



# LABOR OBSERVATORY OF THE AMERICAS



## Country Profile Antigua y Barbuda

2021



### Total Area

440 km<sup>2</sup>



### Population as per 2010 Census:

85.567 people

40.986 men  
44.581 women



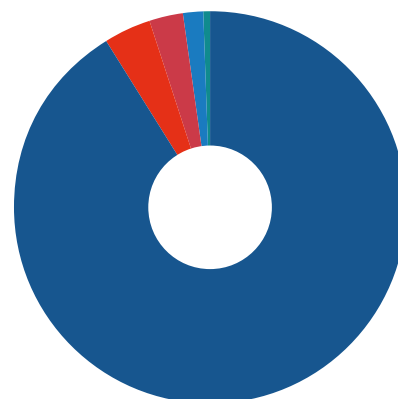
### Population (2021):

99.337 people

**52,1%**  
51.781 women

**47,9%**  
47.556 men

### Population composition (2011 census):



**87,3%** Black or of African descent

**3,8%** mixed origin

**2,7%** hispanic

**1,6%** White or Caucasian

**0,4%** Indigenous

The remaining population identified as Asian or Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, and Syrian, among others.



### Economically active population (2018):

51,931 people,  
24,525 men  
27,406 women



### Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020:

1.37 billion US dollars



### GDP in 2021:

For 2021, ECLAC estimated a 1% growth in the GDP<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The statistics reported here are mostly drawn from the Statistics Division of Antigua and Barbuda, generally referring to the most recent information published in 2018. Other data taken from other sources are duly cited.

<sup>2</sup> <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/national-profile.html?tema=2&country=atg&lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/pr/files/table\\_press\\_gdp\\_economicssurvey2021-eng.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/pr/files/table_press_gdp_economicssurvey2021-eng.pdf)



# Analysis of the socio-economic situation

## Employment (2018).

The 2018 employment rate was 65.9%, with 47,429 people employed, of which 24,701 were men and 22,728 were women. The employment rate was 62.1% for women and 70.5% for men.

## Unemployment (2018).

The 2018 unemployment rate was 8.7%, with 4,502 people unemployed. The employment rate was 9.9% for women and 7.3% for men.

## Inactive population (2018).

20,062 people.

## Poverty (2015).

18.4% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2015.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Antigua%20and%20Barbuda%20-%20UNFCCC%20Biennial%20Update%20Report%201%20-%20Final.pdf>  
The Government of Antigua and Barbuda. (2020b). Antigua and Barbuda's First Biennial Update Report.urvey2021-eng.pdf



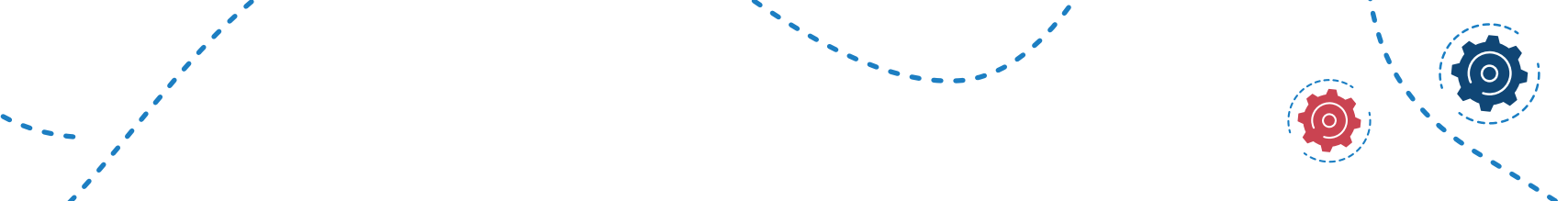
# Context Highlights 2021

In July, the Senate approved an amendment to the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act, reducing the amount of land required to qualify as a SEZ from 1,235 acres, as set in 2015, to 500 acres. The decision was motivated by the controversial results of the Yida SEZ. The construction of factories, houses, and resorts was expected to generate hundreds of jobs, increase exports, and produce a profit of 2 billion dollars, but this has not been obtained so far, and local fisherpeople have been affected by the entry of transnational seafood fishing.

SEZ provide tax exemptions for foreign shareholders, residents, and employees; other exemptions include benefits on import and export activities and value added tax exemption. Moreover, commercial activities carried out by companies do not have to undergo administrative examinations or governmental approvals to begin development.

SEZ have been a hot topic in the media when the opening of the second zone called WISEZ – with a total of 549 acres distributed between Jennings (245 acres) and Five Island (304 acres) – became public knowledge in October. The news sparked controversy among Antiguans because the announcement of the opening occurred several weeks after the agreement was signed and the document on the details was leaked to the public. The objections concern the lack of public discussion and the lack of clear environmental planning. This is a nationally significant development project brokered by Prime Minister Gaston Browne due to the power granted to him by the SEZ Act. The benefits that the zone will bring to the country are also in question, mainly because of the heavy tax concessions that generate unequal market competition for domestic industry, and because the Zone Committee for





Administration and Oversight granted a permit to contract foreign laborers without visa restrictions.

In December, local activists and environmentalists spoke out against the deforestation resulting from the construction works, pointing out that there is an area of virgin mangrove forests between Jennings and Five Islands, the largest wetland area in the country.

Also noteworthy are the demonstrations against government policies that force the population to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Around September, the island entered a State of Emergency due to the increase in the number of cases and a possible collapse of the economy. Despite governmental measures, a sector of the population has been reluctant to be vaccinated: by April, around 27,000 people had been vaccinated, but the increase in vaccination coverage over the following months was not significant.

In view of this situation, the government decreed that with the return to school, students over 12 years of age must be vaccinated in order to attend school. The measure caused indignation – especially among parents with school-aged children – because it goes against the right to education, as expressed in demonstrations in front of the Social Security office.

Regarding education, the government has been strongly criticized for not guaranteeing access to stable and high-quality devices and internet connectivity that would allow students from the most vulnerable populations and those who have not been vaccinated (for health or religious reasons) to catch up with their learning plans.



# Actions and Denunciations (national and international) by Trade Unions and other social sectors

As a result of union action and social dialogue, on 28 July 2021, Antigua and Barbuda ratified the 2014 International Labor Organization (ILO) Protocol on Forced Labor, becoming the second Caribbean country to take this important step in continuing efforts to defend workers' rights. The global health crisis has affected the world of work in many ways and has put the livelihoods of millions of vulnerable workers at risk, increasing the risk that workers will face forced labor. Hence the importance of jointly advancing towards a fair recovery and working together with the trade union movement to bring the ratification to life.

The trade union movement strongly denounced the statements of Prime Minister Gaston Browne, who said in Parliament that Sir George H Walter – late Prime Minister and national hero, as well as a founding member of the Antigua and Barbuda Workers' Union (ABWU) – was totally unworthy of the country's hero status. For the union movement, H Walter made significant contributions towards the development of the

island, with actions such as capturing one billion gallons of water from the Potworks dam, setting up the Delapps water treatment plant, creating the Antigua and Barbuda Development Bank, introducing the labor code, and creating the social security system, among others. For the trade union movement, the Prime Minister's words were a merciless attack on the unions. In its statement, the movement pointed out that "Browne seems to forget that the very reason he and his colleagues are in Parliament along with his achievements was on the sweat and tears of the Trade Union movement", and that "it is Workers who vote Governments into power and remove them from power"<sup>5</sup>. It called for union unity to confront this type of attack against the social movement and demanded that the Prime Minister issue a public apology.

<sup>5</sup> <https://antiguanewsroom.com/trade-union-congress-responds-to-statements-in-parliament-by-pm-browne/>



# Trade union proposals and initiatives

ABWU requested that the Ministry of Labor expedite the creation of a National Minimum Wage Advisory Committee, in accordance with sections C-21 and -22 of the country's Labor Code. Trade unions are concerned that some of the categories set for workers may lead to greater economic difficulties as a result of the lack of timely action by the ministry. The trade union movement pointed out that the real wages of workers in sectors such as security, retail, domestic service, among others, have been substantially reduced due to the increase in the cost of living and the increase in social security contributions. It is worth noting that the minimum wage was last reviewed in 2014, and so in view of the extraordinary conditions of recent years, the Ministry of Labor is expected to act in cooperation and solidarity with workers to alleviate the difficulties being faced by some sectors of society.

During the second half of 2021, ABWU planned and initiated an active campaign for the ratification of ILO Convention 190, which recognizes the right of everyone to a work environment free of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment. With the launch of the campaign, the trade union movement is contributing to the protection of human rights, hoping for a favorable outcome in order to continue expanding the guarantees of rights of the country's working class.



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