



LABOR OBSERVATORY OF THE AMERICAS



Country Profile Barbados

2021



Total Area

430 km²



Population (2010 Census):

277.821 people¹



Population estimated in 2020:

286.641 people

Population composition

(2010 Census):



133.018

WOMEN



144.803

MEN



Economically active population (2018):

136,100 people
70,100 men
66,000 women



Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020:

4.69 billion US dollars²



GDP in 2021:

The Central Bank of Barbados estimated a 5.5% growth in GDP in the second half of 2021³

¹ Most of the statistics reported here are drawn from the latest information published by the Barbados Statistical Services (BSS); data obtained from other sources are referenced as appropriate.

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

³ <http://www.centralbank.org.bb/news/article/10395/review-of-the-barbados-economy-january-june-2021>



Analysis of the socio-economic situation

Employment (2021).

The employment rate was estimated at 62.6%, equivalent to 114,400 employed persons. The employment rate was 58.1% for women (54,200), and 67.5% for men (60,200).

Inactive population (2021).

37.4% of working-age people are inactive⁴, equivalent to 81,200 people. Figures broken down by gender show that of this population, about 33,600 are men and 47,500 are women

Unemployment.

There were 21,700 people unemployed in the second quarter of 2021. The unemployment rate stood at 15.9%.

Informal employment.

For the second half of 2021, it was estimated that 6.7% of people with a job were underemployed; 3.1% men and 3.6% women.

Poverty.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank's Barbados Survey of Living Conditions, 17% of people lived in poverty in 2016⁵.



⁴ Working-age population is defined as all people over 14 years of age.

⁵ Quoted in: <https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/1996/file/Macroeconomic%20Impact%20BBD.pdf>



Context Highlights 2021

On 29 November, the Barbados parliament voted unanimously to reform the political constitution and end dependence on the British Crown. After more than two decades of campaigning to remove Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State and to make the island an independent republic, a ceremony on 30 November marked the end of the parliamentary monarchy and ushered in a republican system of government on the island.

The ceremony took place as part of the 55th anniversary of the 1966 independence, when the country ceased to be a colony of Great Britain, although it remained under its influence. After winning a majority of votes in the Assembly and in the Senate, Sandra Manson, who served as governor general, was sworn in as Barbados' first president.

Two recent events contributed to the strength of pro-independence ideas. First, the Black Lives Matter

movement mobilized outrage against racism on the island and highlighted demands for economic reparations for the slave trade – repeatedly raised by social organizations to the Crown. Second, the 2018 Windrush scandal when the British government unjustly detained a generation of Caribbean migrants who had moved to the UK after World War II to work, treating them as illegal immigrants, stripping them of their rights, and even deporting them to their places of origin. This highlighted the contradiction of Elizabeth II's reign over the two countries, since as Queen of England she could not look after the interests of the Barbadians.

During colonial times, the economy was based on sugar exports to most of Europe – based on slave labor, but independence in 1966 allowed it to diversify its activities, making way for tourism, which is the main economic sector today.



Becoming a republic will allow the country to reduce its dependence on tourism (largely affected by the pandemic) and build trade relations with other countries, which is advantageous due to its geographic position. Barbados is expected to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a project led by China that seeks to gain greater influence in the region and globally⁶

On economic matters, it is also worth noting that the European Union removed Barbados from the list of tax havens in 2021, after it made commitments to implement international tax governance principles. Although the country had been delisted in 2019, it had been reinstated in 2020 for non-compliance with certain measures.

Barbados is also part of the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) agenda, which seeks symbolic reparations through the royal family's public acknowledge-

ment of the economic and political benefits it derived from enslavement around the world. The agenda also proposes that reparations include proposals related to public education, economic compensation, and reconstructing the history of enslavement and its consequences.

After its independence, Barbados remained as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, an alliance of former colonies with historical ties to the United Kingdom. Membership in the organization is seen as a diplomatic act to maintain good relations with the Crown, given the Commonwealth's current blurred image despite Queen Elizabeth II's attempt to maintain its economic and political relevance.

⁶ <https://www.cijn.org/the-caribbean-engages-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>



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

Prior to the presidential inauguration, there were protests in which Barbadian activists demanded that the monarchy and the UK government apologize and make reparations for slavery. Activists also questioned Prince Charles' participation in the event. According to social organizations, the demonstrations are part of this period of emancipation in which democracy and freedom of expression are necessary debates for the Republic's society.

The Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) called for employers to commit to ensuring that workers do not have to choose between their livelihoods and the welfare of the general population in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This needs to take into account the need for guarantees to be able to isolate themselves if they develop symptoms of infection, and to continue to receive their fair pay. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the union has worked closely with the Social Partnership, private sector associations, employer groups, and individual companies to provide guidance and a practical framework for

operations during the crisis, ensuring safety at work and the protection of employees as a way of also safeguarding companies.

With regard to demonstrations carried out as part of the discussions on compulsory vaccination in the country, the BWU pointed out that the welfare of every citizen must be carefully considered, and that social dialogue is elemental. The BWU viewed the debate around vaccines as having been conducted with inadequate awareness-raising efforts, without due attention to concerns around hesitancy, and without providing alternatives to address the problems faced by the population. The BWU called for appropriate awareness-raising and education to promote understanding and dialogue between the different positions.



Trade union proposals and initiatives

Since October, the BWU and its team of lawyers has expanded its legal services, moving beyond advising on industry and employment matters. With this initiative, any union member can request support from legal officers in any area of the law, accessing solid advice to support the effort to ensure the rights of workers and their families in a broad legal spectrum beyond labor legislation.

In relation to other types of trade union proposals and initiatives, the BWU sees the production of and access to knowledge as a key element for the emancipation of peoples, which should be accompanied by opportunities for access to land and home ownership. Thus, the union has invested in land and urban developments that enable workers to access their own homes. In 2021, as part of the organization's anniversary

celebrations, the Executive Board offered lots at a 40% discount, thereby providing concrete support to the members.

The Barbadian trade union movement has also presented alternatives on environmental matters. The BWU is making significant progress in building a photovoltaic project that will begin with a soon-to-be-signed Memorandum of Understanding regarding rooftop renewable energy. The union is exploring options to transfer direct benefits to union members who want to participate in the rooftop renewable energy program.





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