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COVID-19 Island Insights Series

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Barbados

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The COVID-19 Island Insights Series is an initiative spearheaded by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law & Governance (SCELG) and the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island in collaboration with Island Innovation. The initiative brings together critical assessments of how specific islands around the world have performed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which their recovery plans can promote resilience and sustainability in the long term.

For more information on SCELG see
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Barbados

Population 287, 375¹

Size 430 km² ²

COVID-19 data³ and timeline⁴

- Number of cases 222 (0.08% of the population, as at 10 December 2020)
- Number of fatalities 7 (0.002% of the population, as at 10 December 2020)
- Schools closed on 19 March 2020; re-opened on 21 September 2020
- Barbados never officially established a travel ban, and officially opened for all tourists on 12 July 2020, with international flights resuming on a phased-in basis, in accordance with the level of risk of the originating country

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Barbados⁵

¹ Data obtained from <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/barbados-demographics/#pop>

² Data obtained from <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Barbados-LOCATION-SIZE-AND-EXTENT.html>

³ Data obtained from <https://www.facebook.com/gisbarbados/photos/a.297728590391960/1666524526845686>

⁴ Data obtained from <https://barbadostoday.bb/2020/03/19/schools-wont-open-again-after-all-after-unions-outcry/>; <https://today.caricom.org/2020/09/21/public-schools-in-barbados-reopen-on-monday/>; <https://www.tripsavvy.com/caribbean-travel-border-reopenings-4845853>; <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

⁵ Source <https://www.mapsofworld.com/barbados/>

COVID-19 in Barbados

The first two cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Barbados on 17 March, 2020,⁶ when a 48-year-old visitor to the island and a 39-year-old Barbadian tested positive for coronavirus. Both of these individuals had a recent travel history, having come to Barbados from the United States of America. At that point, the country entered Stage 1 of its response to the pandemic, a response which can generally be categorized as thorough, decisive, and comprehensive.

Barbados implemented crucial early measures in response to these first two cases.⁷ All arriving passengers were screened at points of entry for COVID-19 symptoms, and were required to leave their contact information. Shortly after this, a mandate followed that required all arriving passengers to quarantine for 14 days regardless of whether they had symptoms. As a result of this, most airlines suspended international flights. The Barbados Government Information Service (BGIS) was designated⁸ as the primary source of information on COVID-19 the day after the first case was reported, so the public always had ready access to relevant, accurate information regarding the range of protocols.

There was also an emphasis on testing at the Best-dos Santos Public Health laboratory, which facilitated accurate data in relation to the national COVID-19 statistics.

One of the most significant aspects of the response to the pandemic was the designation and construction of specific facilities for the treatment and isolation of COVID-19 cases.⁹ These facilities eased the burden on the main

(Queen Elizabeth) hospital. Construction began in early March, and an abandoned military base was rebuilt and converted into a hospital and quarantine centre.

On 22 March, 2020, Barbados moved to Stage 2 of its COVID-19 response, when human to human transmission was discovered as a result of contact tracing.¹⁰ The government advised its citizens to limit mass gatherings of more than 25 people, but did not enact any legislative change. In general, Barbadians complied with the guidelines that were recommended, but not yet mandated by the government, and businesses limited the number of people who could enter their premises. Social distancing protocols were enforced, and it became commonplace for everyone to wear masks in public places and for businesses to set up sanitizing stations.

The management and response to COVID-19 in Barbados culminated in a national emergency being declared on 28 March, 2020, when 24 cases of coronavirus were confirmed.¹¹ This was the beginning of Stage 3, when comprehensive lockdown measures were imposed. These measures¹² included the closure of all non-essential businesses (for a month, from early April to early May 2020) and a 24-hour curfew during this period, which prohibited all but essential workers from leaving their homes - except for medical reasons or to visit banks and supermarkets and following a schedule based on the first letter of people's last name. During this period, the sale of alcohol was banned from 3 April to 4 May¹³. (The curfew was later relaxed to evening hours only from May 3 to June 30).

⁶ <https://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/barbados-awaiting-covid-19-update>

⁷ <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

⁸ <https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/covid-19/>

⁹ <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

¹⁰ <https://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/covid-19-person-person-transmissions-barbados-stage-2>

¹¹ <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

¹² <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

¹³ <https://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/change-petition-launched-lift-alcohol-ban>

In early April, arrangements were made to bring in a contingent of 100 Cuban doctors and nurses with experience in intensive care treatment to focus on serving the needs of COVID-19 patients confined to the quarantine centres.¹⁴

While there was an overall sense of satisfaction and admiration regarding the way in which the pandemic was handled by the Prime Minister, Mia Mottley, there were disruptions that took a toll on some segments of the population and required major adjustments. For example, the alphabetized system designed to facilitate shopping, banking, etc. often did not allow enough time for the elderly and people with disabilities to get their essential supplies, and saw many such people being exposed to extreme weather conditions while standing in long lines outside of supermarkets and banks. There were also reports of price-gouging by some smaller grocery suppliers, who benefitted from increased customer traffic, as major supermarkets limited their opening hours so as to abide by the curfew.

Key socioeconomic pressures in the Barbados during COVID-19

As a small island developing state that relies heavily on tourism, the Barbadian economy was deeply impacted by the pandemic. In fact, tourism-dependent islands such as Barbados rely on this sector for an average of a 45% contribution to their GDP, with proportionate levels of employment.¹⁵ Hotels and restaurants were closed, resulting in those with jobs in the hospitality sector being laid off. Some of those who did not lose their jobs received pay cuts. There has been a significant amount of pressure placed on the National Insurance Scheme

¹⁴ <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Cuban-Medical-Team-Arrive-in-Barbados-to-Help-Fight-COVID-19-20200406-0011.html>

¹⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/member-states/barbados>

¹⁶ <https://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/welfare-applications-increase-because-job-loss-due-covid>

and Welfare Department, that saw a surge in applications as a result of rising unemployment.¹⁶ By May 2020, approximately a quarter of the workforce had filed for unemployment benefits.¹⁷

Although the issue of food security was brought into sharper focus, food was not scarce. Many informal groups, as well as members of the private sector, banded together to ensure that the most vulnerable and those in need were given food hampers and deliveries of essential supplies. Farmers and vendors provided fresh produce.

Barbados implemented a phased approach to the lockdown exit strategy, and a four-phase plan was outlined by the Prime Minister on 29 April, 2020.¹⁸

For example, during Phase 2, which began on 4 May, 2020, people were allowed to go back to the beaches from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m., and selected sectors were opened up, including Construction and Mining; Finance and Insurance; Legal, Accounting, and Other Professional Services to Support Businesses; and Marine Products.

There were heightened sanitizing measures taken, and when restaurants opened they adjusted their seating so that social distancing guidelines established by the government were adhered to. Specific protocols were also outlined for employers and employees,¹⁹ and to this date, supermarkets and banks still have markers in place to indicate the appropriate distances for customers to stand when queuing up. It is still necessary for face masks to be worn when conducting any business in public.

During the third school term of the 2019 to 2020 academic year, which began on 4 May, teaching took place online for all students. At the end

¹⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/member-states/barbados>

¹⁸ <https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/blog/phase-2-of-barbados-exit-strategy-begins-may-4/>

¹⁹ <https://today.caricom.org/2020/05/01/barbados-enters-phase-2-of-lock-down-exit-strategy/>

of April, the Ministry of Education established an online platform, as a physical return to classrooms was not possible in light of the restrictions on social gatherings and other protocols which were in place.²⁰ Unfortunately, some students did not have access to the internet at home, or, perhaps more problematically, did not have the benefit of a home environment that was particularly conducive to learning. This difficult home environment was due a variety of factors, including the fact that parents also had to work from home, or had to go out to work and did not have access to the resources necessary to make arrangement for proper childcare. Additionally, students from households dealing with addiction and/or abuse were placed at greater risk. It was also extremely challenging for parents who faced the pressure of having to try to obtain multiple devices for children who either attended different schools, or were at the same school but in different classes.

As a result, the Ministry of Education announced that, at the end of the academic year 2019/2020, no student would be given marks on their reports, but teachers would give detailed comments on student performance.

Post Covid-19 recovery on Barbados

There was a level of concern amongst the populace that, as a result of living in a territory which imports the vast majority of its food, Barbadians would struggle with access to food as a result of the pandemic. However, there was an emphasis placed on buying local produce and supporting local business, which boosted the local farmers' earnings and paved the way for a focus on sustainability.

Crucially, Barbadians are seeking to recover from the effects of the pandemic by shifting their

focus away from traditional tourism as a main source of foreign exchange. Recently, the government launched the "12 Month Welcome Stamp" visa program to facilitate a revival of the flagging levels of foreign exchange and to counteract the inevitable negative effects of global lockdowns. The rationale behind the 12 Month Welcome Stamp harnesses the concept of the digital nomad, and seeks to promote Barbados as an oasis from COVID for foreigners able to work remotely,²¹ offering tax-free stays for 12 months or longer for workers and businesses that do not depend on a fixed physical location. According to a report published by PAHO in July, 2020,²² Barbados is particularly appealing as a long-term destination because of its political stability, well-developed tourism infrastructure, relatively high standard of living and the fastest fibre-optics Internet and mobile services in the Caribbean.

It should be noted that, in accordance with the policies put in place during the early stages of the pandemic, strict protocols have been put in place for all visitors to minimize the risk of contagion. Countries of origin have been categorised according to the risk level they present, and the government has recategorised countries and made entry requirements more stringent, as necessary.²³

Another aspect of the post-COVID recovery has been an upsurge in businesses in the hospitality sector catering to the economic reality of locals by offering attractively-discounted "staycations", or special rates for anyone with a Barbados ID card. Small farmers have also continued to benefit from the reliance on local rather than imported products, and have started offering delivery services to cater to the boost in their Barbadian clientele.

²⁰ <https://www.loopslu.com/content/ministry-education-no-marks-students-end-term-3>

²¹ <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

²² <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/barbados-example-government-leadership-and-regional-cooperation-containing-covid-19-virus>

²³ <https://www.visitbarbados.org/covid-19-travel-guidelines-2020#health-protocol>

The government of Barbados was among the first group of countries to make an effort to secure the vaccine²⁴, with eight people, including the Prime Minister and the Attorney General, already receiving the first dose.²⁵ However, it is not yet available to the wider public.

It seems as if Barbadians are showing an awareness of resilience, and the willingness to shift some traditional economic paradigms in their efforts to tackle the effects of this pandemic.

Post Covid-19 recovery and the Sustainable Development Goals

Numerous post COVID-19 economic stimulus packages are being put in place,²⁶ including:

- A USD100 million Tourism Fund Facility to provide urgent working capital and investment loans for the upgrade of Barbadian hotels,
- A USD 20 million VAT Loan Fund for companies who registered to pay Value Added Tax (VAT) and can prove that their cash flow was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and have implemented measures to contain the outbreak,
- A USD 10 million Small Business Wage Fund for firms too small to be eligible for VAT or VAT refunds to help them cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 environment.

The government of Barbados seems to be embracing the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to further cultivate a focus on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Prior to

the pandemic, the Prime Minister unveiled an economic recovery plan to focus primarily on sustainable growth,²⁷ and which clearly reflected the following Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality), and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). This plan, known by the acronym BERT (Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation), also showcased a commitment to Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 14 (Life Below Water).

During the first quarter of 2020, the government had planned to deliver its Voluntary National Review (VNR). This coincided with the indelibly harrowing and devastating socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, effects which called for drastic and fundamental shifts in future global plans, strategies, and structures. In light of this, the government of Barbados is now focusing specifically on Goal 17 (Partnerships to Achieve the Goal), which now has more relevance than ever.

²⁴ [Barbados deposits funds for COVID-19 vaccines – NationNews Barbados — nationnews.com](https://nationnews.com/news/2020/04/08/barbados-deposits-funds-for-covid-19-vaccines)

²⁵ [Barbados – Eight persons, including Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley, have received their first round of the COVID-19 vaccine – PANCAP](https://nationnews.com/news/2020/04/08/barbados-eight-persons-including-prime-minister-mia-amor-mottley-have-received-their-first-round-of-the-covid-19-vaccine)

²⁶ <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/barbados-government-and-institution-measures-in-reponse-to-covid.html>

²⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/member-states/barbados>

Useful Sources

- The Barbados Government Information Service, available at <https://gisbarbados.gov.bb/>
- “**Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 in LatAm**”, available at <https://www.sdgphilanthropy.org/Socio-Economic-Impact-of-COVID-19-in-LatAm>
- UNDP Barbados & Eastern Caribbean COVID-19 Response Program, available at <https://www.bb.undp.org/content/barbados/en/home/covid-19--response-programme.html>
- UN Sustainable Development Goals, **available at** <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>

Published COVID-19 Island Insights Papers

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| #1. Malta. November 2020 | |
| #2. Egadi Islands. November 2020 | #8. Okinawa. February 2021 |
| #3. Grenada. November 2020 | #9. Mauritius. February 2021 |
| #4. Trinidad and Tobago. November 2020 | #10. Seychelles. February 2021 |
| #5. Shetland Islands. November 2020 | #11. Aotearoa New Zealand. February 2021 |
| #6. Åland Islands. November 2020 | #12. Hawai'i. February 2021 |
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