

Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities In Barbados

This research project aims to understand the labor, employment, and hiring conditions for people with disabilities in Barbados and formulate policy solutions to promote labor equality for people with disabilities.

Introduction

Barbados ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on February 28, 2013. This landmark piece of UN legislation establishes broad categories for defining disability and reaffirms a person's entitlement to basic human rights and freedoms. Despite its ratification, there has been little legislative action from the Parliament of Barbados with regards to explicitly establishing protections from discrimination.

Results

This research resulted in an overview of the 2017 Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act that observes the pitfalls of the legislation and national legislature in securing the labor rights of people with disabilities. The interviews produced accounts from disability advocates and researchers that indicate that the Barbados legislature should draft and enact a multi-pronged policy approach to enhancing and protecting the lives of people with disabilities. This policy approach would expand opportunities for virtual employment, increase dialogue and interactions between employers and people with disabilities, and draft legislation that solely focuses on protecting people with disabilities from employment discrimination.

Methodology

As little academic literature exists on disability in Barbados, we created a white paper to compile current research available and included local news reports into the white paper to bolster our understanding of local perceptions and recent updates. This literature review allowed us to identify key stakeholders in the state. We then reached out to the Barbados Council for the Disabled, state legislators who identify as having a disability, and academics studying disability and employment in Barbados. Using qualitative interviews, we interviewed these stakeholders via video chat using IRB-approved questions. We then observed how legislation can work to address the methods of employment improvement that the stakeholders identified. Additionally, we analyzed the Constitution of Barbados, the 2017 Employment Act, and other relevant legislation to understand the anti-discrimination enforcement mechanisms that exist within the country. We then considered what gaps exist in enforcement and how the government can create policies to expand public awareness of equal rights and the right to file discrimination complaints.

Models of Disability Present in the Caribbean

Charity

Way of viewing disability so that the person with disability relies on the kindness and monetary support of others to provide for their needs. This model promotes stigma against people with disabilities and paints them as helpless.

Medical

The medical model of disability categorizes people with disabilities as "diseased" and "in need of a cure". This model views disability as a "solvable" issue through science and medicine. Often, this model overlaps with the charity model.

Human Rights

Anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the model recognizes the inherent human rights of people with disabilities. This model views people with disabilities as inherently equal and in need of having their rights protected.

Social

This model rejects the medical and charity models of disability and instead posits that individuals with disabilities are facing societal barriers to equal, proper access. The social model seeks to remove these barriers to create conditions for equal opportunity.

Addressing Discrimination

Employer Interaction

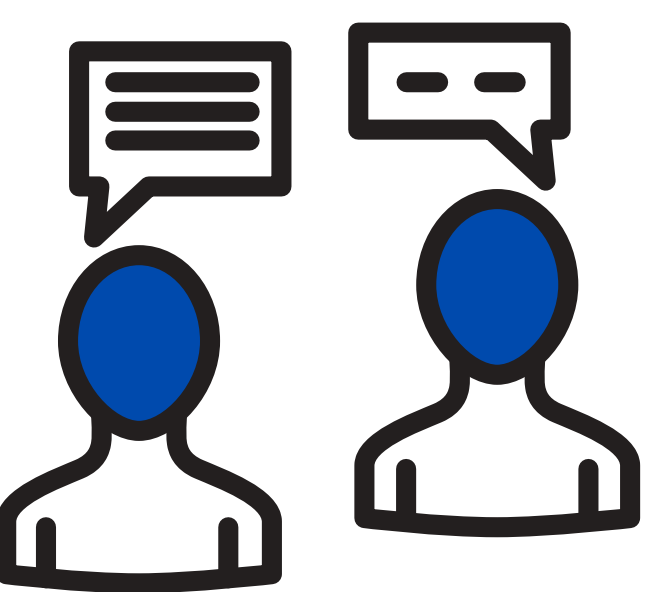
Stakeholders advocated for increasing interactions between people with disabilities and potential employers to help demystify perpetuated stereotypes and discriminatory models of disability that bias employers against hiring people with disabilities.

Virtual work

With the advent of virtual work from the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual work has become common amongst businesses. Technology assists people with disabilities and removes social barriers to accessing work (transportation, accessing offices, etc.).

Infrastructure Justice

Barbados has previously taken initiative to remove barriers to infrastructure access for people with disabilities. However, colonial building layouts present in the country and inaccessible public transportation create barriers to physically attending and performing one's job.



Conclusion

To deconstruct the medical and charity models of disability present in Barbados, the government should expand employer interaction with people with disabilities. Additionally, the government should create explicit legislation protecting and enforcing human rights for people with disabilities.

Authors

This research work was produced by Lead Researcher Dr. Mathew Saleh and Assistant Researchers Andrew Talone, Sarina Zhou, and Krinal Thakar.

Affiliations

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