validated at a meeting with the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs on 22 January 2025. The Ministry subsequently submitted written feedback which was reflected in the final version of the report.

5. Situational Analysis Findings

5.1. Stakeholder and Coordination Analysis

There are multiple government and civil society stakeholders involved in advancing disability rights in Barbados. These stakeholders include various ministries and agencies, non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups dedicated to improving the lives of persons with disabilities. However, there is currently no national coordinating body responsible for guiding or setting the agenda for disability inclusion across all sectors.

Government Stakeholders

[3] See Annex 1 for list of key informant interviews.
[4] "Data on Disabilities Crippling Advancements." *Barbados Council for the Disabled*, 4 July 2017, https://barbadosdisabled.org.bb/data-on-disabilities-crippling-advancements-2/. Accessed 08 Oct. 2024.

The mandate of the **Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA)** is the overall socioeconomic development of Barbados and the empowerment of all members of society by utilizing all available human financial and technical resources. Given its broad social care mandate, multiple social service agencies fall under the MPEA including **the National Assistance Board, the Child Care Board, the Welfare Department and the National Disabilities Unit**. The MPEA plays a pivotal role in coordinating social protection and empowerment initiatives for persons with disabilities in Barbados. This Ministry administers programmes offering financial assistance, social services and support aimed at enhancing the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

In December 2023, the MPEA appointed two **National Disabilities Advocates** with a mandate that includes advising the Barbados government on the implementation of the proposed new disabilities legislation and policy. These advocates will work across various government departments to achieve the targets outlined in the national policy.

Central to the MPEA's efforts is the **National Disabilities Unit (NDU)**, which serves as the primary agency responsible for coordinating disability policies and programmes. The NDU collaborates with other government agencies, civil society organizations and international partners to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities, playing a crucial role in policy development, implementation, and monitoring, as well as providing direct services related to education, employment and social inclusion. In 2020, the NDU moved to a larger, more accessible office that also includes a **recreational and rehabilitative facility** as of 2021.

The **Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT)** plays a crucial role in ensuring that educational institutions are accessible and inclusive. As part of its broader responsibilities, the ministry develops and implements policies that support the education of students with disabilities. This includes integrating inclusive education practices within the mainstream education system and providing resources and training for teachers to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities. The Ministry's education transformation efforts have the potential to substantially enhance educational opportunities for persons with disabilities in Barbados.

Similarly, the **Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Third Sector (Ministry of Labour)** focuses on various aspects of employment and social protection, with disability inclusion being a key part of their mandate. The Ministry develops policies and programmes aimed at increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and ensuring that workplaces are accessible.

The **Department of Emergency Management (DEM)** coordinates national efforts to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters. This includes developing and implementing disaster response plans, conducting public education and awareness campaigns, and working with various governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure an effective and efficient emergency management system. The DEM ensures that all segments of the population, including vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, are considered in disaster planning and response efforts.

The **Barbados Vulnerable Persons Committee (BVPC)** is also a part of Barbados's disaster management framework as it works with the DEM to ensure that its emergency response process and shelter system are adequately prepared to address the needs of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups within the country. Comprising representatives from various government agencies, civil society organizations and international partners, the Committee also coordinates

efforts to support vulnerable populations, ensuring their needs are integrated into national development plans and policies.

While some ministries and agencies, such as the METVT, employ individuals with extensive expertise in disability rights and deep institutional knowledge regarding their Ministry's work in disability inclusion, there are no official disability focal points designated for coordination within these entities. The absence of official focal points in each ministry creates a lack of standardized, coordinated efforts across government bodies which results in fragmented data or data gaps and a lack of accountability for disability inclusion. Additionally, although government officials demonstrate an openness and willingness to improve measures for disability inclusion, there remains a lack of awareness about the CRPD and its rights-based approach to disability. This gap in understanding further impedes the effective implementation of comprehensive disability inclusion policies and practices across all sectors.

The **CRPD Implementation Monitoring Committee** has been instrumental in overseeing the drafting of Barbados' Initial Report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The proposed **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**, under the new disabilities legislation and policy, is envisioned as a multi-stakeholder body that includes representatives from government agencies, civil society organizations and OPDs. The commission will be tasked with monitoring and advocating for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Barbados, playing a key role in policy development and public awareness campaigns. This commission has the potential to significantly enhance the coordination of disability inclusion at the national level, providing a centralized body to streamline efforts across various sectors.

Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

Feedback from persons with disabilities and OPDs during the GDF induction workshop indicates significantly higher awareness and understanding of disability inclusion. These organizations are highly active and serve as an important segment of the disability community in Barbados, playing a critical role in advocacy and support. Some OPDs, such as **the Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD)**, receive a subvention from the government to deliver services to persons with disabilities in the country. Nevertheless, OPDs are substantially under-resourced, with many of the most active OPD members working on a voluntary basis. This lack of resources limits their capacity to sustain and expand their efforts, despite their dedication and essential contributions to advancing disability rights and inclusion.

The **Barbados Council for the Disabled**[5] is a leading advocacy and umbrella organization for persons with disabilities (in Barbados, representing a coalition of disability organizations. The BCD promotes the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities through policy advocacy, public education, and capacity-building activities. It provides support services to its member organizations and coordinates national campaigns to raise awareness about disability issues. One of its recent achievements is the establishment of the Fully Accessible Barbados (FAB) Programme, which enhances services for persons with disabilities through accessible transportation and inclusive education initiatives.

The **Barbados National Organization of the Disabled (BARNOD)** is a cross-disability organisation with a strong membership of persons with disabilities in Barbados. The organisation

[5] Please note that BCD receives a subvention from the Barbados National Disabilities Unit to deliver certain key services (e.g. transportation, skills training).

provides a platform for its members to collaborate and share resources, engaging in advocacy, research and community outreach to promote disability inclusion and improve the lives of persons of disabilities. BARNOD representatives sit on multiple government management committees.

The **Autism Association of Barbados (AAB)** was formed in March 2004 by several concerned individuals. Their vision was to create a community where individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families receive respect, services and support based on individual differences, needs and preferences. The organization works towards increasing awareness and understanding of autism, while providing resources and support for affected families.

The **Barbados Association for Children with Intellectual Challenges** is a charitable organization dedicated to empowering children and young adults with mental challenges in Barbados. They offer a Pre-Academic Programme for young children, a Social Skills Programme for daily living tasks and an Adult Training Programme for those aged 18-35, with courses in agriculture, food preparation, sewing and woodworking. **The Challenor School**, run by the association, accommodates 45 children aged 5-18, providing a supportive environment for various challenges, including ADD, fragile X syndrome, cerebral palsy, down syndrome and autism.

The **National United Society of the Blind (NUSB)** aims to provide comprehensive services for the blind and visually impaired. It focuses on education, vocational training, public awareness and outreach programmes to enhance personal development and inclusion. NUSB also promotes sports for the visually impaired through its affiliation with the International Blind Sports Association, contributing to their overall well-being and integration into society.

The **Barbados Horizon Deaf Charity (BHDC)** is dedicated to enhancing accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in Barbados. Its mandate includes providing accessible communication, education and advocacy, ensuring that programmes, services and opportunities are fully accessible to this community. BHDC works with both private and public entities to promote inclusivity and support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons.

Additionally, new and emerging organizations, such as the **Barbados Organization for Down Syndrome**, are making significant strides in advocating for and supporting individuals with specific disabilities.

National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities

The **National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities (NACPWD)** was commissioned in 2022 with the mandate to draft comprehensive legislation and policy intended to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. Upon completion of the draft legislation and policy, the committee was decommissioned in 2023; but it played a crucial role in advancing dialogue regarding disability rights in Barbados. The committee consisted entirely of members who either had disabilities or were directly connected to someone with a disability.

In addition to its primary mandate of developing disabilities policy and legislation, the committee also provided guidance on reducing discrimination, social exclusion and systematic marginalization of persons with disabilities, while promoting inclusivity in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The committee focused on reviewing existing policies and proposing new strategies to improve accessibility, social protection and the overall quality of life for persons with disabilities.

To ensure a comprehensive approach to policy development, the NACPWD conducted over 60 consultations with various stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, advocacy groups and community organizations. These consultations were integral to gathering diverse perspectives and identifying the key issues affecting persons with disabilities. The committee engaged in numerous meetings, forums and workshops across the country, ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities were heard and their needs accurately represented in the policy recommendations. The extensive public consultations significantly elevated the discourse on disabilities in Barbados, regularly bringing disability issues into the public sphere, fostering greater awareness and dialogue across the country.

The extensive consultative process resulted in the 2023 Comprehensive Report of the National Advisory Committee to Guide the Establishment of a Commission for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities,[6] providing extensive information on the challenges persons with disabilities experience in various sectors and included comprehensive recommendations on how to address those gaps and challenges. The credibility and legitimacy of the NACPWD's situational analysis and recommendations are underscored by the thorough consultation process undertaken by the committee that provided a strong foundation for its findings.

International Stakeholders

The **United Nations Sub-Regional Team in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean (UNST)** works on a broad range of development priorities, including economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Within this broad mandate, the UNST also focuses on promoting disability inclusion through various initiatives aligned with the **UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)**. Their efforts aim to improve accessibility, enhance data collection and increase public awareness about disability rights. The UNST collaborates with governments to develop and implement inclusive public policies, systematically training key workers in health and social protection systems to better address the needs of persons with disabilities. Additionally, the team provides technical and financial support for capacity-building initiatives to integrate disability rights into national development plans, ensuring that disability inclusion is effectively addressed alongside other development goals.

The **Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)** has funded disability assessment studies and projects intended improve infrastructure accessibility and promote inclusive economic development across the Caribbean, including Barbados.

The **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)** significantly contributes to the education sector by supporting projects aimed at transforming education to be more inclusive, with a focus on enhancing instructional quality, infrastructure and data on students with disabilities. The IDB, in collaboration with the METVT, is currently implementing the project "**Skills for the Future II: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Quality Education**." The US$20 million project is intended to support the METVT in its transformation efforts towards a more digital resilient and inclusive education system.

Summary of Key Findings

- Lack of Coordinated Efforts: Despite various government ministries and civil society organizations being involved in advancing disability rights, the absence of a national

[6] Comprehensive Report of the National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities (NACPWD), June 2023. Presented & Submitted by Chairman The Hon. Edmund Hinkson M.P., Researched & Prepared by Ms. Laura Burnett for The NACPWD under the auspices of the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs.

coordinating body and designated disability focal points within each ministry results in fragmented efforts, inconsistent policy implementation and an overall lack of monitoring and evaluation of related interventions. This leads to gaps in service delivery and accountability. It is recommended that now the National Policy and Legislation are completed, the National Advisory Committee on PWDs be mandated to orchestrate a more coordinated effort to address disability.

- Resource Constraints: Organizations of Persons with Disabilities are highly active but substantially under-resourced. This limits their capacity to sustain and expand their advocacy and support efforts, despite their significant contributions.
- Potential for Improved Coordination: The proposed National Commission for Persons with Disabilities under the new disabilities legislation has the potential to significantly enhance coordination and streamline efforts across various sectors by including representatives from government agencies, civil society organizations and OPDs.
- International Support: International stakeholders, including the UNST and IDB, provide essential support for disability inclusion through technical assistance, funding and capacity-building initiatives.

5.2. Equality and Non-discrimination

In addition to the CRPD, Barbados has also ratified other international human rights conventions that address disability rights. These include the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, which protects the rights of women with disabilities; the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**, which ensures access to education, health and employment without discrimination, including on grounds of disabilities; the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, which safeguards the rights of children with disabilities; and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which guarantees civil and political rights to all citizens, including those with disabilities.[7] Although Barbados has not yet submitted its initial report to the CRPD Committee, it has received concluding observations from other treaty body committees, which it is obligated to implement.

The **CRC Committee's 2017 concluding observations** emphasize the need for Barbados to fully implement anti-discrimination laws, particularly benefiting children with disabilities. The committee urged adopting a human rights-based approach to disability, developing a comprehensive inclusion strategy and effectively implementing policies related to persons with disabilities.[8] The concluding observations also included prioritizing inclusive education over specialized institutions, improving access to healthcare, training specialized teachers and launching public education campaigns to combat stigmatization.[9] Similarly, the **CEDAW Committee's 2017 observations** highlight concerns about the lack of public policies protecting

[7] Barbados has ratified/acceded to the following international human rights treaty ratifications:
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; acceded 8 Nov 1972
- International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights; acceded 5 Jan 1973
- International Covenant of Economic, Social, Cultural Rights; acceded 5 Jan 1973
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. ratified 19 Oct 1980
- Convention on the Rights of the Child; ratified 9 Oct 1990
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; ratified 27 Feb 2013

[8] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Initial Report of Barbados*, UN Doc. CRPD/C/BRB/1, 2018, para. 46.
[9] Ibid.

the rights of women and girls with disabilities, including inclusive education, employment, healthcare, housing and political participation. To address these issues, the committee recommends comprehensive policies and programmes to ensure equal access to services, promote autonomy, and safeguard the participation of women and girls with disabilities in community and political life.[10]

Further, in each cycle **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**, Barbados received several recommendations aimed at enhancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. During Barbados' most recent 4th cycle UPR, held on January 30, 2023, the country received several recommendations to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.[11] Additionally, other recommendations included the need for Barbados to strengthen its efforts toward providing inclusive education, making healthcare services more accessible and promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by implementing support services and reasonable accommodations in the workplace.[12]

Recommendations from previous UPR cycles include continuing legislative and public policy efforts to ensure persons with disabilities' rights, particularly in employment, education and state services. There were recommendations for Barbados to conduct a comprehensive census to identify the types and causes of disabilities and assess the needs for medical care, rehabilitation, education, housing and technical aids. It is recommended that the Social Empowerment Agency (SEA) explore the feasibility of undertaking a dedicated disability census within its mandate, recognising that IDP support may be required here. Additionally, Barbados was advised to explore applications of technology to better integrate persons with disabilities into society and ensure that children with disabilities have access to specialized healthcare, including early detection and intervention programmes. Barbados was also urged to combat discrimination against children with disabilities by fully implementing existing anti-discrimination laws and intensifying awareness campaigns to combat negative social attitudes.

The concluding observations from treaty body committees and the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review serve as essential guidance for states to address gaps and challenges in their disability rights frameworks and should be persuasive in developing disability policies in Barbados. They emphasize adopting a human rights-based approach, ensuring inclusive and equitable access to services, and involving persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in policy-making processes. All three human rights mechanisms stress the importance of public education campaigns to combat stigma, the development of specialized training service providers, and the involvement of persons with disabilities and OPDs in policy-making processes to ensure that their needs are adequately addressed.

Since ratifying the CRPD in 2013, Barbados has made substantial progress in strengthening its legal frameworks and policies to promote equality and combat discrimination against persons with disabilities. This progress is highlighted by the September 2023 approval of a new national disability policy by the Cabinet and the development of comprehensive disabilities legislation currently under review by government stakeholders. Both instruments represent a substantial step forward in meeting international human rights standards regarding disability rights and were drafted to align with the CRPD.

[10] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth to Eighth Periodic Reports of Barbados*, CEDAW/C/BRB/CO/5-8, para. 42.
[11] Human Rights Council, *Universal Periodic Review, 4th Cycle, Barbados*, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/13, 2023.
[12] Ibid.

Barbados' recent approval of a new disability policy and the recently passed disability legislation is a significant move to strengthen the legislative framework specifically addressing the rights and protections of persons with disabilities Similarly, the **Immigration Act** was revised by the **Immigration (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 2018-56** to remove discriminatory language against persons with disabilities. Nonetheless, other policies and legislation remain misaligned with the CRPD, and still other legislation is ambiguous regarding the rights clearly delineated in the convention.

The **Barbados Constitution**, while not explicitly mentioning persons with disabilities in its original text, provides a foundation for protecting the rights and ensuring the inclusion of all individuals through its broader principles of equality and non-discrimination. The Constitution affirms that all individuals are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law without any discrimination. These principles theoretically ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded the same legal protections and rights as other citizens.

Following **Barbados' transition to a parliamentary republic in November 2021, a Constitutional Reform Commission** was appointed to manage the process of developing a new constitution that, according to Prime Minister Mia Mottley, "speaks to the role of governance and that sets out with clarity the roles, rights and responsibilities of each and every Bajan."[13] Consultations regarding the new constitution are ongoing, with active engagement from persons with disabilities. Among the commission's appointees is former Senator Kerry-Ann Ifill, former president of BCD.

The **Charter of Barbados**, adopted during the country's transition, may provide insight into the direction of the new constitution. Prime Minister Mia Mottley emphasized its importance, stating that the Charter, although non-binding, declares in Article 1 that "all Barbadians are born free and are equal in human dignity and rights regardless of age, race, ethnicity, faith, class, cultural and educational background, ability, sex, gender or sexual orientation."

Although the principles expressed in the current **Barbados Constitution and Charter** are consistent with the promotion and protection of human rights for persons with disabilities, Barbados lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and there are only a few pieces of legislation that specifically address the needs of persons with disabilities. The passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2025) represents notable legislative progress which builds on previous achievements that strengthened disability legislation in the areas of employment, education and physical accessibility.

Further, there is a lack of legal clarity regarding several issues addressed by the CRPD. Key areas such as anti-discrimination protections, accessibility standards and specific rights and services for persons with disabilities remain inadequately defined. This legislative gap impacts various areas, including accessible communication, education, healthcare and employment, posing significant challenges to achieving full inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in Barbados. In the absence of comprehensive disability legislation, disability issues are only minimally addressed in existing laws, which persons with disabilities report are not well enforced.

Overview of Barbados' Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2025) and 2023-2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities

[13] Barbados Today. *"People's Say: A Look at Disability Issues in Barbados." Barbados Today*, July 27, 2021. https://barbadostoday.bb/2021/07/27/peoples-say/.

The legislative and policy framework for persons with disabilities in Barbados was highly fragmented, ambiguous in some areas and misaligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in others. The new policy adopted in September 2023 and the newly passed legislation aim to rectify these inconsistencies by replacing outdated and conflicting laws and establishing accountability and enforcement mechanisms.

The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2025**[14] aims to establish comprehensive rights for persons with disabilities, ensuring their full and equal enjoyment of these rights. Central to this bill is the creation of a **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**. This Commission will be responsible for implementing the bill, providing policy advice, promoting research and monitoring compliance. The Commission will consist of key officials including a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Chief Executive Officer and a Secretariat, funded by Parliament and open to receiving donations.

To address disputes and complaints related to disability rights, the Act proposes the establishment of a **Disability Rights Tribunal**. Currently, there is no national mechanism, other than the **Employment Rights Tribunal**, with the authority to hear complaints of human rights violations against persons with disabilities. The proposed Disability Rights Tribunal will have the authority to hear complaints, summon witnesses and enforce its decisions, ensuring the protection and enforcement of disability rights.

The Act outlines the rights of persons with disabilities across various areas. It mandates that persons with disabilities are protected from discrimination in education, employment, healthcare and social protection. The draft legislation also outlines multiple entitlements with respect to social protection. The legislation ensures free primary and secondary education with necessary accommodation and mandates equal employment opportunities and reasonable accommodation. The bill also proposes implementing temporary special measures to enhance the hiring of persons with disabilities within the government sector.

Additionally, it stipulates that public buildings, facilities and transportation services must be accessible, with specific provisions for accessible parking and restroom facilities. The Bill also protects the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life, ensuring accessible polling places and necessary accommodations. Further provisions in the bill ensure that media and communication services are accessible, financial incentives and support are available to persons with disabilities, and that they have access to justice and legal services.

The Act also includes penalties for non-compliance and transitional arrangements to amend existing laws to align with the rights of persons with disabilities.

The 2023-2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities,[15] approved by Cabinet on 21 September 2023**,** is based on core values of acceptance of human diversity, accessibility, equality, empowerment, participation, and respect for dignity. The policy outlines several priority areas, each with specific goals and strategies.

The policy aims to enhance accessibility by improving access to the physical environment, housing, transportation, information and communication. In terms of social protection, it seeks to ensure an adequate standard of living for persons with disabilities. National campaigns are

[14] This SitAn has been updated post-draft, to acknowledged that the MPEA completed the policy and advanced the legislative process, culminating in the eventual passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2025.
[15] Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs. *The 2023-2030 National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities in Barbados.* Revised September 2023. Prepared by Dwayne Devonish, Ph.D., The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

planned to foster positive societal attitudes and reduce discrimination, emphasizing awareness building.

Inclusive education is a priority, with the policy offering quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for persons with disabilities. Employment and economic participation are also highlighted, with strategies to create inclusive work opportunities and promote self-employment. Healthcare and rehabilitation services are tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, ensuring they receive accessible and high-quality care.

Legal recognition and access to justice are clearly outlined, with provisions to ensure persons with disabilities can fully participate in society, including in political, public, cultural, recreational and sports activities. The policy also includes measures to protect persons with disabilities during disasters and emergencies, ensuring their inclusion in disaster planning and response.

Additionally, the policy integrates the needs of persons with disabilities into national data management systems and ensures the full enjoyment of rights for women and children with disabilities. The policy includes an implementation strategy and monitoring and evaluation framework.

Although the new policy must still be approved by Parliament before it becomes fully operational, government stakeholders, such as the **National Disabilities Advocates** and **the Ministry of Education, Technology and Vocational Training (METVT)**, indicate that certain elements of the policy are already being implemented. The **Ministry of Finance** indicates that implementation of the new policy has not been budgeted for. The Ministry indicates that there will likely be changes and adjustments to budget allocations to implement the disabilities policy on an as needed basis.

Summary of Key Findings

- Progress in Legal Frameworks and Policies: Since ratifying the CRPD in 2013, Barbados has made significant progress in enhancing legal frameworks and policies for disability inclusion. The new national disability policy and recently enacted comprehensive disabilities legislation reflect substantial advancements, aligning with CRPD standards. However, implementation and enforcement challenges persist.
- Gaps in Legislation and Enforcement: Despite progress, mainstream legislation is not aligned with the CRPD and lacks comprehensive focus on disability rights. In addition, enforcement mechanisms are weak. The absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws hampers the realization of full disability rights, with existing laws inadequately addressing critical areas like communication, education and healthcare.
- Implementation and Monitoring Challenges: The proposed National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Disability Rights Tribunal, if the bill is adopted without changes and became law, will aim to enhance oversight but require adequate funding and authority. The lack of robust enforcement and accountability mechanisms limits the practical impact of policies and legislation, highlighting the need for stronger institutional frameworks.

5.3. Accessibility

5.3.1 Physical accessibility

In Barbados, physical accessibility for persons with disabilities is addressed through a few legislative and regulatory measures. Although the **Building Standards Act, 2018**, does not

specifically reference persons with disabilities or outline accessibility standards, the legislation is intended to promote the construction of accessible buildings, giving the Director of the Building Standards Authority the power to set regulations with Ministerial approval. The **National Disability Advocates** clarified that while there are accessibility standards applicable to new building construction in Barbados, these standards are not law.[16] This issue was raised during the one of the NACPWD townhall meetings on the disabilities policy and legislative proposals. The **Director of the Building Standards Authority** indicated that there many provisions in the building code that address the needs of persons with disabilities, but it is unclear if these provisions are legally enforceable. The town hall discussion also highlighted the ongoing uncertainty within the **Department of Planning and Development** regarding the oversight and enforcement capabilities for buildings that fail to accommodate persons with disabilities.[17] **The Road Traffic (Amendment) Act, 2017** mandates clearly marked and conveniently located parking spaces for persons with disabilities, penalizing unauthorized use. However, OPDs and persons with disabilities report that, although mandated parking for persons with disabilities is clearly indicated in private and public spaces across the country, penalties for unauthorized use are rarely enforced.[18]

The **Barbados Physical Development Plan Amendment (2023)** aims to enhance accessibility and mobility for persons with disabilities. It mandates one disabled parking space per 25 regular spaces, up to a maximum of 10. The plan requires new social service and community facilities to be accessible to both persons with disabilities and the elderly, incorporating wheelchair-accessible sidewalks and designated crossings. It promotes inclusive housing developments and public spaces, ensuring significant renovations meet accessibility standards. Additionally, the plan emphasizes integrating barrier-free design into all public transportation infrastructure to reduce barriers and foster full participation in social and economic activities.

Barbados has taken steps to improve accessibility in its road and walkway infrastructure, particularly in the capital city Bridgetown.[19] However, much of the country's infrastructure is still characterized by narrow roads and limited sidewalks, vestiges of decades-old colonial planning.

All focus group participants and the NACPWD report confirm that persons with disabilities in Barbados face numerous physical accessibility challenges in both public and private spaces.[20] Roads, pathways, parking facilities and buildings often lack universal design principles, making navigation difficult, particularly for those with mobility issues. Public buildings, including government offices, healthcare facilities and educational institutions, frequently lack essential modifications like ramps, elevators and accessible restrooms. Public transportation is also largely inaccessible, with buses and taxis often missing wheelchair lifts or designated spaces. Enforcement of building standards is inconsistent, leading to varying levels of accessibility across facilities and public spaces. Organizations and individuals with disabilities report that there is limited oversight or enforcement of new building projects to ensure compliance with accessibility standards.[21]

[16] Stakeholder report, NDA interview.
[17] Barbados Today. "Hinkson Wants Law to Back Building Code for Disabled." *Barbados Today*, September 17, 2022. https://barbadostoday.bb/2022/09/17/hinkson-wants-law-to-back-building-code-for-disabled/.
[18] Stakeholder report, BCD interview; Focus group discussion
[19] Stakeholder report, NDU interview.
[20] Stakeholder report, Focus group discussion; NACPWD report, p. 9.
[21] Stakeholder report, BCD interview, BARNOD interview, Focus Group discussion.

The proposed new legislation and policy is intended to provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing physical accessibility across Barbados. This policy outlines several key areas of focus to ensure that persons with disabilities can navigate public and private spaces with independence. The policy identifies a primary objective to conduct thorough accessibility audits of all public buildings, transportation systems and recreational facilities. These audits aim to identify existing barriers and prioritize areas for improvement, ensuring that all public infrastructure meets international accessibility standards. The policy calls for the retrofitting of existing buildings and infrastructure to include features such as ramps, widened doorways and accessible restrooms. It emphasizes the need for new construction projects to adhere to universal design principles, catering to the needs of all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities. Additionally, the policy advocates for the creation of accessible pathways and pedestrian crossings, enhancing the mobility of persons with disabilities in both urban and rural areas. However, the Ministry of Finance indicates that there is no specific budgeting to implement the physical accessibility elements of the policy.

5.3.2 Accessible Transport

Focus group participants identified transportation as one of the most critical accessibility issues for all persons with disabilities in Barbados, particularly those with mobility and visual impairments.[22] Although the government and OPDs provide free transportation services, focus group and GDF workshop participants insisted that these options are inadequate. This inadequacy often forces persons with disabilities to rely on expensive private transportation options, limiting their ability to access healthcare, employment, and education. [23]

The **Call-A-Ride paratransit service** offered by the **Barbados Transport Board** is a free service developed to assist individuals with mobility challenges. However, due to increasing demand and limited vehicle availability, multiple stakeholders acknowledge that it is not a consistent transportation option for many persons with disabilities. Users indicate that it is not a 24-hour service and is rarely available for any purpose other than medical appointments.[24] Since 2020, the Transport Board has been systematically adding accessible buses to its fleet. The **wheelchair-accessible electric buses** feature wheelchair ramps, internal bus announcer systems and kneeling technology.[25] As of 2021, there were 47 accessible buses servicing Barbados's passengers. However, focus group participants indicated that these buses can only accommodate one wheelchair at a time. Further, the buses often face incompatibility issues with existing road and sidewalk infrastructure.[26] According to BCD, passengers with disabilities often face uncertainty about the availability of accessible transportation to and from their destinations given that the schedule of accessible buses is not consistent.[27]

[22] According the 2010 National Census, approximately 20% of the population of persons with disabilities have mobility challenges and approximately 16% have a visual impairment. However, a high percentage of persons with disabilities are reflected under the category "not stated" so these percentages may be higher. The 2020/2021 National Census does not provide any information on persons with disabilities due to challenges with administering the census.
[23] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.
[24] Stakeholder report, Wickham interview, Focus Group discussion.
[25] Barbados Today. "EV Buses Are Here." *Barbados Today*, July 9, 2020. http://barbadostoday.bb/2020/07/09/ev-buses-are-here/.
[26] Stakeholder report, BCD interview; NDA interview.
[27] Stakeholder report, BCD interview.

The NDU also provides specialized transportation services for persons with disabilities, managing a fleet of three buses. In March 2024, the Prime Minister committed to acquiring six new buses over next three years for the NDU, which she indicates is intended to expand persons with disabilities access to employment, community resources, medical care and recreational opportunities.[28]

The NACPWD report details many of the significant challenges persons with disabilities face due to inadequate transportation services. The high demand for accessible transportation, coupled with limited resources and the high cost of private specialized transportation, severely impacts their ability to travel. This issue affects access to healthcare, education, social services and commercial services across the island, leading to high levels of absenteeism among students with disabilities. Despite the free transportation services provided by the government and the NDU, limited resources and restricted service hours result in unmet transportation needs for persons with disabilities.[29] Participants in the focus group were animated about inadequacy of the overall bus system in Barbados, including the accessible buses. They highlighted the fact that despite the buses' kneeling technology, persons may still require assistance in boarding due to Barbados' road infrastructure. However, government bus drivers are prohibited from assisting passengers onto the bus due to insurance regulations, which can functionally make the buses inaccessible for many.[30]

The new disability policy in Barbados outlines a comprehensive strategy to enhance transportation accessibility. It includes country-wide accessibility assessments, development of accessibility standards, incorporation of assistive devices, specialized training for service providers and financial and technical support for private transportation providers. The policy mandates efficient, affordable and specialized national public transport services, increases the supply of accessible vehicles, introduces a disability parking permit system, and provides incentives for making private transportation fully accessible. If the strategy outlined in the policy is properly resourced and implemented, the policy would be in alignment with the provisions of the CRPD.

5.3.3 Housing accessibility

Currently there are no regulations mandating accessibility adjustments to provide residences. Accessibility modifications to homes for persons with disabilities have been a key service provided by the NDU. However, there is a growing concern that demand for these services is exceeding the capacity to deliver them. Additionally, there is a limited supply of accessible housing and facilities available to accommodate persons with disabilities across the country.[31]

According to the NDU and NACPWD report, in August 2022 the Government of Barbados has agreed to **allocate 10% of state-funded housing to persons with disabilities**, subject to their registration with the NDU and satisfying certain necessary financial criteria.[32] Future housing constructions, whether by the State or private entities, should be readily accessible and usable by persons with disabilities and built according to the tenets of a revised National Building Code. Additionally, a planned and structured approach is needed to retrofit the homes of financially

[28] Transport Board of Barbados. "Public Transportation and the Disabled Community." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.transportboard.com/public-transportation-and-the-disabled-community/.
[29] NACPWD report, p.19-20
[30] Stakeholder report, Focus group discussion.
[31] NACPWD report, p. 20-21
[32] NACPWD report, p. 20; Stakeholder report, NDU interview.

vulnerable persons with disabilities to facilitate greater accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

BCD has highlighted significant challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing rental housing. Although financially vulnerable individuals and persons with disabilities are eligible for rental assistance under the **National Assistance Programme**, that falls under the portfolio of the **Welfare Department**[33], many landlords are hesitant to rent to those receiving national assistance due to a pattern of late rental payments from the government. Additionally, BCD reports that potential landlords often harbor discriminatory mindsets regarding persons with disabilities who are renters, assuming they will require expensive accommodation renovations or will be problematic tenants.

The new policy and legislation to be adopted aim to enhance access to housing for persons with disabilities by identifying and addressing accessibility barriers in current policies and accommodations. It promotes universal design principles and mandates nationwide compliance with accessibility standards. The policy includes initiatives such as subsidized housing, special allocations, supportive living facilities, home purchase programmes, maintenance services and socio-economic support for housing expenses to provide accessible and affordable housing for persons with disabilities.

The policy aligns with key aspects of CRPD Article 9 (Accessibility) and Article 28 (Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection). The focus on universal design, accessibility audits and supportive living facilities supports the CRPD's goal of enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and fully participate in all aspects of life. However, the success of these initiatives will depend on effective implementation and consistent enforcement to meet the growing demand for accessible housing.

5.3.4 Information and communication

Barbados faces significant challenges in ensuring information and communication accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The **Barbados Information Ecosystem Assessment** reveals significant barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing timely, credible information.[34] The assessment was undertaken to facilitate Barbados' efforts to build resilience. Among the thirty-two (32) persons living with a disability who participated in the survey, the majority reported that they generally rely on the radio (62.5%) and social media (62.5%) to obtain news and information. However, persons with disabilities used more sources of information when accessing information relating to COVID-19 and disasters/emergencies.[35] During these times persons with disabilities use four channels: television, radio, social media and the internet.[36]

For those respondents who indicated that they are unable to ask questions of or raise concerns with local authorities regarding access to information, the main reasons cited were the inaccessibility of authorities. According to one survey respondent, local authorities are not

[33] The mandate of the Welfare Department falls under the National Assistance Act 1969.
[34] The Barbados Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA): How the flow of information impacts disaster preparedness and response, Research Matters, Internews
[35] ibid
[36] ibid

approachable because "able bodied persons tend to not respond the most favourably to disabled persons."[37]

Social media offers numerous benefits, providing up-to-date information, networking opportunities and public engagement. However, according the NACPWD report, traditional media and television often lack accessible formats, such as sign language, Braille, large print or easy-read content, limiting the information available to persons with disabilities.[38] Websites and online platforms are frequently poorly designed with little consideration for accessibility, compelling persons with disabilities to depend on social media, which exposes them to potential misinformation.[39]

When possible, BCD provides sign language interpretation services to facilitate communication for the deaf community. This service is crucial during public events and emergencies, allowing individuals with hearing impairments to receive important information in real time. The BCD also offers braille translation services and accessible formats for various documents, promoting inclusivity across different modes of communication.

The new disabilities policy addresses the importance of accessible public information, aligning with the CRPD's requirements for accessible communication. This includes utilizing sign language interpreters during public broadcasts and emergency announcements, integrating assistive technologies and providing information in accessible formats to ensure that persons with disabilities are well-informed and can respond appropriately during emergencies. The proposed legislation mandates comprehensive accessibility standards across various sectors. It requires all public buildings to meet accessibility standards within two years and mandates new rental properties to be accessible to persons with disabilities. Public premises must provide reasonable access, with penalties for non-compliance. The legislation also emphasizes the right to accessible information and communication technologies, incorporating assistive devices and adaptive technologies. Additionally, it mandates accessible public transportation, institutionalizes a disability parking permit system and requires accessible public vehicles, offering customs duty exemptions for private vehicles that facilitate the transportation of persons with disabilities.

These measures, if the legislation is adopted, will demonstrate alignment with the CRPD, particularly in terms of accessibility and equal participation in society. However, the effectiveness of these measures will depend on robust implementation and enforcement mechanisms to fully meet CRPD standards. Notably, during the NACPWD's consultation with telecommunication companies regarding the draft legislation, there was notable hesitancy from the private sector. The companies indicated that full compliance with the bill would require efficient planning and the allocation of significant resources. They highlighted the financial implications related to procurement, operational costs, timelines, technology and hardware necessary to meet the bill's requirements.[40]

Summary of Key Findings

- Inconsistent Legal Framework and Enforcement: While Barbados has introduced a few laws and regulations addressing physical accessibility, these laws often lack clear

[37] ibid, p.42
[38] NACPWD Report, p. 25
[39] ibid
[40] NACPWD report, p.21; Stakeholder report, Hickson interview

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.

- Inadequate Transportation Services: 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.
- Information and Communication Barriers: 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.
- Limited Awareness and Sensitization: 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.

5.4. Inclusive Services for Persons with Disabilities

5.4.1 Disability Referral & Assessment Systems

In Barbados, disability assessment is a complex process involving collaboration among various government agencies, healthcare providers, and non-governmental organizations. The NDU plays a role in coordinating these assessments, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are identified and their needs evaluated.[41] **The Albert Cecil Graham Development Centre** caters to children and young adults with developmental disabilities. The centre offers a range of services including physiotherapy, medical services, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychological services, neurology services, orthopedics, social work and counseling services.[42] The centre serves as the main facility offering assessment and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, along with counselling and social support for their parents and guardians. It conducts evaluations for all referred clients, including those with developmental delays, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, intellectual or learning difficulties, specific learning disabilities, communication disorders and congenital syndromes.[43]

The assessment process for METVT includes the use of specialized educational psychologists and resource officers who work within schools to identify and support students with disabilities.

[41] Stakeholder Report, NDU interview
[42] *The Barbados Health Report: Healthy, Productive People and Communities*, Planning and Research Unit, 2019.
[43] Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados. *"Care of Persons with Disabilities."* Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.health.gov.bb/For-Public/Care-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.

These professionals utilize various resources and tools to conduct thorough evaluations, which inform the development of individualized education plans and appropriate support services. The assessment process typically includes medical evaluations, psychological assessments and social evaluations to determine the extent and nature of the disability.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist in the disability assessment process in Barbados. In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, in collaboration with PAHO, conducted a **Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities in Barbados** to evaluate the unmet health needs of persons with disabilities.[44] It involved a survey of 43 respondents, including persons with disabilities, caregivers and medical staff. The needs assessment highlighted gaps in specialized healthcare services and the lack of adequate services for identifying and addressing the health needs of persons with disabilities, particularly in areas like mental health, physiotherapy and speech therapy.[45]

OPDs and persons with disabilities have expressed significant criticism of the current disability assessment services, describing the process as fragmented and inefficient.[46] One major issue is the lack of standardized assessment criteria and tools, leading to inconsistencies in how disabilities are evaluated and recognized. Additionally, there is a shortage of trained professionals, such as occupational therapists and clinical psychologists, both in the public and private sectors, which hampers the timely and accurate assessment of disabilities.[47]

Both children and adults face substantial challenges in accessing assessment services, with primary assessment centers confirmed by the **Barbados Health Report** to be overwhelmed and unable to meet the demand.[48] As a result, individuals report wait times as long as two years for assessments, despite these assessments being crucial for accessing support services. The **Child Care Board** corroborates this issue, noting that children under their care also experience difficulties in obtaining timely assessments. While private assessment services are available, they are costly and have long waiting lists. Persons with disabilities report these delays hinder their access to essential support services, adversely affecting the quality of life and negatively impacting their access to healthcare and education.[49]

5.4.2 Disability Support Services (targeted efforts)

The **National Assistance Board (NAB)**, **the NDU, and BCD** provide support services aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Barbados. The legal framework for the support services provided by the NAB falls under **The National Assistance Act 1969**.

The NAB administers national social assistance programmes such as the **Home Help Programme**, which offers daily assistance with tasks such as meal preparation, personal care, and household chores, allowing persons with disabilities to live independently. Additionally, the NAB operates facilities like the **Vauxhall Senior Citizens Village** and the **Jorris Dunner Elderly Day Care Centre**, which provide long-term and day care services for the elderly and disabled.

[44] Douglin, Carmeta Patricia, *Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities in Barbados*, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Ministry of Health, Barbados, 2018.
[45] Ibid. p. 31
[46] Stakeholder Report, BARNOD interview, Focus Group discussion.
[47] Stakeholder Report, CCB interview.
[48] Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados. "Care of Persons with Disabilities." Accessed September 2, 2024. https://www.health.gov.bb/For-Public/Care-of-Persons-with-Disabilities, p.26
[49] Stakeholder Report, CCB interview, Focus group discussion.

Financial support is also provided through non-contributory pensions for individuals with disabilities, helping to ease the financial burden on families.[50]

The **National Assistance Programme (NAP)** is part of the portfolio of the **Welfare Department (WD)**. The NAP is the WD's primary programme in terms of budget and beneficiaries. As a key component of the country's social services, the NAP acts as a national safety net aimed at assisting the poor and vulnerable. The NAP "provides assistance to needy citizens who are unable to earn a living to support themselves and their dependents because of illness, injury or other special circumstance." The programme has two components, i.e., monetary assistance and assistance in-kind.[51]

According to the **ILO's Social Protection Expenditure Review, Barbados**, persons with disabilities receive between BBD50-88 per week and "severely disabled persons" receive BBD164 per week. The report indicates that persons with disabilities defined as "disabled high," and "disabled age 55 to 66 years," have rates that are equal to 59.5 per cent of the poverty line, one-quarter of the minimum wage, and almost 15 per cent of the GDP per capita.[52]

Despite these provisions, focus group participants indicated that many individuals with disabilities face challenges in accessing adequate support due to bureaucratic hurdles and insufficient benefit levels. Many persons with disabilities lack access to necessary information about government support, and many persons with disabilities were ineligible for social security benefits. Prior to October 2024, only hearing and visually impaired persons were eligible for benefits. Additionally, caregivers who often leave formal employment to care for persons with disabilities do not receive social security or national insurance scheme support, including non-contributory pensions.[5354]

Positively, Prime Minister Mia Mottley announced plans to expand the eligibility for non-contributory pensions. Starting October 1, 2024, the categories of persons with disabilities eligible for benefits will be expanded to include persons with conditions such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, and autism, and benefits will extend to minors as well. The special needs grant for minors with these conditions will be 50 percent of the value of the non-contributory pension, while adults will receive 100 percent. This measure is expected to require Government investment of approximately US$4 million per year.[55]

Nonetheless, focus group participants indicated that, in addition to the disability benefit being substantially inadequate to meet their daily needs, access to certain social support services is heavily influenced by the discretion of caseworkers at the NAB.[56] Persons with disabilities report that if they are not perceived as very poor, or if they receive some caregiving support from a family member, they are often deemed ineligible for assistance. Focus group participants indicate that the discretionary assessment process does not foster independent living and frequently results

[50] Government of Barbados. "National Assistance Board." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://www.gov.bb/State-Bodies/national-assistance.
[51] International Labour Organization (ILO). *Social Protection Expenditure Review, Barbados.* ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean, June 2022, p. 54-55.
[52] Ibid.
[53] NACPWD report, p. 27
[54] Barbados Today. "Social Security Extension for Disabled Youth Amid New Support." *Barbados Today*, March 19, 2024. https://barbadostoday.bb/2024/03/19/social-security-extension-for-disabled-youth-amid-new-support/.
[55] Barbados Today. "Social Security Extension for Disabled Youth Amid New Support." *Barbados Today*, March 19, 2024. https://barbadostoday.bb/2024/03/19/social-security-extension-for-disabled-youth-amid-new-support/.
[56] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.

in individuals not receiving the full support they need.[57] It must be noted here that the new rights-based framework (from the recently passed Act) is expected to limit caseworker discretion and create more transparent criteria.

In addition to monetary and in-kind benefits, key facilities such as the **Albert Cecil Graham Development Centre** and the **Elayne Scantlebury Centre** provide specialized care and rehabilitation services for children, young adults and individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities.

According to the **Ministry of Health and Wellness**, public health programmes address disability issues through outreach and education in collaboration with local and international organizations.[58] A notable development is the on-going construction of a **new Geriatric Hospital**, which is intended to provide comprehensive healthcare services to older adults, focusing on wellness, community-based health service, non-institutionalized healthcare, rehabilitation and long-term care.

Barbados also offers a range of mental health services, with the **Psychiatric Hospital** in Black Rock, St. Michael, playing a central role. This facility provides both in-patient and out-patient services. It is equipped to handle acute psychiatric care, drug rehabilitation, forensic psychiatric care and long-term psycho-geriatric care.[59] It should be noted that BCD reports some individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are also housed at the hospital.[60]

In 2023, new recreational and occupational therapy facilities were opened at the Psychiatric Hospital. These facilities were developed in partnership with the Maria Holder Memorial Trust and aim to enhance the rehabilitation patients with psychosocial disabilities. The services focus on helping individuals regain life skills, independence, and social inclusion. During the official opening, Acting Prime Minister Santia Bradshaw emphasized the importance of these facilities in providing holistic care, reducing stigma and promoting mental health recovery.[61]

The Psychiatric Hospital works alongside other community mental health services, including outreach programmes, child guidance services and educational initiatives aimed at empowering families.[62]

One major mental health initiative is the introduction of a **24-hour national mental health hotline, Lifeline Barbados**, which aims to provide immediate assistance and intervention for individuals dealing with mental health crises. This hotline is staffed by trained professionals and was developed with the support of the **Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)**. It reflects a broader push to destigmatize mental health issues and improve access to care.[63] Another

[57] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.
[58] Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados. *"Care of Persons with Disabilities."* Accessed September 1, 2024. https://www.health.gov.bb/For-Public/Care-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.
[59] Black Rock Psychiatric Hospital." *Totally Barbados*, https://www.totallybarbados.com/articles/health-fitness/health-care/hospitals-and-clinics/black-rock-psychiatric-hospital/. Accessed 8 Oct. 2024.
[60] Stakeholder report, BCD interview
[61] "New Recreational and Occupational Health Facilities at Psychiatric Hospital." *Barbados Today*, 5 Dec. 2023, https://barbadostoday.bb/2023/12/05/new-recreational-and-occupational-health-facilities-at-psychiatric-hospital/. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.
[62] "Mental Health Care." *Government of Barbados*, *Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados* https://www.health.gov.bb/mental-health-care. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.
[63]. "Barbados Has New 24-Hour Mental Health Hotline." *Government of Barbados, Ministry of Health and Wellness*, https://health.gov.bb/News/Press-Releases/Barbados-Has-New-24-Hour-Mental-He. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.

initiative is the **Healthy Caribbean Youth** project, a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which seeks to destigmatize psychosocial disabilities and promote access to care for young people.[64]

Despite this progress, according to the Borgen Project, mental health in Barbados is still impacted by cultural stigma, leading to many cases going undiagnosed and untreated. Although efforts to raise awareness are ongoing, research specific to Barbados remains limited. Barbados offers opportunities for psychology education, with a range of scholarships available to support students in pursuing both local and online degrees. However, while there are multiple academic options, the country faces challenges in terms of laboratory facilities and internship sites, limiting practical training opportunities.[65]

The NDU reports that it provides various assistive devices including spine braces and prostheses and arranges transportation for medical appointments; however, the NDU explains that its resources are frequently limited, resulting in some individuals experience long delays in accessing these essential services.[66]

The BCD focuses on direct support through programmes like the **Fully Accessible Barbados (FAB)**, which aims to enhance accessibility in public and tourist spaces. The BCD also offers accessible transportation services, sign language interpretation and Braille translation for persons with disabilities. BCD's **My Inclusive School (MIS) Project**, a collaborative effort with the METVT, supports inclusive education by creating sensory rooms in schools.[67]

The new disabilities policy and recently enacted legislation show significant alignment with the standards set by the CRPD. The policy's comprehensive approach to social protection, including the review and enhancement of existing programmes, the development of fair assessment systems and the prevention of automatic discontinuation of invalidity benefits, which directly supports CRPD Articles 28 (Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection). Additionally, the emphasis on accessibility in financial and insurance services and the implementation of disability awareness training for service providers align with multiple CRPD articles.

5.4.3 Mainstream Services

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND HEALTHCARE SERVICES

In Barbados, the legislative framework related to health and persons with disabilities includes the **Health Services Act (Cap. 44)**, first passed in 1969, which does not specifically address disabilities. Its primary functions include the prevention, treatment and suppression of diseases; publishing health-related reports and advice; abatement of nuisances; control of food and drugs; and regulation of healthcare facilities. Additionally, the **Mental Health Act**, first passed in 1989, is relevant to psychosocial disabilities because it allows for the involuntary institutionalization of anyone assessed by a senior consultant psychiatrist to be suffering from a "mental disorder" or "psychopathic disorder."

According to the most recent **Health in America's Report from PAHO**, the draft **Barbados National Strategic Plan for Health 2018-2022** aims to achieve "healthy productive people and communities through excellent care for everyone, everywhere, every time." The plan outlines

[64] "5 Facts About Mental Health in Barbados." *The Borgen Project*, 25 Aug. 2023, https://borgenproject.org/mental-health-in-barbados/. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Stakeholder report, NDU interview
[67] Barbados Council for the Disabled. "My Inclusive School." Accessed September 5, 2024. https://barbadosdisabled.org.bb/my-inclusive-school/.

several priority areas: reducing risk factors such as childhood obesity, harmful alcohol use and tobacco control; improving noncommunicable disease (NCD) management through primary healthcare and the chronic care model; using NCD surveillance and research to guide evidence-based actions; fostering multisectoral partnerships that integrate health considerations into all policies; and promoting NCD prevention and control through effective health communication. However, the plan's priority areas do not reference the health needs of persons with disabilities. While the focus on reducing risk factors and improving health outcomes indirectly benefits this group, tailored strategies addressing their unique challenges are essential for inclusivity.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, in collaboration with PAHO, conducted a **Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities in Barbados** evaluating the health-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the country. The assessment incorporated survey data from 43 respondents, including persons with disabilities, caregivers and staff, along with key informant interviews. The study identified several major health concerns, particularly transportation to doctor's appointments, affordable housing, health insurance, prescription medications and access to mental health services. Additionally, communication support, access to gyms and durable medical equipment were also highlighted as critical needs. The study emphasized three priority areas: transportation, affordable housing and employment opportunities, along with urgent needs for mental health services and healthcare accessibility.[68]

Following on the recommendations from the health needs assessment, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, with the support of PAHO, developed the **Barbados National Disability Health Policy, A Framework for Action** that outlines a framework aimed at addressing the health needs and rights of persons with disabilities within the context of the broader national healthcare system. The policy acknowledges that persons with disabilities in Barbados have unique health needs that are often unmet due to barriers such as inaccessible transportation, limited access to assistive technologies, and challenges in obtaining affordable health insurance and medications. Furthermore, the policy discusses the importance of creating inclusive environments and ensuring that health services are delivered equitably to all citizens, including persons with disabilities.[69]

The framework aims to address the gaps and recommendations identified in the assessment. It includes commitments to ensure that transportation to medical facilities becomes more accessible for persons with disabilities, aligning with the assessment's findings that transportation poses a significant barrier to healthcare. Additionally, it aims to enhance the availability of assistive technologies and rehabilitative services. The framework also commits to training healthcare workers to better communicate and engage with persons with disabilities. Further commitments include advocating for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in health insurance schemes and ensuring affordable access to prescription medications.[70]

The NACPWD report identified several significant gaps and challenges in the healthcare system for persons with disabilities in Barbados. At **Queen Elizabeth Hospital**, the country's primary hospital, the report indicates that medical treatment and patient care for persons with disabilities require substantial improvement. Hearing impaired individuals also reported that they often encounter substantial communication barriers when seeking healthcare. Persons with disabilities also indicate that occasionally essential medications or medical equipment, such as

[68] Douglin, Carmeta Patricia. *Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities in Barbados*. Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Ministry of Health, Barbados, 2018.
[69] Ministry of Health and Wellness. *"Barbados National Health Disability Policy,"* Government of Barbados, 2019.
[70] Ibid.

insulin or glucose testing strips, are not available from the **Barbados Drug Service,** imposing a financial burden on many persons with disabilities. Additionally, healthcare providers often lack specialized training in detecting and treating disabilities, and medical facilities frequently lack sufficient physical accessibility and accommodations, further hindering access to necessary healthcare services for persons with disabilities.[71]

Focus group participants reported feeling marginalized or "put into a corner" by healthcare professionals. They shared multiple experiences where healthcare workers preferred to engage with family members or guardians rather than directly with the persons with disabilities patient. Many individuals with disabilities noted that healthcare workers often did not take their concerns seriously and were dismissive of them, which resulted in poor or inadequate patient care and medical treatment.[72]

A significant issue raised by all OPDs and focus group participants is the difficulty in accessing health insurance. Individuals with disabilities often encounter high premiums and coverage limitations, particularly for pre-existing or degenerative conditions. Insurance providers assess risk differently for these individuals, resulting in higher premiums.[73] Conditions requiring specialized care may further increase costs. Members of the NACPWD committee met with insurance companies regarding this issue. The **General Insurance Association of Barbados (GIAB)** asserts that, according to their policies and procedures, companies selling general insurance underwrite each customer based on their own merit and do not discriminate against persons with disabilities.[74] The **Minister of Finance** expressed a willingness to address this issue directly with the GIAB and to assess the possibility of government providing support to persons with disability in accessing health insurance.[75]

The new disabilities policy and recently enacted legislation emphasize enhancing access to healthcare for persons with disabilities by implementing specialized training for healthcare providers and extending free healthcare services, including dental care, to adult persons with disabilities. Certified interpreters will be assigned to public health spaces to reduce communication barriers, and a fast-track system will be introduced in healthcare facilities to facilitate quick access for children and adult persons with disabilities. There is an emphasis on improving physical accessibility and accommodations in medical facilities, emphasizing mental health support and programmes for persons with disabilities, and streamlining early detection programmes and monitoring of pregnant women for gestation anomalies. Additionally, the legislation aims to increase medications used by persons with disabilities that are covered by the Barbados Drug Service. It also seeks to explore suitable living arrangements for persons with disabilities upon the death of their caregivers and closely monitor persons with comorbidities to prevent disability.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The legislative framework regulating the education system in Barbados is the **1987 Education Act**. The Act allows the METVT to provide special schools or facilities for children needing "special education," mandates medical examinations to ascertain disabilities, and ensures transportation

[71] NACPWD report, p. 16
[72] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.
[73] NACPWD report, p. 27-28, Stakeholder report, BCD interview, Focus Group discussion
[74] Barbados Today. "GIAB Says People with Disabilities Not Excluded from Insurance Coverage." *Barbados Today*, August 22, 2023. https://barbadostoday.bb/2023/08/22/giab-says-people-with-disabilities-not-excluded-from-insurance-coverage/amp/.
[75] Stakeholder report, Hinkson interview

and necessary facilities for children with disabilities. The **Student Support Services** section of the Ministry, established in 1997, focuses on addressing the needs of students with disabilities by providing support to parents, teachers and guidance counselors. It collaborates with social service agencies to ensure the behavioral, emotional, social and intellectual needs of students are met. The section also conducts assessments, develops Individualized Educational Programmes (IEPs), and offers parent and teacher workshops to improve the management of learning difficulties and behavioral challenges.[76]

The METVT utilizes a referral system to assess children with disabilities, with referrals coming from schools, parents, guardians, doctors and organizations like the **Albert Cecil Graham Development Center** (assessment center) and the **Child Care Board**. Once referred, an officer within **Student Support Services** conducts an investigation which includes input from peripatetic teachers who observe and assess students' needs. These teachers provide recommendations on strategies, methods and accommodations to support the student's academic progress. Additional assessments by psychologists and educational professionals, as well as therapy services such as speech and behaviour therapy, are facilitated through the Ministry.[77]

In August 2024, the Minister of Education indicated that METVT will **expand its learning disability screening programme** in the upcoming academic year. This initiative will include vision and hearing tests for children aged three-and-a-half to five years old and enhance resources for diagnostic testing, building on last year's vision screening for secondary school first-formers. The goal is early identification and intervention for learning challenges.[78]

Students with disabilities are eligible to receive support services that include **social workers** who manage social and behavioural issues, **school counsellors** and **special education officers** who provide direct support and guidance to students and staff, and school attendance and safety officers who handle attendance and safety concerns, often with a background in social work to manage disruptive behaviours. Additionally, three **peripatetic teachers** who rotate throughout the primary school system to provide in-class support and training for teachers, helping them modify teaching methods and create individualized support plans to accommodate students with disabilities.[79] For students with sensory impairments the ministry tries to provide **interpreters and assistive technologies**. However, these resources are often expensive and not widely available.[80]

The Barbados education system is currently undertaking an educational transformation initiative. Dr. Ramona Archer-Bradshaw, Chief Education Officer has stated that "education transformation has been a top priority for the current administration."[81] In October 2023, the Barbados government launched its educational reform initiative under the theme **"Reimagining Education: A Bright Future for Every Child."** According to **Barbados's 2023 VNR**, the reform agenda aims to establish a robust lifelong learning system that offers various educational

[76] Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados. *"Student Support Services."* Accessed September 2, 2024. https://mes.gov.bb/Departments/Student-Support-Services.
[77] Stakeholder report, METVT interview.
[78] Barbados Today. "A New Dawn for Inclusive Education." *Barbados Today*, August 1, 2024. https://barbadostoday.bb/2024/08/01/a-new-dawn-for-inclusive-education/.
[79] Stakeholder report/METVT interview.
[80] Stakeholder report/METVT interview.
[81] Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados. *"A Bright Future for Every Child!" Education Transformation Launch 2023.* October 3, 2023. Accessed September 5, 2024. https://mes.gov.bb/News/Latest/Press-Release.aspx.

opportunities for students with disabilities, including lifelong learning opportunities at the tertiary level.[82]

Among the multiple proposed reforms is a commitment to enhancing the education of children with disabilities. The central principle of this approach is inclusion and would be achieved through providing essential physical facilities, materials, assistive devices and specialized teacher training to deliver differentiated instruction tailored to individual needs. However, there is an acknowledgement that there will be students whose needs cannot be fully met in inclusive classrooms. In these situations, the ministry proposes establishing specialized environments to provide support and personalized instruction. The Ministry's **Student Support Unit** will conduct detailed assessments to develop **Individualized Educational Programmes (IEPs)** for students with mental or physical challenges, ensuring their specific needs are met.[83]

A significant project within the METVT, that will serve to advance inclusive education in Barbados, is the project "**Skills for the Future II: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Quality Education,"** funded by the **Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)**, which aims to improve the quality and equity of education in Barbados by supporting the transformation effort of the education system. The project's specific objectives include improving the quality of education, promoting a more inclusive educational environment, enhancing the quality of school infrastructure and strengthening sector management. Key initiatives of the project include curriculum reform, professional development for teachers and principals, the development of educational materials and digital content, and upgrading to resilient and sustainable physical and digital infrastructure. The comprehensive approach aims to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, receive high-quality education in a supportive and accessible environment.[84]

UNICEF indicates that a **Model Special Education Policy** is under development and awaiting ratification for country localization and implementation. The policy will support a more inclusive education sector by addressing infrastructure, teacher capacity, system support and operational alignment.

The METVT also indicates that the **Erdiston Teacher Training College** offers instruction and training on educating children with disabilities, including a one-year postgraduate diploma in special needs instruction.[85] According to BCD, the college has consistently graduated special needs teachers annually, with an estimated 150 to 200 individuals having completed the postgraduate training, joining both special education and mainstream schools.[86]

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BARBADOS

An inclusive education policy is outlined in the **METVT's 2002-2012 Strategic Plan** in which it indicates that the ministry "will adopt a policy of mainstreaming students with special needs wherever possible." METVT indicates that a new education strategic plan is in development that

[82] Barbados VNR p.98
[83] Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Barbados. *"Education Reform: Final Report."* Government of Barbados, 2023. https://mrd.gov.bb/attachments/Education%20Reform-FINAL-WA.pdf.
[84] Inter-American Development Bank. (Year). *Barbados: Skills for the Future II: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Quality Education (BA-L1053) - Loan Proposal*. Details of the survey can be found here: https://publications.iadb.org/en/barbados-survey-living-conditions-2016.
[85] Erdiston Teachers' Training College. **"Post-Graduate Diploma in Special Education."** Accessed September 5, 2024. https://ettc.edu.bb/Programmes/Post-Graduate-Diploma-in-Special-E/.
[86] Stakeholder report, BCD interview

reflects the ministry's commitment to an inclusive education policy.[87] An example of this commitment is the **"My Inclusive School" initiative**, a collaborative project between the **BCD** and the **METVT**. Under the 2023 initiative, **METVT** is expanding its efforts to support students with disabilities by introducing new programmes. The initiative aims to create inclusive educational environments by improving accessibility, integrating assistive technologies and training educators in inclusive teaching methods. It also ensures that school facilities accommodate diverse student needs. Additionally, the programme promotes awareness and fosters a culture of acceptance and equal opportunity within the educational system.[88]

However, the process is ongoing and is not yet comprehensive, and persons with disabilities and OPDs indicate that this results in many children and adults with disabilities marginalized from mainstream education services. The absence of a comprehensive inclusive education strategy continues to place students with disabilities at a learning disadvantage. Currently, most students with disabilities are limited to attending a small number of specialized schools and units, which restricts their access to a more inclusive educational environment. In the 2021/22 academic year, 710 students were enrolled in special needs schools, and approximately 15 students with disabilities attended mainstream schools, which do necessarily have all the resources and services to support them adequately. [89]

Mainstream schools in Barbados often lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to accommodate students with disabilities. The infrastructure at special education schools like the **Irving Wilson and Ann Hill Schools** is designed to cater to specific disabilities with hearing and visual impairments, and global developmental delays. However, places in these schools are limited, making it more likely that some children are excluded from education. Also, members of the deaf community report that the overall education received in these facilities do not adequately prepare them further education or entering the workforce.[90] Significant efforts have been made to improve the physical accessibility of educational facilities. This includes renovating school buildings by installing ramps, accessible restrooms and other necessary modifications. The government is also working to ensure that new school buildings are designed with accessibility in mind from the outset.[91]

Persons with disabilities report that while access to education has improved, many children with disabilities await official assessment which results in their marginalization within mainstream school environments and sometimes expulsion. For example, METVT and the CCB acknowledged that school principals have the discretion to deny enrollment to children who are not potty-trained.[92] Persons with disabilities report that this discretionary rule has resulted in multiple children with disabilities being denied access to school.[93]

Barriers to inclusive education for students with disabilities in Barbados are not only structural but also cultural. Focus group participants also indicated that there is still a stigma attached to

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[87] Stakeholder report, METVT interview. The new strategic plan was not provided for review for the purposes of the situational analysis.

[88] *Ministry of Education to add new programmes to assist students with disabilities*. Barbados Today. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from https://barbadostoday.bb/2023/04/06/ministry-of-education-to-add-new-programmes-to-assist-students-with-disabilities/.

[89] Inter-American Development Bank. (Year). *Barbados: Skills for the Future II: Digital Transformation for Inclusive and Quality Education (BA-L1053) - Loan Proposal*. Details of the survey can be found here: https://publications.iadb.org/en/barbados-survey-living-conditions-2016.

[90] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.

[91] Stakeholder report, METVT interview.

[92] Stakeholder report, METVT interview, CCB interview.

[93] Stakeholder report, Wickham interview

disability in the educational environment resulting in isolation and/or harassment. Some focus group participants shared their school experiences of being treated as “invisible” quote invisible or “inferior.” They indicated that such treatment discouraged them from remaining in school or pursuing further studies.[94]

A study in the International Journal of Special Education highlighted interpersonal conflicts with teachers and peers as significant barriers. Students reported that relationships with teachers were difficult, particularly when teachers lacked knowledge of their impairments. Students with physical impairments also reported that some school administrators often failed to make necessary accommodations.[95] Deaf students experienced communication challenges and felt ignored by teachers, while students with physical impairments struggled with moving between classes, leading to feelings of exclusion and frustration.[96]

PROPOSED REFORMS IN NEW DISABILITIES POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The proposed disabilities policy and legislation aim to improve educational access for persons with disabilities, aligning with the CRPD's requirements for inclusive education. Key strategies include conducting comprehensive assessments to identify and remove learning barriers, reviewing curricula for accessibility, and enhancing diagnostic and assessment procedures. The policy emphasizes the need for specialized training for educators in inclusive practices and understanding the needs of students with disabilities.

Infrastructure improvements, such as installing ramps and accessible restrooms, are prioritized to ensure that school buildings are accessible. The development and implementation of individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to each student's needs are also emphasized, reflecting CRPD standards for personalized educational support. The policy highlights the provision of assistive technologies and adaptive learning materials to enhance educational experiences.

Additionally, the new policy advocates for integrating disability awareness programmes in schools to foster inclusive attitudes and reduce discrimination. Partnerships with private schools and educational institutions are encouraged to ensure that educational opportunities for students with disabilities are affordable and accessible. Overall, the new policy and legislation demonstrate an alignment with the CRPD, promoting inclusive education and equal participation for persons with disabilities.

5.4.4 Access to Employment

Barbados' employment legislation relevant to disability inclusion is primarily addressed in the **Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act, 2020**. This Act aims to eliminate discrimination in employment based on multiple grounds including disability. It mandates that employers provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities and prohibits discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion and termination. Additionally, the Act requires that complaints of discrimination be addressed through an Employment Rights Tribunal, ensuring that employees with disabilities have a formal mechanism to seek redress if their rights are violated.

[94] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.
[95] Blackman, Stacey, Conrad, Dennis A., & Philip, Lisa. "The Pre-University Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Barbados and Trinidad." *International Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2017.
[96] Blackman, Stacey, Conrad, Dennis A., & Philip, Lisa. "The Pre-University Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Barbados and Trinidad." *International Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2017.

The **Employment Rights Tribunal**, established under the **Barbados Employment Rights Act, 2012**, is mandated to with resolving employment disputes. The Tribunal handles complaints related to unfair dismissal, employment terms and other grievances. The employment rights tribunal represents one of the few avenues for redress and accountability for persons with disabilities who are subject to a rights violation.

The **2014 Barbados National Employment Policy** includes specific objectives to empower persons with disabilities through employment. Key areas of intervention include increasing the provision of employment services for persons with disabilities, sensitizing key labour stakeholders on their rights, enhancing access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes, and collaborating with various agencies to formulate and promote employment programmes for persons with disabilities. The **policy** focuses on increasing employment services for persons with disabilities through raising awareness among labour stakeholders and enhancing access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. The policy advocates for inclusive education and enterprise-level sensitization in addition to emphasizing adaptive technologies and accessible facilities. The **Ministry of Labour** indicates that a **new employment policy is currently being finalized** and will likely reflect the provisions and requirements of the new disabilities legislation and policy.

The policy promotes a comprehensive approach involving individual education and training, enterprise-level sensitization and institutional collaboration. It emphasizes inclusive curricula, adaptive technologies and accessible facilities, supported by specialized career counselling and job placement services. Enterprises are encouraged to adopt non-discriminatory policies and make necessary workplace adjustments. The policy also aims to mainstream disability issues into legislation, policies and programmes, fostering an inclusive labour market that recognizes the contributions of persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Labour indicates that Barbados is in the process of finalizing an updated employment policy which will likely be aligned to reflect the provisions of the new national disability policy. The updated employment policy was not made available for review.

Access to employment for persons with disabilities in Barbados remains challenging despite various legislative measures and policies aimed at promoting inclusivity in the workforce. Data from **2010 Census**, collected by the **Barbados Statistics Service (BSS),** found that 90% of persons with disabilities are unemployed. Unfortunately, due to complications with the 2021 census there is no current information regarding the level of employment of persons with disabilities.

The METVT is also working to enhance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through **The First Jobs Initiative**. The project provides first-time employment opportunities for young persons with disabilities, supported by a significant budget allocation.[97] Collaborations with the private sector encourage inclusive employment practices, with guidance and support from the government. The **Job Prep Programme**, launched by BARNOD, offers essential job training and employment preparation for persons with disabilities. Since the programme's launch in 2013, over 79 participants have undergone training in areas such as resume writing, work attire and communication skills. Importantly, the programme aims to address the lack of work

[97] Stakeholder report, Ministry of Finance interview

experience for many in the disabled community, including those over the age of 25 who have never had employment opportunities.[98]

The programme has been supported by key partners like Scotiabank, which has played a significant role through its "World of Work" initiative. Scotiabank has taken on interns from the Job Prep Programme, and to date, 15 individuals have completed internships across various businesses. These six-week placements help build confidence and skills that prepare participants for future job opportunities. BARNOD is optimistic about expanding the programme to reach more persons with disabilities, particularly those who have been excluded from the job market due to age or other factors.[99]

Despite these legislative measures, persons with disabilities face numerous barriers, such as limited observation of health and safety protocols suitable for persons with disabilities, limited use of flexible and remote work options and lack of physical accessibility in workplaces.[100] Focus group participants have reported that employers and potential employers often demonstrate reluctance to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. There is a prevailing discriminatory mindset among employers, who frequently make unfounded assumptions about the abilities of individuals with disabilities. Safety concerns are commonly used as a justification for not providing accommodations or for not hiring persons with disabilities. Additionally, those who do gain employment often face exploitation, as employers may underpay them, recognizing their limited job options, or overwork them, knowing that securing alternative employment would be challenging. Focus group participants reported experiencing verbal abuse and harassment from coworkers creating such a toxic environment that many persons with disabilities felt pushed out of their jobs due to frustration.[101] Additionally, BCD and focus group participants indicate there many well-trained persons with disabilities, including university graduates, who struggle to find employment within the mainstream economy.[102]

PROPOSED REFORMS UNDER NEW DISABILITIES LEGISLATION AND POLICY

The new policy and proposed legislation in Barbados outline multiple provisions to enhance employment opportunities and economic participation through strategies such as creating non-discriminatory workplace policies, ensuring accessible work environments and providing assistive equipment. The policy encourages private employers to reserve jobs for qualified persons with disabilities, promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship through vocational training and financial incentives, and supports flexible work arrangements and accessible training opportunities.

The legislation mandates equal access to employment and prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in recruitment, training, promotion and other employment areas. Employers must make reasonable adjustments unless it imposes an undue burden. Requirements include hiring a **minimum number of persons with disabilities based on company size and ensuring government ministries have at least 5% of their workforce** as qualified persons with disabilities**.** The legislation promotes vocational training and self-

[98] *Job Prep Programme reducing unemployment amongst disabled*. Barbados Advocate. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from https://www.barbadosadvocate.com/news/job-prep-programme-reducing-unemployment-amongst-disabled.
[99] *Job Prep Programme reducing unemployment amongst disabled*. Barbados Advocate. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from https://www.barbadosadvocate.com/news/job-prep-programme-reducing-unemployment-amongst-disabled.
[100] NACPWD report, p. 22
[101] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion.
[102] Stakeholder report, BCD interview, Focus Group discussion.

employment schemes and includes mechanisms for complaints and enforcement through the **Employment Rights Tribunal** and the **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

With regard to legal capacity, **Section 19 of the Barbados Mental Health Act** outlines the court's authority over the property and affairs of patients with "mental disorders." The court can take necessary actions for the patient's benefit and their family. The court can manage, sell or acquire property, execute wills, conduct business and handle legal matters on behalf of the patient. Additionally, it can settle property and exercise trustee powers.

The **Barbados Evidence Act (Cap. 121)** includes provisions intended to protect witnesses with mental, intellectual or physical disabilities. The Act allows courts to disallow misleading, harassing, or repetitive questions directed at such witnesses. Additionally, the admissibility of confessions must take into account the mental, intellectual or physical disability of the person making the confession.

Barbados does not prohibit persons with disabilities from providing evidence in court. However, practical challenges exist, as highlighted during the GDF induction workshop. A participant, who is also a sign language interpreter, recounted an incident where a hearing-impaired witness's statement was deemed inadmissible because it was taken without sign language interpretation support. This resulted in the dismissal of the case, underscoring the need for proper procedural accommodations to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld in judicial processes.

ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The social protection system in Barbados is designed to support various vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, low-income families, the youth, single mothers and the unemployed. Persons with disabilities may be eligible for support under the **National Assistance Programme,** administered under the **National Assistance Act Cap 48**, which provides financial aid to those in need, and a non-contributory old-age pension operated by the **National Insurance and Social Security Service (NIS)**.

Barbados' **2023 Voluntary National Review: Creating a Sustainable Future for Generations to Come** highlights the work of the Welfare Department in providing a social safety net for the poor and vulnerable persons in society via poverty reduction programmes offering both financial and in-kind assistance. The VNR indicates that, in addition to non-contributory pensions, persons with disabilities in Barbados are also eligible to receive food, clothing and assistive devices as well as support in the payment of utilities and rent.[103]

Social protection expenditure in Barbados represents 11.4% of GDP, with significant portions allocated to old-age pensions (4.1% of GDP) and other benefits, including those for sickness, maternity, employment injury and disability (1.2% of GDP). Coverage statistics show that 55.3% of the total population has access to at least one social protection benefit. However, coverage for persons with disabilities less comprehensive, with severe disability benefits reaching only 3% of the population. Persons with severe disabilities receive BBD 162.4 per week through the National Insurance Scheme (NIS).[104]

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[103] Government of Barbados. *"Barbados Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals."* United Nations, 2023, p.47-48

[104] Social Protection Expenditure Review, Barbados, ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean, 2022

The **National Assistance Programme** covers the largest number of people, providing 4,980 households with cash transfers and 6,600 households with in-kind transfers, such as food, clothing and funeral costs, focusing on children, the unemployed, persons with disabilities and the elderly.[105]

Summary of Key Findings

- Lack of Public Awareness and Need for Education and Disability Sensitivity Training: Public awareness regarding the rights and needs of persons with disabilities remains limited, contributing to societal stigma and discrimination. This lack of awareness extends to various sectors, including employment, education and healthcare, where service providers may hold discriminatory mindsets. Further, inconsistent enforcement of current disabilities related legislation indicates a charitable-based approach to disability, which lacks the understanding that the provision of these services are legal obligations on the state.
- Significant Policy and Legislative Enhancements: The new disabilities policy and legislation will significantly advance CRPD compliance by addressing various aspects of disability rights in education, healthcare and accessibility. However, persons with disabilities have reported that some of the laws currently in place are not always enforced, which could undermine the effective implementation of the new policy and legislation.
- Inadequate Social Support Services: The social protection system in Barbados faces significant challenges including unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, exclusionary requirements and insufficient benefit levels.
- Challenges in Access and Coverage: Barbados is making multiple efforts to improve disability inclusion, but persons with disabilities still face significant barriers in accessing quality education, employment and healthcare services because disability inclusion efforts are fragmented and lacking a cohesive strategy for effective implementation compromising access and coverage.

5.5. CRPD Compliant Budgeting

Barbados, with a population of approximately 290,000 and a GDP per capita of US$14,666 as of 2021, has faced considerable economic challenges since the global financial crisis of 2008.[106] The country's annual real GDP growth has averaged -0.5% over the past decade, leading to unsustainable levels of debt. In response, the Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (BERT) was launched in 2018 to restore fiscal and debt sustainability, increase international reserves and foster long-term economic growth.[107]

The economic landscape was further strained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a significant 13.7% drop in GDP in 2020 and pushed the unemployment rate to a peak of 21%.[108] Although the **December 2023 IMF Article IV Report** noted a gradual economic recovery, bolstered by a resurgence in tourism and effective implementation of the BERT plan, the country's financial situation remains challenging.[109] The IMF's report praised Barbados for its fiscal

[105] ibid.
[106] Barbados VNR
[107] Barbados VNR
[108] Barbados VNR
[109] International Monetary Fund (IMF). *"IMF Executive Board Concludes 2023 Article IV Consultation and Second Review Under the Extended Fund Facility for Barbados."* December 18, 2023.

discipline and progress in structural reforms. Nevertheless, it underscored the necessity for continued fiscal consolidation, enhanced public financial management and improved business conditions to attract investment and diversify the economy. The IMF also stressed the urgent need to strengthen social protection programmes to support the most vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.[110]

According to the 2024-2025 Barbados National Budget, funding for "special schools" will increase by 40% compared to the previous fiscal year. Additionally, the NDU is set to receive a 26% increase in funding. While approximately 10% of the overall education budget is allocated to special schools, there is no clear breakdown of how much of the mainstream education budget supports inclusive education. About 3% of the budget for personal social services is dedicated to the NDU, which also includes a modest subvention for the Barbados Council for the Disabled. However, the budget does not specify what portion of the funds allocated to the Welfare Department or the National Assistance Board is directed toward services and support for persons with disabilities. Similarly, the percentage of the health budget that is dedicated to persons with disabilities is not clearly indicated.[111]

Overall, the budget for persons with disabilities is not explicitly outlined, and disability-related spending is not tracked separately by the Ministry of Finance. However, the Ministry has indicated that a new budget tagging system is being developed to better capture and reflect expenditures related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those specifically related to disability.[112]

Given the ongoing economic pressures, it is important to acknowledge that Barbados faces significant financial limitations that will impact its ability to implement the proposed disabilities legislation and policy. Implementation depends on the availability of resources — human, physical, financial, technical and technological — that all ministries and agencies interviewed indicated are in short supply. A coordinated strategy, efficient resource allocation and international support may be essential to effectively address these limitations and ensure successful implementation.

The legislation includes the establishment of a **National Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities** to ensure financial support for the implementation of the legislation. The proposed Fund would be permanent, benefiting persons with disabilities and related organizations, and would be managed by the **National Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through a Board of Trustees**. The Fund's sources include income from investments, donations from international, regional and local donors, and money allocated by Parliament.

Summary of Key Findings

- Lack of Dedicated Disability Budget Tracking Tools: There is a significant gap in monitoring and tracking budget allocations specifically for disability-related expenditures. The absence of dedicated budget tracking tools makes it challenging to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and utilization of funds. Implementing robust disability

https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/12/18/pr23461-barbados-imf-executive-board-concludes-2023-article-iv-second-rvw-undereff-rsf.

[110] ibid

[111] *Barbados National Budget: Estimates for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025.* Government Printing Department, February 20, 2024.

[112] Stakeholder report, Ministry of Finance interview

budget tracking tools is essential to monitor spending, identify gaps and enhance the overall management of resources.

- Limited Integration of Disability Considerations in Budget Planning: Disability considerations are not consistently integrated into the broader budget planning and allocation processes. Often, disability-related programmes and services are funded through ad-hoc allocations rather than through a comprehensive and integrated approach. This results in fragmented and inefficient use of resources.
- Economic Limitations Impacting CRPD Compliance: Barbados faces significant financial limitations that affect its ability to fully comply with the CRPD. The proposed disabilities legislation and policy will go a long way toward CRPD compliance, but effective implementation is contingent on the availability of human, physical, financial, technical and technological resources, which are currently in short supply across various ministries and agencies. A coordinated strategy, efficient resource allocation and international support may be essential to address these limitations and ensure successful implementation.

5.6. Accountability and Governance

5.6.1 National Accountability Mechanisms

Despite ratifying the CRPD in 2013, Barbados has yet to submit its initial report to the CRPD Committee. Efforts to draft a national report have been ongoing, but a completed version has not yet been finalized. Currently, a draft report is being circulated, indicating some progress toward fulfilling this obligation.

Barbados has few national accountability mechanisms, which are currently limited in scope and effectiveness. The **Employment Rights Tribunal** primarily addresses workplace rights violations but does not comprehensively cover all forms of discrimination and rights violations experienced by persons with disabilities. The **Ombudsman's Office**, while providing some oversight, is tasked with investigating complaints from individuals regarding potential maladministration or unfair treatment by government bodies and does not necessarily address human rights violations against persons with disabilities. Additionally, the civil court system is often backlogged, causing significant delays in case resolution, which further hinders effective protection and enforcement of disability rights.

To address these gaps, the proposed establishment of a **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities**, recommended by the **National Advisory Committee on Persons with Disabilities**, is intended to advance the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure compliance with the proposed disabilities legislation. This Commission, overseen by the **Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs** and directed by a Board appointed by the Minister, will include representatives from various disability advocacy groups, caregivers and individuals experienced in disability issues.

The Commission's responsibilities will encompass advising the Minister on disability matters, aiding in policy formulation and implementing measures to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities. Additionally, the Commission will conduct public information campaigns, maintain a confidential register of persons with disabilities and support research on assistive technologies. It will review national policies for compliance with international standards, monitor institutions' adherence to the disabilities legislation and handle complaints related to disability rights violations, with the ability to initiate investigations or refer cases to a

proposed Disabilities Rights Tribunal. The new policy does not explicitly state whether the commission will have its own budget but does state that the implementation of its proposed strategies relies on the availability of key resources, including human, financial, physical, technical and technological. The policy calls for appropriate budgetary provisions to be made for these resources.[113]

The **Disabilities Rights Tribunal**, consisting of three members, will be established to hear and resolve complaints under the disability's legislation, with its decisions enforceable as Magistrate's Court judgments. The Commission will also be responsible for registering persons with disabilities and relevant organizations, ensuring accurate data collection for planning and policymaking.

Also, the MPEA plans to amalgamate several social services agencies into a single entity, the Department of Family Services, including the Child Care Board, National Disabilities Unit, National Assistance Board and the Welfare Department. The purpose of this amalgamation is to streamline the delivery of social services, ensuring a more efficient and effective regional approach. Some persons with disabilities have expressed hesitancy about this amalgamation, concerned that it may result in a lack of focus on disability inclusion.

5.6.2 Statistics and Data Gathering Systems

The absence of comprehensive empirical data and statistics on persons with disabilities in Barbados is a significant challenge for advocacy and policy development. The **Barbados Statistical Service (BSS)** is the primary agency responsible for collecting, compiling and disseminating statistical data related to the economic, social, and demographic aspects of Barbados. The BSS conducts various surveys and censuses, ensuring accurate and timely data collection to support national development and planning.

According to the **2010 National Census**, 11,546 Barbadians were diagnosed with disabilities, covering a range of impairments. However, recent estimates suggest the actual number of persons with disabilities in Barbados is closer to 20,000 persons, indicating a significant discrepancy and the need for more accurate statistics.[114]

Despite conducting a national census in 2021, which incorporated the **Washington Group Questions**, Barbados lacks updated statistics on persons with disabilities due to significant issues encountered during the census. The BSS identified a severe undercount of this population and indicated that, in their professional judgment, the census data on persons with disabilities was inaccurate and unusable.[115] The BSS identified several reasons for the flawed 2021 census, largely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to a significant loss of enumerators and increased reluctance among residents to allow census takers into their homes. Additionally, quarantine regulations required individuals to leave their homes to speak with census enumerators, resulting in some persons with disabilities remaining hidden due to persistent societal stigma and the inclination of family members to keep them out of sight. Consequently, COVID-19 significantly hindered the comprehensiveness of the census.[116]

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[113] *Barbados National Disabilities Policy*. Barbados House of Assembly, https://www.barbadosparliament.com/uploads/sittings/attachments/5a8a360c31a626ffd68f4f57769a0960.pdf. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.
[114] Jones, Francis, and Serieux-Lubin, Luanne. *"Disability, Human Rights and Public Policy in the Caribbean: A Situation Analysis."* United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018.
[115] Stakeholder report, BSS interview
[116] Stakeholder report, BSS interview

BSS indicated that conducting a survey to accurately capture disability populations in Barbados would require substantial resources like those needed for a national census. Currently, data on persons with disabilities is dispersed across various ministries and agencies, including the METVT, the NDU, the Child Care Board and the Electoral and Boundaries Commission. Each entity gathers its own data independently, resulting in a lack of coordination and data sharing.

BSS suggests establishing of a centralized electronic database to facilitate data sharing among government agencies, while understanding the importance of data privacy. BSS indicates that it has no current plans to gather persons with disabilities data and highlighted the need for administrative reforms to improve data sharing and collaboration among agencies.

As previously discussed, there are currently no designated disability focal points within government ministries responsible for overseeing disability-related issues. This absence of appointed personnel results in uncoordinated efforts across different government bodies, leading to inconsistent data collection and gaps in information regarding disability inclusion. Without focal points, it becomes challenging to maintain accountability for integrating disability considerations into policies and programmes, which in turn hampers a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of persons with disabilities at the governmental level.

Summary of Key Findings

- Lack of Comprehensive Governance Systems for Disability Inclusion: There is a lack of governance systems to ensure coordinated and accountable disability inclusion efforts. Current mechanisms, such as the Employment Rights Tribunal and the Ombudsman's Office, are limited in scope and do not comprehensively address the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. Additionally, delays in submitting the CRPD Initial Report and a lack of unified oversight further undermine efforts to monitor and enforce disability rights. This fragmented system results in limited policy integration, weak accountability, and uncoordinated actions across government ministries and agencies.
- Inadequate Data Collection and Statistical Systems: The absence of comprehensive empirical data and statistics on persons with disabilities in Barbados hampers effective advocacy and policy development. Current data is fragmented across various agencies, and recent census efforts have been significantly flawed, necessitating a centralized and coordinated data collection approach.
- Concerns About Amalgamation of Social Services: While the proposed amalgamation of social services agencies into the Department of Family Services aims to streamline service delivery, there is concern among persons with disabilities that this may dilute the focus on disability-specific issues. Ensuring that disability inclusion remains a priority within this new structure, with supporting institutional safeguards is essential to address these concerns.
- Lack of disability focal points: There are no designated disability focal points within government ministries, leading to uncoordinated efforts and inconsistent data on disability inclusion. This lack of accountability hinders the effective integration of disability considerations into policies and programmes.

6. Cross Cutting Issues

6.1. 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 who are blind, physically incapacitated, illiterate, or mentally challenged in Barbados may request assistance from the presiding officer at their polling station. They can also choose to be assisted by a companion, and the presiding officer is required to record the details of both the voter and the companion.[117]

Persons with disabilities are increasingly included in advisory mechanisms related to government planning processes to ensure that their needs and perspectives are integrated into policymaking. BCD and BARNOD are represented, or have been consulted, on the following committees:

- Social Justice Committee: Under the **Ministry of Labour**, this committee tackles poverty alleviation, promotes family roles, combats discrimination, ensures education access and integrates persons with disabilities.
- National Wellness in the Workplace Committee: Associated with the **Ministry of Labour**, this committee promotes employee wellness and health and productive workplace environments.
- Monitoring Rights of the Child Committee: Under the MPEA, this committee oversees child protection policies, ensuring children's well-being and safeguarding them against abuse and neglect.
- Vulnerable Persons Committee: Collaborates with multiple government agencies, including the **Department of Emergency Management**, on ensuring the welling and safety of vulnerable persons.
- Building and Standards Advisory Committee: Under the **Ministry of Housing, Lands, and Maintenance**, this committee ensures that construction and renovation projects are accessible and safe, promoting inclusive infrastructure.
- Consultation on New Banknotes: The Central Bank of Barbados collaborated with the **Association for the Blind and Deaf** to make the 2022 banknote series accessible for visually impaired individuals, incorporating tactile marks, brighter colors, improved contrast and larger numerals.

Regarding participation in social and cultural life, sports and recreational initiatives for persons with disabilities in Barbados are driven by various collaborative efforts between the **Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs** and the **Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Community Empowerment**. Key programmes include the **Special Olympics**, which gives athletes with disabilities opportunities to train and compete on both national and international stages. The **Paralympic Association of Barbados** plays an important role in organizing training and competitions, as well as selecting athletes to represent Barbados in the **Paralympic Games**.

[117] *Assistance for the Disabled on Voting Day*. Barbados Council for the Disabled. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from https://barbadosdisabled.org.bb/assistance-for-the-disabled-on-voting-day/.

Additionally, organizations like the **Blind Cricket Association** provide inclusive environments by adapting traditional sports, such as cricket, for visually impaired individuals through modifications in rules and equipment. Despite these initiatives, participation in sports by PWDs remains limited due to accessibility issues, the nature of certain sports and the availability of resources.

Barbados' National Sports Policy aims to create an inclusive sporting environment, emphasizing the principle of **"Sports for All."** This policy encourages the participation of not only PWDs but also other underrepresented groups, such as the elderly, by broadening the scope of sports beyond traditional demographics.[118] The **IncludeU Sports Academy**, founded by national field hockey player Akeem Rudder, also works toward increasing opportunities for persons with disabilities to engage in physical activities, focusing on both recreational and competitive sports, such as football and cricket.[119]

In the cultural sphere, inclusivity is also being promoted through initiatives such as the **Deaf Calypso Project and the Blind Calypso Competition**.[120] In the **2024 Pic-O-De-Crop final**, a major song competition which is part of the Barbados's **Crop Over festival**, Granville "Mr Deejay" Carter became the first visually impaired contestant to participate in the Pic-O-De-Crop competition's 50-year history. His involvement marked a significant moment for inclusivity in Barbados' cultural events. Carter competed among 17 finalists in this prestigious calypso contest, contributing to a diverse lineup of seasoned and emerging artists.[121]

The **Barbados Museum and Historical Society**, along with the **National Library Service**, have taken steps to make cultural experiences more accessible, ensuring that PWDs can engage with exhibitions and resources in meaningful ways.

Persons with disabilities have been long active members of their religious communities, but there has been growing recognition of the importance of full inclusion. In 2023, the Barbados Gospelfest emphasized this issue when Reverend Dr. Gordon Cowans, speaking at a public lecture "Touching Lives of Persons with Disability: Freed to Simply Be," called on religious communities to shift their perspectives. He encouraged moving away from viewing persons with disabilities through a lens of limitation and instead recognizing their full potential and the importance of their inclusion within the church.[122]

6.2. Inclusion of Marginalized Groups

While organizations of persons with disabilities in Barbados have some influence in decision-making on national policy, legal reforms and national development processes, specific marginalized groups within the persons with disabilities community are not well represented.

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[118] *National Sports Policy of Barbados*. Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Community Empowerment, Government of Barbados, 2022, https://www.barbadosparliament.com/uploads/sittings/attachments/national_sports_policy.pdf. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

[119] "Pro Hockey Player Akeem Rudder Promotes Inclusion and Diversity Through Sport." *Unstoppable Yes You*, 18 Jan. 2022, https://www.unstoppableyesyou.com/post/pro-hockey-player-akeem-rudder-promotes-inclusion-and-diversity-through-sport. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

[120] "Calypso Project." *Audiovisability*, 2023, https://www.audiovisability.com/projects/calypso. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

"Calypso Royalty Clash in Historic Pic-O-De-Crop Final." *Barbados Today*, 31 July 2024, https://barbadostoday.bb/2024/07/31/calypso-royalty-clash-in-historic-pic-o-de-crop-final/. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

[122] "In Barbados, Public Lecture Explores 'Touching Lives of Persons with Disability: Freed to Simply Be.'" *World Council of Churches*, 1 June 2023, https://oikoumene.org/news/in-barbados-public-lecture-explores-touching-lives-of-persons-with-disability-freed-to-simply-be. Accessed 12 Oct. 2024.

Barbados hosts multiple organizations representing a diverse range of disabilities, including visual and hearing impairments, mobility impairments, intellectual disabilities and psychosocial disabilities. However, the disability movement in Barbados is predominantly Afrocentric, and ethnic and religious minority communities, such as those of the Muslim and Hindu communities, as well as persons of Caucasian and Indian backgrounds, are not adequately represented.

OPDs also indicate that although visual, hearing and mobility impairments are well represented within the persons with disabilities community, persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities are not well represented in the movement.[123] The Prime Minister choosing to expand the category of disabilities eligible for social support services is an indication that this is changing.

6.3. Gender Equality

Women with disabilities in Barbados have played significant roles in advancing disability rights, but they continue to face substantial obstacles in achieving full equality. While leadership opportunities within OPDs provide some pathways for empowerment, issues such as healthcare access, reproductive rights, violence and the marginalization of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities require more focused and sustained advocacy.

Within the disability community in Barbados, women are well-represented in leadership roles, with many OPDs led by women, demonstrating the leadership strength of women with disabilities in the country. Both BCD and BARNOD estimate that there is gender parity within Barbados OPDs.

Despite their leadership presence, some disability-specific women's organizations struggle with visibility and recognition in larger gender-focused/women's rights organizations. This disconnect has hindered their ability to work on a larger scale in addressing the needs of women with disabilities.

Access to healthcare, particularly sexual and reproductive health, remains a significant issue for women with disabilities in Barbados. Historically, some women with disabilities have reported instances of non-consensual sterilization during adolescence. This practice was often justified as a protective measure to shield them from potential sexual abuse or exploitation. The lack of autonomy in making decisions about their reproductive health is a deeply stigmatizing issue, with long-lasting emotional and psychological effects and is not readily discussed in public forums.

In recent years, efforts have been made to address this issue. BCD, in collaboration with organizations such as the **Barbados Family Planning Association (BFPA)** and UNFPA have engaged in sexual health and reproductive rights seminars for women with disabilities and disability sensitivity training for healthcare providers. BCD also sits on the board of the BFPA, demonstrating the importance of integrating the needs of women with disabilities into broader sexual and reproductive health discussions.

Women with disabilities in Barbados are particularly vulnerable to violence, including gender-based violence. Reports indicate that disabled women are often targeted because of their perceived vulnerability, with some experiencing sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation.[124] This has prompted advocacy groups to focus on violence prevention measures, including campaigns led by the Barbados Council for the Disabled. The BCD's collaboration with other

[123] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion

[124] *UN convenes intergenerational dialogue in Barbados to support "We the Women" global campaign*. Caribbean News Service. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from https://caribbeannewsservice.com/un-convenes-intergenerational-dialogue-in-barbados-to-support-we-the-women-global-campaign/

organizations has resulted in initiatives to raise awareness and provide support for survivors of violence within the disabled community.

BCD indicates that it has previously offered self-defense classes specifically tailored to women with disabilities as part of broader efforts to empower them and reduce their risk of falling victim to violence. However, the deeply entrenched stigma around disability and gender continues to pose challenges in addressing these issues comprehensively.

While women with disabilities are making strides in terms of representation and leadership, the intersectionality of disability with other identities remains largely unaddressed. LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities face compounded discrimination and social exclusion. Within the broader disability movement in Barbados, the concerns of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities are not widely recognized in either the LGBTQ+ movement or the disability rights movement and they remain underrepresented in both legal and policy discussions. This lack of visibility limits their influence in advocating for reforms that would address their specific needs.

7. Disability Inclusion in Broader Development, Humanitarian and Emergency Context

7.1 National Development Plans

The most recent publicly available national development plan for Barbados is the **National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2005-2025**, which outlines the government's development agenda for the 20-year period. With the plan nearing its 2025 expiration, the **2023 Barbados Voluntary National Review (VNR)** offers a more forward-looking perspective on Barbados' national development goals and disability inclusive SDG implementation. The VNR highlights some progress in addressing disability inclusion, but there are notable areas where the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities into the SDG process could be strengthened.

The VNR references several initiatives aimed at supporting persons with disabilities, demonstrating an awareness of the need for inclusion. The opening of the **Recreational and Rehabilitation Facility** by the NDU in 2021 is a significant development providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to engage in recreation, entrepreneurship, and skills development.[125] However, while this facility is a positive step, it represents a specific intervention rather than a systemic approach to mainstreaming disability into broader development policies.

The VNR cites the **National Policy to Improve the Lives of Persons with Disabilities** as another important initiative.[126] However, the VNR does not provide substantial details on the policy's implementation or how it will be integrated across different sectors, leaving room for further clarification on its impact on mainstreaming disability into national development goals.

Other programmes cited, such as the **Basic Life Skills Programme** for individuals on the autism spectrum and **the Calypso Project** for the Deaf community, contribute to empowering persons with disabilities through education and cultural engagement.[127] These targeted initiatives indicate progress in providing opportunities for stronger engagement in society. However, they are largely

[125] Barbados VNR, p. 139
[126] Ibid., p. 137
[127] Ibid, p. 141

focused on specific communities rather than reflecting a broader, system-wide strategy for disability inclusion.

While the VNR highlights several disability-specific programmes, there are significant areas where disability inclusion could be more fully integrated into the SDG implementation process. One of the primary gaps is the lack of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities cited in the VNR. There is no data on the participation, outcomes or access to services for persons with disabilities across sectors such as education, employment or healthcare. Without such data, it is difficult to assess the extent to which persons with disabilities are benefiting from national development programmes or to track progress on inclusion.

The VNR also lacks a comprehensive discussion on inclusive education. While the report references skill-building programmes for persons with disabilities, there is no detailed analysis of how the mainstream education system is accommodating children with disabilities. SDG 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all, yet the VNR does not provide insight into how schools are adapting to meet the needs of persons with disabilities or how teacher training and support systems are being enhanced to promote inclusivity in the classroom.

In terms of employment, while there are references to entrepreneurship opportunities for persons with disabilities, the VNR does not offer a clear strategy for integrating persons with disabilities into the broader labor market. The absence of information on workplace accessibility, accommodations and anti-discrimination measures suggests that more could be done to align national employment policies with SDG 8, which calls for inclusive economic growth and decent work for all.

Healthcare access for persons with disabilities is another area that could be more thoroughly addressed. While the rehabilitation facility is mentioned, there is little information on how the national healthcare system is adapting to meet the broader needs of persons with disabilities, particularly in terms of accessibility and mental health services.

Additionally, the discussion regarding disaster risk management and climate resilience efforts do not specifically address the needs of persons with disabilities and how persons with disabilities are being considered in national disaster risk reduction strategies.

The VNR reflects some progress toward disability inclusion through targeted programmes and policies. However, the mainstreaming of disability into the broader SDG framework appears limited. While institutions such as the NDU and initiatives such as the specific skills development programmes are positive, they do not reflect an integration of disability considerations across sectors. This suggests that while there is an awareness of the need for disability inclusion, a more comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach is needed to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in the national development agenda.

Persons with disabilities Barbados' international commitments to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities extend beyond commitments made under the treaty bodies, encompassing a broader pledge to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda**. The implementation of the CRPD aligns closely with several SDGs, as Barbados identified in its Voluntary National Review (2023), including inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4), promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth and decent work for all (Goal 8) and reducing inequality within and among countries (Goal 10). By prioritizing CRPD implementation, Barbados can make significant progress towards implementing disability inclusive SDGs, ensuring that persons with disabilities are not left behind. Mainstreaming disability rights into the national development framework supports the creation of inclusive policies and programmes that

promote accessibility, equal opportunities and participation for all, thereby advancing both human rights and sustainable development objectives.

The United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (MSDCF) identifies several ways in which the UN can support Barbados in enhancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs). The focus is on strengthening social protection systems, improving access to education and healthcare, and promoting equality for marginalized groups.

A key area of support involves improving data collection to ensure that policies and interventions are effectively targeted toward PWDs. This includes assisting Barbados in gathering more comprehensive and disaggregated data to inform evidence-based decision-making. The MSDCF also highlights the importance of ensuring that social protection systems are equitable and accessible, particularly for vulnerable populations such as PWDs. The UN will collaborate with Barbados to enhance these systems, ensuring they are responsive to the needs of all citizens, including in areas such as healthcare and education.

In addition, the UN will work with the government of Barbados to develop and implement policies that address discrimination and promote greater inclusion of PWDs. This includes efforts to improve access to justice, social services, and community participation, ensuring that PWDs are fully integrated into the country's development efforts.

7.2 Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Action

Barbados's disaster preparedness and emergency response frameworks have incorporated disability inclusion to some extent. The **National Disaster Management Plan**, guided by the **Department of Emergency Management (DEM)**, outlines general protocols for disaster response, but specific measures addressing persons with disabilities are less detailed. The plan emphasizes community-based approaches and aims for inclusive preparedness, though it lacks comprehensive disaggregated analyses or targets explicitly mentioning disabilities.

The **Barbados Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Policy 2022** outlines the strategic direction for community safety and resilience to disasters and climate risks, with a focus on inclusiveness and protecting vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. However, specific details on disability inclusion are limited. The policy emphasizes building resilience across all societal segments, enhancing community resilience with special attention to vulnerable groups, and improving CDM capabilities through sectoral disaster planning that includes persons with disabilities considerations.[128]

The disaster management framework in Barbados is structured around the **National Emergency Management System (NEMS)**, coordinated by the DEM. NEMS is a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder mechanism comprising the **Emergency Management Advisory Council (EMAC)**, national emergency services, local volunteers, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), regional and international partners, and the private sector. The EMAC, chaired by the Minister responsible for Disaster Risk Management, includes representatives from both the public and private sectors as well as NGOs. It oversees the planning and implementation of emergency response functions through its sixteen Standing Committees, which cover areas such as shelter management, emergency telecommunications and public utilities.

[128] Barbados Comprehensive Disaster Management Policy 2022

A key component of NEMS is the **District Emergency Organizations (DEOs)**, voluntary groups in each constituency that organize and coordinate community resources for effective disaster response. The DEOs develop and implement disaster prevention and preparedness programmes within their communities, working closely with the communities they serve.[129]

Both the **Regional Security System**[130] and focus group participants[131] acknowledge that community support mechanisms have been very effective in ensuring the safety and well-being of persons with disabilities in Barbados during a natural disaster or humanitarian emergencies. Focus group members reported their local DEOs ensured that they were evacuated prior to an announced emergency. One of the focus group participants sits on his local DEO and confirms strong DEM engagement to ensure the evacuation and care of persons with disabilities in disaster response.[132]

A substantial exception relates to the deaf community in emergency situations. Deaf focus group members indicated that in disaster preparedness and response, they must engage their own communication and support networks because the national systems are not accessible or necessarily responsive to their needs.[133]

The proposed policy for persons with disabilities highlights significant risks that persons with disabilities face during national disasters and emergencies. Key issues include poor communication and inaccessible information, a lack of disability awareness and sensitivity training among disaster response personnel, inadequate accessibility at shelter facilities and limited resources to support persons with disabilities' specific needs. Additionally, there is limited inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response plans, increasing their vulnerability during emergencies.[134]

The policy emphasizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster management, mandating comprehensive assessments to identify barriers to full participation and the development of standard guidelines to improve accessibility and provide disability awareness training for professionals. persons with disabilities are to be engaged as key representatives on national disaster committees, exposed to educational programmes to enhance their readiness, and involved in community surveillance systems to support other at-risk persons with disabilities. This approach aims to create a resilient network of persons with disabilities to assist in disaster situations.

7.3 Climate Change

There is limited literature and specific policies directly linking persons with disabilities to climate change adaptation and resilience strategies in Barbados.

The "**Roofs to Reefs" National Resilience Plan ("R2RP")** is a comprehensive initiative intended to enhance the island's resilience to climate change impacts. The plan, spearheaded by the Prime Minister, focuses on strengthening infrastructure, restoring ecosystems and promoting sustainable practices. It aims to create a resilient environment from the rooftops of buildings to the coral reefs surrounding the island, addressing various sectors such as sustainable fishing, fossil fuel divestment and achieving net-zero growth. Although the **R2RP** programme documents

[129] Ibid.
[130] Stakeholder report, RSS interview
[131] Stakeholder report, Focus Group discussion
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] NACPWD report, p. 29-30

are not publicly available, the Prime Minister's office confirms that **R2RP** does not specifically address persons with disabilities, the programme primarily speaks to sustainability and resilience in the biophysical sphere and the natural and build environment.

7.4 COVID-19

The Government of Barbados, supported by international organizations such as UNDP, implemented various social protection measures to mitigate the pandemic's impact. These measures included cash transfers, in-kind assistance and food vouchers.[135] The NDU reports that during the pandemic it continued to provide assistance requested by the persons with disabilities community with staff working flexi-time and telecommuting. Focus group members and the NDU reported that the primary form of government assistance persons with disabilities received during the COVID-19 pandemic was care packages to the persons with disabilities community. Clients in need of food would call the NDU to pick up packages or make arrangements to have the packages delivered.[136]

Focus group participants highlighted significant challenges faced by persons with disabilities during the pandemic. Key obstacles included limited access to communication and education, exacerbated by global mask mandates, which hindered communication for individuals with hearing disabilities who rely on lip-reading. The transition to remote learning further excluded children with disabilities due to insufficient accessible learning technologies and support systems. Focus group participants also noted that the pandemic disrupted social support services and their delivery, with many persons with disabilities not receiving any special or augmented services during this period.

8. Overall Analysis of Key Gaps and Opportunities

When Barbados ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013, it committed to implementing a rights-based approach to disability rights. The CRPD aims to create a paradigm shift from a charity-based approach, which views persons with disabilities as passive recipients of aid, to a rights-based approach that recognizes persons with disabilities as active citizens with equal rights. This transition requires comprehensive reforms to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are enshrined in national legislation and that societal attitudes shift towards inclusion and empowerment.

Barbados's approach has been predominantly charity based. This approach has been evident in the significant reliance on OPDs to provide services, support and advocacy for persons with disabilities, filling gaps left by government services. Government programmes and services, such as those provided by the NDU, are often described in terms of assistance rather than empowerment. This extends to the educational and employment sectors, where persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers despite the introduction of progressive policies and legislation.

In recent years, the Government of Barbados has significantly expanded its direct support to the NGO and OPD sectors, recognizing that these organizations are well-positioned to understand and respond to the specific needs of their constituencies. This shift replies on strategic

[135] Joint SDG Fund. *Assessing Barbados' Social Protection Response within the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Accessed September 1, 2024. https://jointsdgfund.org/article/assessing-barbados-social-protection-response-within-context-covid19-pandemic.
[136] Stakeholder report, NDU interview.

partnerships and aims to leverage the deep community knowledge and expertise of OPDs to deliver services to persons with disabilities. Additionally, the recent passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and the adoption of the National Policy for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities signal a move toward an explicitly rights-based framework. These developments suggest that the state is actively working to embed the principles of equality, participation and accountability into the national disability agenda. Nonetheless, significant work remains and the necessary human, financial and institutional resources need to be allocated to support this transition.

A critical challenge in Barbados is the lack of strong disability awareness and the prevalence of discriminatory mindsets among the general public. Many people in Barbados do not have a deep understanding of the rights and potential of persons with disabilities, which results in societal stigma and discrimination. Public perception and awareness campaigns often frame persons with disabilities as recipients of support, reflecting a charitable viewpoint. This lack of awareness extends to service providers, impacting the quality of social, educational and healthcare services offered to persons with disabilities. Changing these mindsets is crucial for the true implementation of the new policy and legislation.

Barbados's current financial situation adds another layer of complexity. As a small island developing state, Barbados has limited financial, human, technical and technological resources. The implementation of new disability policies and legislation requires substantial investment in infrastructure, training and services. These financial limitations must be acknowledged as they impact the ability to implement comprehensive and effective disability-inclusive policies.

To successfully transition from a charity-based to a rights-based approach, several key actions are necessary. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks is crucial and Barbados is in the process of taking that important step. The new disabilities legislation and policy, represent significant steps towards adopting a rights-based approach. These documents emphasize inclusion, equality and non-discrimination, aligning with CRPD principles.

Public awareness campaigns are another critical step toward true implementation of disability inclusive development. National public awareness initiatives and sensitivity training are essential to dismantling long-standing stigmas and stereotypes associated with disabilities. Public education efforts should focus on promoting the rights and potential of persons with disabilities, shifting societal attitudes from sympathy to empowerment. The success of the new policies and legislation heavily relies on changing public mindsets. Edmund Hinkson, Chairman of the NACPWD, said “true implementation requires an understanding of discrimination.” Engaging in broad-based education efforts to promote understanding of disability as a matter of human rights, rather than charity, is critical to fostering an inclusive society.

By ratifying the CRPD, Barbados has demonstrated a commitment to advancing disability rights through a rights-based approach, recognizing persons with disabilities as equal citizens entitled to fundamental rights. However, successfully transitioning from a charity-based model to a rights-based framework and effectively implementing the new disability policy and legislation will require considerable support. Moving forward, it will be essential to provide financial assistance for infrastructure improvements, technical support to develop and implement inclusive policies, and human resource support for specialized training and capacity building.

9. Key Recommendations for UNST Actions

1. Support the development and Implementation of the new disabilities policy and legislation

   The United Nations Sub-Regional Team (UNST) should commit to supporting Barbados in enforcing and implementing its new national disabilities policy and legislation, with a particular emphasis on ensuring compliance with CRPD standards. This includes advocating for the repeal of any remaining discriminatory laws and policies that prevent the full participation of persons with disabilities. To strengthen enforcement, key activities would involve training government officials on CRPD principles, developing clear policy guidelines and facilitating stakeholder consultations to ensure inclusivity in decision-making. Supporting OPDs through capacity-building programmes and empowering persons with disabilities as active participants in the implementation process is crucial to fostering ownership of these reforms. National partners include the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), the National Disabilities Unit (NDU), OPDs, and eventually, the National Commission on the Rights of Disabilities envisioned by the legislation.

2. Comprehensive Review of Legislation and Policy Affecting Persons with Disabilities in Barbados

   A comprehensive review of all legislation and policy affecting persons with disabilities in Barbados is essential to ensure alignment with international standards, including the CRPD, and to address any gaps in implementation. The UNST can support this effort by collaborating with the Government of Barbados to conduct a thorough assessment of existing laws and policies, identifying areas where improvements are needed to promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. This review should also consider feedback from OPDs and stakeholders to ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities are represented in legislative reform efforts.

   The review should focus on strengthening the enforcement mechanisms within existing laws, improving accessibility standards, and ensuring that policies cover critical areas such as education, healthcare, employment and social protection. It should also ensure that future policies are developed with an intersectional approach, addressing the diverse needs of persons with disabilities across gender, age and socio-economic lines. The UNST's support will be vital in providing technical expertise, facilitating stakeholder consultations and aligning national efforts with international best practices.

   Key partners would include the METVT, MPEA, OPDs, UNICEF and relevant government agencies.

3. Strengthen Disability Sensitivity Training and Public Awareness

   Efforts to improve disability inclusion should prioritize disability sensitivity training and the integration of assistive technologies across multiple sectors. This includes training healthcare providers, educators and employers to improve communication, service delivery and support for persons with disabilities. Incorporating assistive technologies and inclusive practices, such as sign language instruction in healthcare, will enhance access to essential services.

   Disability education must be embedded within schools to promote understanding and respect from a young age, fostering an inclusive mindset. Schools should adopt inclusive

teaching methods and technologies that support diverse learning needs, ensuring that all students can participate fully. There is a need for universal training and sensitization standards to ensure an agreed understanding of diagnosis, treatment and support for persons in the education sector.

Public awareness campaigns should focus on changing societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities, emphasizing their contributions in education, healthcare and employment. Culturally tailored messaging will resonate with the local population, furthering understanding of disability rights and the importance of inclusion. These campaigns should also promote the role of assistive technologies and inclusive teaching to create more accessible environments across society.

Key partners for implementing this recommendation include the MPEA, METVT, UNICEF and OPDs.

4. Disability Inclusion in the 2027-2031 UN Cooperation Framework for the Caribbean region

The upcoming 2027-2031 United Nations Cooperation Framework for the Caribbean region should incorporate disability inclusion as a cross-cutting priority, with specific focus on development initiatives, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. This includes promoting inclusive development policies, improving accessibility in infrastructure projects and supporting capacity-building efforts for disability-sensitive disaster response. Additionally, the framework should emphasize disability-inclusive economic recovery and development, ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to employment, education, healthcare and social protection programmes. Key partners in this process would include the Ministry of Environment and National Beautification, Office of the Prime Minister (Climate Resilience), Department of Emergency Management, Ministry of Finance, Economic Affairs, and Investment, Ministry of Home Affairs (Disaster Risk Reduction), MPEA, OPDs and UN agency partners.

5. Promoting an Enabling and Empowering Environment for Persons with Disabilities

To foster an inclusive society that fully integrates persons with disabilities, it is essential to create an enabling environment that facilitates equal access to opportunities in all sectors. The United Nations Sub-Regional Team (UNST), in collaboration with national partners, should promote systemic changes that support the implementation of comprehensive disability-inclusive interventions.

This requires a strategic focus on enhancing communication accessibility, including expanding sign language interpretation services in key areas such as healthcare, education and media, thereby ensuring the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities are not excluded from essential services. In the transportation sector, there is a pressing need to improve the availability of accessible vehicles and address existing inadequacies in public transport, enabling persons with disabilities to navigate the country with greater independence and ease.

Efforts to strengthen inclusive education should be prioritized to ensure that all students, regardless of ability, can thrive. This includes equipping schools with assistive technologies, training educators in inclusive practices and creating learning environments that meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Furthermore, advancing the employment of persons with disabilities requires concerted efforts to engage with employers. This involves developing vocational training programmes tailored to persons with disabilities, incentivizing businesses to hire persons with disabilities and fostering workplace accommodations that support sustained employment opportunities.

Through these targeted interventions, the UNST can help establish a more inclusive environment that removes barriers and empowers persons with disabilities to fully participate in society. Collaboration with the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), the National Disabilities Unit (NDU), organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and the private sector will be key in driving these efforts forward.

6. Establishing Disability Focal Points Across Government Ministries and Agencies

The fragmentation of efforts and the lack of a coordinated approach to disability inclusion across government ministries and agencies in Barbados presents a significant barrier to the effective implementation of disability-related policies. The absence of designated disability focal points within key government entities has resulted in inconsistencies in policy application, fragmented data collection, and a lack of accountability for advancing disability inclusion. Without a centralized coordination mechanism, the full realization of the rights of persons with disabilities under the CRPD remains difficult to achieve.

To address this gap, it is recommended that disability focal points be established across all government ministries and agencies. These focal points would serve as the primary contact within their respective ministries, tasked with coordinating disability-related activities, ensuring CRPD compliance and supporting the integration of disability inclusion across all sectors. Disability focal points would also play a crucial role in data collection and reporting, working to consolidate information on persons with disabilities from various government sources into a centralized system, ensuring that disability data is both accurate and accessible. These positions would also improve collaboration between government agencies and OPDs, fostering a more cohesive national strategy for disability inclusion. Key responsibilities would include monitoring accessibility initiatives, overseeing disability-related service provision and ensuring that ministries allocate sufficient resources to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

The establishment of disability focal points would thus create the necessary foundation for a more integrated and effective approach to disability inclusion in Barbados, helping to close the gaps that currently exist in policy implementation, service delivery, and data management.

7. Establish a Permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism on Disability Inclusion, anchored in the network of designated disability focal points

It is further proposed that the Government of Barbados institutionalize a permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism, chaired by the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs (MPEA), to oversee and harmonize the implementation of disability rights legislation and policy across government. This mechanism should be composed of the designated disability focal points from each ministry and statutory body, as recommended. Its responsibilities would include:

- Coordinating and monitoring CRPD-aligned actions across sectors;
- Addressing policy and operational bottlenecks;
- Sharing data and best practices;

- Preparing joint progress reports; and
- Ensuring budget alignment with the National Policy and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.

The Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanism should work in tandem with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and engage OPDs to ensure inclusive, transparent and participatory governance. Embedding such a mechanism would transform the network of focal points into an actionable governance structure, promoting policy coherence, shared accountability and sustained cross-sectoral impact—thus making Recommendation 6 fully operational and strategically effective.

8. Strengthen Data Collection and Management Systems

A key challenge identified is the fragmentation of data on persons with across various government ministries and agencies. This lack of centralized, coordinated data severely hinders the ability to develop informed, coherent policies and deliver effective services to persons with disabilities.

To address this, the United Nations Sub-Regional Team for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean (UNST) should support the establishment of a centralized, accessible database on persons with disabilities. This database would consolidate disability-related data across government ministries and agencies, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders have access to accurate, up-to-date information. Such a system would significantly reduce fragmentation, enabling better coordination, more efficient policymaking and improved service provision.

The UNST can assist the Barbados Statistical Service (BSS) in developing and implementing this centralized system, while also providing technical expertise in survey design, data analysis, and database management to ensure the data is robust, reliable, and consistent with international standards. Furthermore, a targeted data-gathering exercise should be prioritized, particularly in light of the 2020/2021 national census, which failed to adequately capture the persons with disabilities population.

Capacity-building workshops for BSS staff, along with other government officials, would be essential to strengthen data management skills and ensure that disability data is collected, analyzed and disseminated effectively. The centralized database should be designed with standardized data collection protocols that can be used consistently across all government agencies, ensuring data privacy, compatibility and accessibility.

Key partners for this initiative include the BSS, MPEA and OPDs.

9. Enhance CRPD Budgeting and Financial Allocations

There is a lack of dedicated budgeting for CRPD implementation, and current financial allocations are insufficient to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The UNST can provide technical assistance to the government of Barbados in adopting CRPD-compliant budgeting practices. This includes developing budget tracking tools, conducting financial analyses and advocating for increased budget allocations for disability-related programmes. Workshops and training sessions on inclusive budgeting and financial management can be facilitated to ensure effective allocation and use of resources. Key partners include the Ministry of Finance, the MPEA and OPDs.

10. Improve Accessibility in Physical and Digital Environments

Accessibility barriers in physical infrastructure and digital services significantly hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities in society, particularly in transportation, where limited wheelchair-accessible vehicles and poorly designed road infrastructure continue to restrict mobility. The UNST can assist the government in conducting thorough accessibility audits and in implementing universal design principles in public and private infrastructure projects. Furthermore, promoting accessible digital platforms and services is crucial for ensuring that persons with disabilities can fully engage with online services and information. The UNST can provide technical guidance on accessibility standards and offer training for architects, engineers and digital service providers to ensure compliance with CRPD guidelines. Key partners for this initiative include the Ministry of Transport, Works and Maintenance, the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Smart Technology, and OPDs.

11. Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security for Persons with Disabilities

The UNST should support the Government of Barbados in integrating food and nutrition security for persons with disabilities into the national development agenda. This can be achieved by ensuring that food access and nutrition programmes are incorporated into social protection measures and that specific legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are developed to guarantee access for persons with disabilities.

To ensure inclusivity, the UNST can support the development of accessible infrastructure, including disability-friendly markets, food distribution centers and agricultural services, as well as transport options that meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

The UNST can also promote capacity-building for persons with disabilities, enabling them to participate meaningfully in food policy development, programmes and dialogues. Special attention should be given to mainstreaming school feeding programmes and other social services to ensure they are inclusive of persons with disabilities, particularly through the development of disability-sensitive nutrition programmes.

Finally, the UNST should work to ensure that these measures are linked to employment opportunities in the agricultural sector, promoting economic inclusion for persons with disabilities through agriculture-related jobs and entrepreneurship.

Key partners would include the MPEA, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Food and Agriculture Organization and OPDs.

Annex 1
List of the Key Informant Interviews

1. **Kerryann Ifill**, Vice President of Barbados Council for the Disabled – June 12, 2024
2. **Eudalie Wickham**, Former President of BARNOD – June 17, 2024
3. **Andwele Boyce** and **Janeil Odle**, National Disability Advocates, Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs – June 24, 2024
4. **Ryan Straughn**, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Affairs, and Investment – July 8, 2024
5. **Edmund Hinkson**, S.C. M.P., Chair of the National Advisory Committee for Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities – July 10, 2024
6. **Randy Warner**, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – July 10, 2024
7. **John Hollingsworth**, Director of the Barbados National Disabilities Unit – July 11, 2024
8. **Kaye Sargeant**, Senior Education Officer, Student Support Services, Ministry of Education – July 19, 2024
9. **Aubrey Browne**, Director of the Barbados Statistical Service – July 18, 2024
10. **Keisha Linton**, Regional Security System (RSS) – July 29, 2024
11. **Gale Carter**, Child Care Board – July 30, 2024
12. **Focus Group Meeting**: Barbados National Organization of the Disabled – July 30, 2024.

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